



British Literature Through History

v. 0.1

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Old English Literature	1
Development of the English Language	2
“Caedmon’s Hymn” and the Venerable Bede.....	12
“The Dream of the Rood”	19
Beowulf.....	29
Chapter 2: Middle English Literature	40
Introduction to Middle English Literature: The Medieval World	41
William Caxton and Printing in England.....	50
Medieval Drama	53
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight	60
Geoffrey Chaucer (1343–1400)	72
Julian of Norwich (1342–1416)	85
Chapter 3: The Sixteenth Century	89
The Sixteenth Century	90
Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586)	101
William Shakespeare (1564–1616)—The Sonnets.....	115
Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593)	119
Sir Walter Raleigh (1552–1618)	128
Elizabeth I (1533–1603).....	134
William Shakespeare (1564–1616)—The Plays	142
I Henry IV	146
Much Ado About Nothing.....	156
Twelfth Night	160
Chapter 4: The Early 17th Century	164
The Early Seventeenth Century.....	165
John Donne (1572–1631).....	172
Andrew Marvell (1621–1678)	185
Robert Herrick (1591–1674)	191
John Milton (1608–1674).....	197

Chapter 5: The Restoration and Eighteenth Century	204
The Restoration and 18th Century	205
Jonathan Swift (1667–1745).....	217
Alexander Pope (1688–1744)	224
Frances Burney [Madame D’Arblay] (1752–1840)	230
Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)	234
Thomas Gray (1716–1771)	237
Chapter 6: The Romantic Period.....	250
The Romantic Period (1798–1832).....	251
Charlotte Turner Smith (1749–1806)	259
William Blake (1757–1827)	267
Robert Burns (1759–1796)	275
Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797)	282
William Wordsworth (1770–1850)	292
Dorothy Wordsworth (1771–1855)	306
Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834).....	314
Jane Austen (1775–1817).....	326
George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788–1824).....	332
Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822)	348
John Keats (1795–1821).....	377
Chapter 7: The Victorian Era.....	394
The Victorian Era (1832–1901).....	395
Charles Dickens (1812–1870).....	409
Emily Brontë (1818–1848).....	420
Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861).....	429
Robert Browning (1812–1889).....	448
Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892)	469
Matthew Arnold (1822–1888).....	484
Oscar Wilde (1854–1900).....	492
Chapter 8: The Twentieth Century	501
The Twentieth Century	502
Thomas Hardy (1840–1928).....	511
Joseph Conrad (1857–1924)	529
The War Poets.....	536
Virginia Woolf (1882–1941)	547
T.S. Eliot (1888–1965).....	551
Philip Larkin (1922–1985).....	560
Carol Ann Duffy (1955–)	567

Chapter 1

Old English Literature

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

1.1 Development of the English Language

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize the key influences on the development of the English language.
2. Understand the broad timeline of the development of the English language.

The English language and English literature began with the recorded history of Britain.



Norman Invasion portrayed in the Bayeux Tapestry.

The early history of England includes five invasions which contributed to the development of the English language and influenced the literature:

- the Roman invasion
- the Anglo-Saxon invasions
- the Christian “invasion”
- the Viking invasions
- the Norman French invasion

The Roman Invasion

At the time of the earliest written records, the British islands were inhabited by Celtic people known as the Britons. (See [Map 1](#).) Although the Roman Empire made initial contacts with the Celtic people in Britain around 55 B.C., the Roman invasion of Britain began around A.D. 43. The Celtic people resisted but were unable to fend off the invading Roman troops. One of the principal figures fighting the Romans was the Celtic queen **Boudicca**. Unlike their Roman counterparts, Celtic societies allotted women rights often equal to those of men. When her husband, an ally of the Romans, died, the Romans took over the land of her tribe, the Iceni, flogging

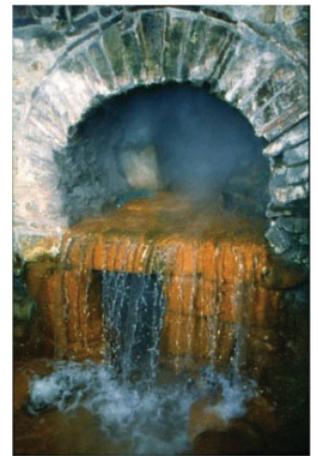
Boudicca and raping her daughters. Boudicca led her people in revolt and for some time managed to hold back the mighty Roman legions.

Long familiar with Britain as a source of tin, the Romans conquered Britain around A.D. 44 and set up fortresses, light houses on the coast, and a defensive wall across the entire Northern border of England named Hadrian's Wall for the Roman emperor Hadrian. As they did in many parts of the world, the Romans built villas with beautiful mosaics, a series of roads which were used for centuries, and great Roman baths, such as those at Aquae Sulis, now known as Bath, England. View a video [mini-lecture that explains the Roman invasion](#).



Roman lighthouse at Dover.

How did the Roman invasion affect the development of the English language? While there is no direct linguistic connection, the Roman occupation of Britain and their subsequent abandonment of the country set the stage for the most important invasion, the Anglo-Saxon invasion which provided the foundation of the English language.



Roman bath overflow at Bath, England.

The Anglo-Saxon Invasions

At the fall of the Roman Empire (ca. 420), the Roman troops were called back to the continent, and Britain was left undefended. This period of time produced the figure that was transformed in legend into King Arthur. The man who formed the basis of the Arthurian legend was probably a descendent of Celtic and Roman people who led his followers in resisting the Anglo-Saxons. This resistance occurred long before the days of knights in armor mounted on horseback, the picture of King Arthur found in most stories.

The Anglo-Saxons were Germanic tribes who began raiding the coastal areas of Britain around 450. (See [Map 2](#).) For over 100 years, the Anglo-Saxons continued to raid and gradually to settle in Britain, pushing the Celtic people into the remote parts of Britain—into what are today the countries of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. (See [Map 3](#) and [Map 4](#).) With them, they took their Celtic language which formed the basis of the Gaelic languages



of Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. (See Map 5.) Few Celtic words remain in today's English; those few are primarily place names such as *avon* for river (as in the English town Stratford-upon-Avon) and words associated with the countries to which the Celts dispersed such as *glen* (valley), *loch* (lake), and *cairn* (pile of stones) from Scotland.

Anglo-Saxon ornament in the British Museum.

The Anglo-Saxon Germanic Language Is the Foundation of the English Language

The culture of the Anglo-Saxons is much in evidence in Old English literature, especially in the concept of the Germanic heroic ideal. The primary attribute of the heroic ideal was excellence—excellence in all that was important to the tribe: hunting, sea-faring, fighting. The leader of each tribal unit, often family units especially in earlier years, gained his position because of his physical strength and capabilities in the activities necessary for survival. Each man of the tribe, called a **thane**¹ or retainer, an Anglo-Saxon warrior loyal to a specific leader, swore his allegiance, and in return his leader rewarded him with the spoils of their battles and raids. A group of Anglo-Saxon warriors bound by the reciprocal king-retainer relationship was known as a **comitatus**². An example is the group of Geats led by Beowulf.

These Anglo-Saxon tribes led violent lives governed as they believed by **wyrd**³, the Anglo-Saxon word for fate, the power that controls one's destiny, and bound by loyalty to their *comitatus*, including the obligation of exacting revenge for their comrades. A formal system of **wergild**⁴, a price placed on a man's life and paid in lieu of blood revenge, provided an honorable way to end a feud or to satisfy the demands of revenge.

1. an Anglo-Saxon warrior loyal to a specific leader
2. a group of Anglo-Saxon warriors bound by the reciprocal king-retainer relationship
3. the Anglo-Saxon word for fate, the power that controls one's destiny
4. a price placed on a man's life and paid in lieu of blood revenge

By the year 700, various tribes settled in different parts of Britain, each with its own dialect. (See Map 6.) The language generally known as Old English came primarily from the dialect of the West Saxons, located in an area known as Wessex.

Video Clip 1

The Anglo-Saxon Invasion: Beowulf and the Sutton Hoo Exhibit

[\(click to see video\)](#)

Although mostly illiterate, the Anglo-Saxons had a rich tradition of oral literature. Gathered in the mead hall with its long tables around a central hearth, the Anglo-Saxons listened to tales of battle glory sung or chanted to the strums of a harp. The **scop**⁵, the tribal poet/singer, entertained and commemorated significant events by composing and performing tales such as *Beowulf*. Although many scholars have varying ideas about how these performances might have sounded, little is known of secular music during this time period, and there is of course no evidence to suggest whether the songs were more like chants with strums of the harp perhaps in the caesura or whether they were lively, rambunctious, melodic performances. We might remember that in *Beowulf*, it's the sound of laughter, the music of the harp, and the singing of the scop that drives Grendel to attack Heorot.

The Anglo-Saxon invasion established the English language and the earliest English literature. The next important step, the recording of that literature, came with the return of Christianity to Britain.



Reconstruction of Anglo-Saxon harp from remnants in Sutton Hoo.

The Christian “Invasion”

Although certainly not a military invasion like the others in the list, the arrival of Christianity in Britain was as influential on the language and the culture, and therefore on the literature. Christianity was not unknown in Britain when St. Augustine arrived in 597 but had appeared during the time of the Romans.

However, Christianity was suppressed along with the Celtic tribes during the Anglo-Saxon invasions. In 597, St. Augustine arrived on a mission to Christianize the pagan Anglo-Saxons, and the literature of the time bears witness to his influence. During the same time period, Celtic Christianity continued to spread from the northern and western reaches. The Anglo-Saxons were mostly illiterate; therefore, their oral stories were not written until the Christian monks recorded them. Many twentieth-century scholars believed that *Beowulf*, for example, was originally a pagan story and that references to Christianity are interpolations made by the recording monks in their reluctance to perpetuate strictly pagan literature or as a way of converting still-pagan Anglo-Saxons. Most scholars now believe that *Beowulf* was more likely composed by a Christian author who drew on and perhaps paid homage to his pagan roots.

5. the tribal poet/singer

Video Clip 2

The Christian Invasion: St. Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury

[\(click to see video\)](#)

Many words with Latin roots found their way into the English language with the assimilation of Christianity into the culture, many of them words for religious concepts for which the Anglo-Saxons had no terms, such as angel, priest, martyr, bishop.

The establishment of monasteries in Britain also led to the production of beautifully illuminated manuscripts, such as the Lindisfarne Gospels. The British Library's Virtual Books Online Gallery allows you to virtually turn the pages of the [Lindisfarne gospels](#).

Video Clip 3

The Lindisfarne Gospels

[\(click to see video\)](#)

The Viking Invasions

Between 750 and 1050, another group of war-like, pagan tribes raided Britain and gradually established settlements, primarily in the north and east of England.

The Vikings were from the area now known as Scandinavia. While they shared cultural similarities with the Anglo-Saxons, they brought their own language, another impact on the developing English language. Words such as sky, skin, wagon originated with the language of the Vikings.



Burial site of St. Augustine's successor Laurence in the abbey ruins.



Ruins of St. Augustine's Abbey.



Sidebar 1.1.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (translated by E. E. C. Gomme, 1909) describes the Viking raid on the Holy Island of Lindisfarne:

“Here terrible portents came about over the land of Northumbria, and miserably frightened the people: these were immense flashes of lightening, and fiery dragons were seen flying in the air. A great famine immediately followed these signs; and a little after that in the same year on 8 June the raiding of heathen men miserably devastated God’s church in Lindisfarne island by looting and slaughter.”

These fishing huts on the Holy Isle of Lindisfarne are built in the shape of overturned Viking boats, still suggesting the Viking heritage of this area as a result of the Viking raiding parties and the eventual coming of Viking settlers. The English language also retains evidence of the Viking influence. In northeastern England, place names recall their Viking settlers: York from Jorvik and Whitby from the Viking *by* meaning a farm.

Alfred the Great negotiated a peaceful settlement with the Vikings by partitioning Britain in what was known as the Danelaw, establishing a period of relatively peaceful coexistence in which the language and the culture mingled.



Video Clip 4

The Viking Invasion: Chester, England

[\(click to see video\)](#)

Video Clip 5

St. Gregory's Minster, Kirkdale, England

[\(click to see video\)](#)

The Norman Invasion

The year 1066 is possibly the most important date in the history of Britain and in the development of the English language. When William the Conqueror defeated the English King Harold at the Battle of Hastings, he brought to England a new language and a new culture. Old French became the language of the court, of the government, the church, and all the aristocratic entities. Old English, the language of the Anglo-Saxons, existed only among the conquered lower orders of society. However, within three to four hundred years, the English language emerged, greatly enriched by French vocabulary and distinctly different from the Anglo-Saxons' Old English, Chaucer's language, now referred to as Middle English.

Video Clip 6

The Norman Invasion: William the Conqueror and the Battle of Hastings

[\(click to see video\)](#)

The British Library provides an [interactive timeline](#) that traces the development of the English language, beginning with Beowulf.



Pevensey Castle ruins—Pevensey Castle was built by William the Conqueror on ruins of Roman and Anglo-Saxon settlements.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The development of the English language was influenced by 5 events:
 - the Roman invasion
 - the Anglo-Saxon invasions
 - the Christian “invasion”
 - the Viking invasions
 - the Norman invasion
- The Germanic language of the Anglo-Saxons, known as Old English, is the foundation of the English language.

EXERCISES

1. Construct a timeline which includes key events in the development of the English language.
2. On a map of the British Isles, locate areas of Roman settlements, Celtic settlements after the Roman invasion, Anglo-Saxon settlements, Canterbury (the site of St. Augustine’s church and monastery), Viking settlements, and the Holy Island of Lindisfarne.
3. On a contemporary map of England, locate cities whose names contain recognizable Roman influence such as *castor* or *cester* and *wich* or *wick*; Anglo-Saxon influence such as *stow*, *ham*, *ton*, or *bury*; Viking influence such as *by*, *thorpe*, or *thwaite*; and Norman influence such as *beau*, *bel*, *ville*, or *mont*.

Resources

Maps

- [Celtic Peoples of Roman Britain](#). *Britannia History*.
- [Roman “Saxon Shore” Forts](#). *Britannia History*
- [Saxon Invasions and Land Holdings](#). *Britannia History*
- [Saxon Tribes and Celtic Holdings](#). *Britannia History*
- [Saxon Control](#). *Britannia History*

General Background

- [English Language and Literature Timeline](#). British Library.

The Britons

- “[Arthur: King of the Britons](#).” David Nash Ford. *Britannia*.
- “[Boudicca](#). *The Celtic Arts and Cultures Website*. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- “[Britons \(Celts\)](#).” John Weston. *Data Wales*.
- British Museum Online Tours:
 - “[Daily Life in Iron Age Britain](#)”
 - “[People in Iron Age Britain](#)”
 - “[Religion and Ritual in Iron Age Britain](#)”
 - “[War and Art in Iron Age Britain](#)”

The Romans

- [Hadrian's Wall](#). “Hadrian: Empire and Conflict.” The British Museum.

The Anglo-Saxon Invasions

- “[Alfred the Great](#).” Monarchs. *Britannia*.
- “[The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle](#).” *The Online Medieval and Classical Library*.
- “[The Anglo-Saxon Fyrd c.400–878 A.D.](#)” Ben Levick. *Regia Anglorum*.

The Arrival of Christianity

- “[St. Augustine of Canterbury](#).” Terry H. Jones. *Saints.SPQN.com*.
- [Lindisfarne Gospels](#). Virtual Books. Online Gallery. The British Library.
- “[The Venerable Bede \(672–735\)](#).” *Religion Facts*.

The Viking Invasions

- “[The Danelaw](#).” *Britannia*.

Videos

- “[The Anglo-Saxon Invasion: Beowulf and the Sutton Hoo Exhibit](#).” Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College.

- “The Christian Invasion: St. Augustine’s Abbey, Canterbury.” Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College.
- “The Lindisfarne Gospels.” Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College.
- “The Norman Invasion: William the Conqueror and the Battle of Hastings.” Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College.
- “The Roman Invasion: Boudicca and the Celts.” Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College.
- “St Gregory’s Minster, Kirkdale.” Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College.
- “The Viking Invasion: Chester, England.” Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College.

Medieval Manuscripts

- Catalogue of Digitized Medieval Manuscripts. Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies. University of California, Los Angeles.
- Digital Scriptorium. Columbia University and University of California, Berkeley.

1.2 “Caedmon’s Hymn” and the Venerable Bede

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize the elements of Anglo-Saxon culture revealed in Bede’s story of Caedmon.
2. Identify the Venerable Bede and appraise the importance of his work in our knowledge of Anglo-Saxon culture in Britain.

The Venerable Bede

The Venerable Bede, a monk from Northumbria, is the most important historian of the Anglo-Saxon period primarily because of his work the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Although little is known about his life, Bede likely was born about 672 or 673 to a noble family and sent to the monastery of Wearmouth to be educated.

From his monastery at Jarrow, Bede visited the monastery on the Holy Island of Lindisfarne and wrote two books about the life and miracles of St. Cuthbert, Bishop of Lindisfarne Priory from 685–687. Both St. Cuthbert and the Venerable Bede are buried at Durham Cathedral.



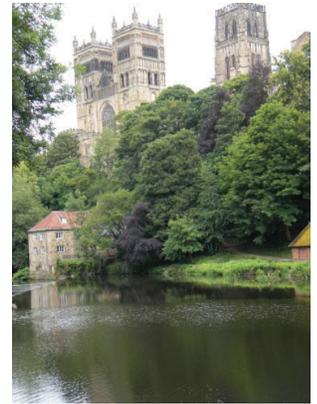
Death of St. Bede.

Ecclesiastical History of the English People

Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* records two important events that occurred at another abbey in northern England, the Abbey of Whitby.

The Abbey of Whitby overlooks the North Sea in North Yorkshire, England. Founded in 657, the abbey's first abbess Hilda was the niece of Edwin, the first Christian king of Northumbria.

The Venerable Bede records the story of King Edwin's conversion to Christianity. Considering converting as part of a marriage arrangement, King Edwin asked some of his counselors for advice. The Venerable Bede records the advice that one of his counselors gave him:



Durham Cathedral.



Ruins of Whitby Abbey.

Sidebar 1.2.

The present life man, O king, seems to me, in comparison with that time which is unknown to us, like to the swift flight of a sparrow through the room wherein you sit at supper in winter amid your officers and ministers, with a good fire in the midst whilst the storms of rain and snow prevail abroad; the sparrow, I say, flying in at one door and immediately out another, whilst he is within is safe from the wintry but after a short space of fair weather he immediately vanishes out of your sight into the dark winter from which he has emerged. So this life of man appears for a short space but of what went before or what is to follow we are ignorant. If, therefore, this new doctrine contains something more certain, it seems justly to deserve to be followed.

Like the Abbey at Lindisfarne, the Abbey at Whitby was sacked by Viking raiders and rebuilt. Also like other abbeys in England, it was closed at the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII in 1536.

But long before Henry VIII, Whitby Abbey was home to Caedmon.

Recorded by the Venerable Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, “Caedmon’s Hymn” is the oldest extant work in the Old English language. It was probably composed during the latter half of the 7th century.

Part of this work’s importance is what it reveals about Anglo-Saxon society nearly one hundred years after the arrival of St. Augustine in 597. The poem pictures an Anglo-Saxon society in which the tribe gathers in the mead hall to eat and to entertain each other with songs about heroes and their adventures. But, in this story, for the first time, one of those traditional songs has a religious theme, illustrating the influence of Christianity on the pagan culture.

In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, the Venerable Bede records the story of Caedmon, a simple, uneducated cow herder at the Abbey of Whitby who was given the gift of song in a dream/vision. Like others in Anglo-Saxon society, the monks followed the custom of passing around a harp after the evening meal in the great hall for everyone to take a turn singing/chanting a story. Caedmon used to sneak out before it was his turn because he couldn’t sing. Then he received his divine gift. The important point, however, is that he was given the gift of singing stories about religious subjects, specifically the creation of the world.



Caedmon’s cross near Whitby Abbey.

Sidebar 1.3.

Caedmon's Hymn

Now praise the guardian of Heaven,
the might of the Creator, and his purpose,
the work of the Father of glory, how each of wonders
the Eternal Lord established in the beginning.
He, the holy Creator, first created
Heaven as a roof for the sons of men.
The holy Creator, the guardian of mankind,
the Eternal Lord, the Almighty Lord
afterwards made Middle-earth, the earth for men.
In the beginning Cædmon sang this poem.

Anglo-Saxon songs and stories were always about battles, heroic but violent deeds, monsters—stories like *Beowulf*. The story of Caedmon pictures the use of the Anglo-Saxon custom of singing in the mead hall to introduce Christian stories to the pagan Anglo-Saxons.

Illuminated Manuscripts

After the Anglo-Saxon invasions and before the Norman Conquest, literacy in Britain was almost entirely the province of the monasteries. As we see in Bede's *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, monks were responsible for the recording of what history and literature exists from the Anglo-Saxon period.

One of the highlights of this period was the production of **illuminated manuscripts**⁶, handwritten manuscripts adorned with richly colorful, intricately crafted illustration, often using expensive materials such as gold leaf. One of the most famous illuminated manuscripts is the Lindisfarne Gospels. The [British Library's online virtual books](#) feature allows you the experience of leafing through this rare and valuable manuscript.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Venerable Bede's *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* is one of the few sources of information about Britain in the Anglo-Saxon period.
- The story of Caedmon the cow herder may have been composed to account for the introduction of religious topics to the Anglo-Saxon story-telling tradition.
- The creation of illuminated manuscripts is a highlight of medieval literature and art.

EXERCISES

1. Read the [story of Caedmon](#) in *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. What do you learn about daily life in a monastery from reading this passage? What do you learn about Anglo-Saxon culture?
2. After reading the story of Caedmon, how would you characterize Bede's work? What would you consider the main purpose of his work?
3. Describe what you consider the outstanding features of the Lindisfarne Gospels.

Resources

Biographical Information on Caedmon

- "[Caedmon](#)." *Dictionary of National Biography*.
- "[St. Caedmon](#)." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*.

Biographical Information on The Venerable Bede

- [Biography of The Venerable Bede](#). Calvin College Christian Classics Ethereal Library.
- [Image of Bede's tomb in Durham Cathedral](#). Durham Cathedral.

6. handwritten manuscripts adorned with richly colorful, intricately crafted illustration, often using expensive materials such as gold leaf

- The Venerable Bede. BBC. Audio of panel consisting of Richard Gameson, Reader in Medieval History at the University of Kent at Canterbury; Sarah Foot, Professor of Early Medieval History at the University of Sheffield; Michelle Brown, manuscript specialist from the British Library.
- “The Venerable Bede.” History. Historic Figures. BBC.
- “The Venerable Bede.” *Religion Facts*. Biography and images of Bede and Bede’s tomb.

Text of “Caedmon’s Hymn”

- “Caedmon’s Hymn.” *Poemhunter.com*. Old English and Modern English.
- “Caedmon’s Hymn.” *Representative Poetry Online*. Old English and Modern English with commentary by Ian Lancashire, Dept. of English, University of Toronto.

Audio

- Anglo-Saxon Aloud. Michael D. C. Drout. Wheaton College. Recording in Old English.
- “Caedmon’s Hymn.” *Internet Archive. Librivox*. Recording in Old English.
- “Caedmon’s Hymn.” *Project Gutenberg*. Recording in Modern English.

Video

- “The Venerable Bede and ‘Caedmon’s Hymn.”” Dr. Carol A. Lowe. McLennan Community College.

Ecclesiastical History of England Text

- Ecclesiastical History of England. Calvin College Christian Classics Ethereal Library.
- “Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation.” Internet Medieval Sourcebook. *The ORB: Online Reference Book for Medieval Studies*. text in Modern English.
- Ecclesiastical History of the English People. Thomas Miller. *In Parentheses*. Old English Series. York University, Canada.
- Story of Caedmon from *Ecclesiastical History*. *Internet Sacred Text Archive*.

Illuminated Manuscripts

- *Fathom The Lindisfarne Gospels*. Michelle P. Brown, Curator of Illuminated Manuscripts, British Library. Seminar on the history of illuminated manuscripts including images.
- *Fathom: An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*. Michelle P. Brown, Curator of Illuminated Manuscripts, British Library. Seminar on the history of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts including images.
- *Pinnacle of Anglo-Saxon Art: the Lindisfarne Gospels*. Online Gallery. Virtual Books. British Library.

1.3 “The Dream of the Rood”

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize and account for both pagan and Christian elements in “The Dream of the Rood.”
2. Interpret the poem’s characterization of Christ in terms of the Anglo-Saxon culture.

“The Dream of the Rood” tells a Christian story with emphasis on elements that would appeal to the pagan warrior society of the Anglo-Saxons. Note the use of **epithets**⁷ (characterizing words or phrases used in place of a proper name). For example, the cross is referred to as “wondrous wood,” “victor-tree,” and “the Saviour’s tree.” Each epithet suggests a characteristic of the cross. Like much Old English poetry, “The Dream of the Rood” exemplifies an **elegiac tone**⁸, an awareness of the transitory nature of life, human sinfulness and sorrow, and the promised consolation of Heaven.

Told by two narrators, the unnamed Dreamer and the Rood, the poem is an example of **dream vision literature**⁹, a narrative in which an individual experiences a dream or vision which substantially changes his/her life, frequently through the wisdom of a guide or mentor. In this case the Rood, the cross upon which Christ was crucified, relates his experiences in the terms of a loyal retainer supporting his king.

Text: “The Dream of the Rood”

(translated by James M. Garnett, Boston: Ginn & Co., Publishers, The Athenaeum Press, 1911. rpt. in *Project Gutenberg*)

Lo! choicest of dreams I will relate,	
What dream I dreamt in middle of night	

- 7. characterizing words or phrases used in place of a proper name
- 8. an awareness of the transitory nature of life, human sinfulness and sorrow, and the promised consolation of Heaven
- 9. a narrative in which an individual experiences a dream or vision which substantially changes his/her life, frequently through the wisdom of a guide or mentor

When mortal men reposed in rest.	
Methought I saw a wondrous wood	
Tower aloft with light bewound,	5
Brightest of trees; that beacon was all	
Begirt with gold; jewels were standing	
Four at surface of earth, likewise were there five	
Above on the shoulder-brace. All angels of God beheld it,	
Fair through future ages; 'twas no criminal's cross indeed,	10
But holy spirits beheld it there,	
Men upon earth, all this glorious creation.	
Strange was that victor-tree, and stained with sins was I,	
With foulness defiled. I saw the glorious tree	
With vesture adorned winsomely shine,	15
Begirt with gold; bright gems had there	
Worthily decked the tree of the Lord.	
Yet through that gold I might perceive	
Old strife of the wretched, that first it gave	
Blood on the stronger [right] side. With sorrows was I oppressed,	20
Afraid for that fair sight; I saw the ready beacon	
Change in vesture and hue; at times with moisture covered,	
Soiled with course of blood; at times with treasure adorned.	
Yet lying there a longer while,	
Beheld I sad the Saviour's tree	25
Until I heard that words it uttered;	
The best of woods gan speak these words:	
“'Twas long ago (I remember it still)	
That I was hewn at end of a grove,	
Stripped from off my stem; strong foes laid hold of me there,	30
Wrought for themselves a show, bade felons raise me up;	
Men bore me on their shoulders, till on a mount they set me;	

Fiends many fixed me there. Then saw I mankind's Lord	
Hasten with mickle might, for He would sty upon me.	
There durst I not 'gainst word of the Lord	35
Bow down or break, when saw I tremble	
The surface of earth; I might then all	
My foes have felled, yet fast I stood.	
The Hero young begirt Himself, Almighty God was He,	
Strong and stern of mind; He stied on the gallows high,	40
Bold in sight of many, for man He would redeem.	
I shook when the Hero clasped me, yet durst not bow to earth,	
Fall to surface of earth, but firm I must there stand.	
A rood was I upreared; I raised the mighty King,	
The Lord of Heaven; I durst not bend me.	45
They drove their dark nails through me; the wounds are seen upon me,	
The open gashes of guile; I durst harm none of them.	
They mocked us both together; all moistened with blood was I,	
Shed from side of the man, when forth He sent His spirit.	
Many have I on that mount endured	50
Of cruel fates; I saw the Lord of Hosts	
Strongly outstretched; darkness had then	
Covered with clouds the corse of the Lord,	
The brilliant brightness; the shadow continued,	
Wan 'neath the welkin. There wept all creation,	55
Bewailed the King's death; Christ was on the cross.	
Yet hastening thither they came from afar	
To the Son of the King: that all I beheld.	
Sorely with sorrows was I oppressed; yet I bowed 'neath the hands of men,	
Lowly with mickle might. Took they there Almighty God,	60
Him raised from the heavy torture; the battle-warriors left me	
To stand bedrenched with blood; all wounded with darts was I.	

There laid they the weary of limb, at head of His corse they stood,	
Beheld the Lord of Heaven, and He rested Him there awhile,	
Worn from the mickle war. Began they an earth-house to work,	65
Men in the murderers' sight, carved it of brightest stone,	
Placed therein victories' Lord. Began sad songs to sing	
The wretched at eventide; then would they back return	
Mourning from the mighty prince; all lonely rested He there.	
Yet weeping we then a longer while	70
Stood at our station: the [voice] arose	
Of battle-warriors; the corse grew cold,	
Fair house of life. Then one gan fell	
Us all to earth; 'twas a fearful fate!	
One buried us in deep pit, yet of me the thanes of the Lord,	75
His friends, heard tell; [from earth they raised me],	
And me begirt with gold and silver.	
Now thou mayst hear, my dearest man,	
That bale of woes have I endured,	
Of sorrows sore. Now the time is come,	80
That me shall honor both far and wide	
Men upon earth, and all this mighty creation	
Will pray to this beacon. On me God's Son	
Suffered awhile; so glorious now	
I tower to Heaven, and I may heal	85
Each one of those who reverence me;	
Of old I became the hardest of pains,	
Most loathsome to ledes [nations], the way of life,	
Right way, I prepared for mortal men.	
Lo! the Lord of Glory honored me then	90
Above the grove, the guardian of Heaven,	
As He His mother, even Mary herself,	

Almighty God before all men	
Worthily honored above all women.	
Now thee I bid, my dearest man,	95
That thou this sight shalt say to men,	
Reveal in words, 'tis the tree of glory,	
On which once suffered Almighty God	
For the many sins of all mankind,	
And also for Adam's misdeeds of old.	100
Death tasted He there; yet the Lord arose	
With His mickle might for help to men.	
Then stied He to Heaven; again shall come	
Upon this mid-earth to seek mankind	
At the day of doom the Lord Himself,	105
Almighty God, and His angels with Him;	
Then He will judge, who hath right of doom,	
Each one of men as here before	
In this vain life he hath deserved.	
No one may there be free from fear	110
In view of the word that the Judge will speak.	
He will ask 'fore the crowd, where is the man	
Who for name of the Lord would bitter death	
Be willing to taste, as He did on the tree.	
But then they will fear, and few will bethink them	115
What they to Christ may venture to say.	
Then need there no one be filled with fear	
Who bears in his breast the best of beacons;	
But through the rood a kingdom shall seek	
From earthly way each single soul	120
That with the Lord thinketh to dwell."	
Then I prayed to the tree with joyous heart,	

With mickle might, when I was alone	
With small attendance; the thought of my mind	
For the journey was ready; I've lived through many	125
Hours of longing. Now 'tis hope of my life	
That the victory-tree I am able to seek,	
Oftener than all men I alone may	
Honor it well; my will to that	
Is mickle in mind, and my plea for protection	130
To the rood is directed. I've not many mighty	
Of friends on earth; but hence went they forth	
From joys of the world, sought glory's King;	
Now live they in Heaven with the Father on high,	
In glory dwell, and I hope for myself	135
On every day when the rood of the Lord,	
Which here on earth before I viewed,	
In this vain life may fetch me away	
And bring me then, where bliss is mickle,	
Joy in the Heavens, where the folk of the Lord	140
Is set at the feast, where bliss is eternal;	
And may He then set me where I may hereafter	
In glory dwell, and well with the saints	
Of joy partake. May the Lord be my friend,	
Who here on earth suffered before	145
On the gallows-tree for the sins of man!	
He us redeemed, and gave to us life,	
A heavenly home. Hope was renewed,	
With blessing and bliss, for the sufferers of burning.	
The Son was victorious on that fateful journey,	150
Mighty and happy, when He came with a many,	
With a band of spirits to the kingdom of God,	

The Ruler Almighty, for joy to the angels	
And to all the saints, who in Heaven before	
In glory dwelt, when their Ruler came,	155
Almighty God, where was His home.	

The Ruthwell Cross

Part of the poem “The Dream of the Rood” is inscribed on the Ruthwell Cross, an 18-foot tall, free standing cross, one of oldest extant Christian monuments in Britain.

Video Clip 7

The Ruthwell Cross and The Dream of the Rood

[\(click to see video\)](#)

The stone is carved with scenes from the Bible, decorative vine work, and 18 lines of “The Dream of the Rood” in Anglo-Saxon runes and Latin lettering. Scholars believe the cross could have been carved after 650, probably after the Synod of Whitby in 664; others think it may have been carved as late as 710.

The Ruthwell Cross, a preaching cross, originally stood outdoors at a crossroad. Because the Anglo-Saxons were mostly illiterate, one of the ways the missionary Christian monks communicated knowledge about the Bible and Christianity was through pictures. Pagan people who saw the cross might be influenced to convert to Christianity or the first Christian converts could be taught biblical knowledge.



The Vercelli Book

Only four manuscripts contain all extant Old English literature: the Junius manuscript (which includes “Caedmon’s Hymn”), the Exeter Book, the Nowell Codex (which includes the *Beowulf* manuscript), and the Vercelli Book (so called because it was found in Vercelli, Italy). The Vercelli Book contains two poems by Cynewulf, whom some scholars believe may also have composed “The Dream of the Rood.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. “The Dream of the Rood” is a Christian story presented in terms of the Germanic heroic ideal.
2. “The Dream of the Rood” exemplifies typical literary devices of Old English literature such as elegiac tone and dream vision format.

EXERCISES

1. In “The Dream of the Rood,” there are two speakers. Who speaks the first and last stanzas? Who speaks the middle stanza in quotation marks?
2. “The Dream of the Rood” pictures Christ as a Germanic hero. List some of the epithets for Christ found in “The Dream of the Rood.” What qualities of Christ are emphasized by these epithets? Why is he portrayed that way?
3. Also note the epithets used for the cross. What qualities are emphasized by these epithets?
4. Describe the mood of the Dreamer in the first paragraph and in the last paragraph. What consolation is revealed to him?

Resources

Text in Modern English

- “[The Dream of the Rood.](#)” Charles Kennedy. *In Parentheses*. Old English Series. York University, Canada.
- “[The Dream of the Rood.](#)” Jonathan A. Glenn. University of Central Arkansas. Text with annotations.
- “[The Dream of the Rood.](#)” Oxford University. Old English text, multiple modern English translations, background information, and images.
- “[The Dream of the Rood.](#)” *Project Gutenberg*.
- [The Dream of the Rood: An Electronic Edition](#). Mary Rambaran-Olm. University of Glasgow. Text with glossary in both Old and Modern English and images of the manuscript.

Text in Old English

- “[Dream of the Rood.](#)” *Labyrinth*. Georgetown University.
- “[The Dream of the Rood.](#)” Oxford University. Old English text, multiple modern English translations, background information, and images.

- [The Dream of the Rood: An Electronic Edition](#). Mary Rambaran-Olm. University of Glasgow. Text with glossary in both Old and Modern English and images of the manuscript.
- [The Dream of the Rood: An Old English Poem Attributed to Cynewulf](#). Albert S. Cook. *Internet Archive*.

Audio Text in Old English

- [“The Dream of the Rood.”](#) *Anglo-Saxon Aloud*. Michael D. C. Drout. Wheaton College.

Video

- [“The Ruthwell Cross and the Dream of the Rood.”](#) Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College.

Old English Manuscripts

Exeter Book

- [“11th Century: The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry.”](#) *Facsimiles of Illuminated Manuscripts in Special Collections*. The University of Arizona Library Special Collections.

Junius Manuscript

- [MS. Junius 11](#). Bodleian Library. Oxford University.
- [Image from MS. Junius 11, p. 2](#). Bodleian Library. Oxford University. Dr. Felicia Steele, The College of New Jersey.

Nowell Codex

- [Image from Beowulf](#). Online Gallery. British Library.

Vercelli Book

- [The Dream of the Rood: An Electronic Edition](#). Mary Rambaran-Olm. University of Glasgow. Text with glossary in both Old and Modern English and images of the manuscript.
- [Digital Images of the Vercelli Book](#). Oxford University.

The Ruthwell Cross

- [“The Dream of the Rood.”](#) Oxford University. Old English text, multiple modern English translations, background information, and images.
- [Ruthwell Cross Factsheet.](#) Birth of a Nation History Trails. BBC.

Manuscript and Author

- [The Dream of the Rood: An Old English Poem Attributed to Cynewulf.](#) Albert S. Cook. *Internet Archive*.

1.4 *Beowulf*

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Trace the history of the *Beowulf* manuscript.
2. Interpret theories of structure and theme in *Beowulf*.
3. Define the oral formulaic tradition and give examples of its use in *Beowulf*.
4. Identify major characters and settings in *Beowulf*.
5. List literary techniques typical of Old English poetry, including *Beowulf*, and provide examples.

Beowulf is the oldest epic poem written in English and is probably the most important extant Old English literary work. It exists in only one manuscript, the Nowell Codex of the British Library MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv. Julian Harrison, Curator of Medieval Manuscripts, British Library, provides a comprehensive introduction to *Beowulf* in [“What Is *Beowulf*?”](#)

Text

- [*Beowulf*](#). Clarence Griffin Child. *In Parentheses*. Old English Series. York University, Canada. Modern English prose translation.
- [*Beowulf*](#). Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia. Modern English translation.
- [*Beowulf*. Gummere translation](#). *Project Gutenberg*. Modern English translation.
- [*Beowulf*. Old English text](#). *Project Gutenberg*.
- [*Beowulf*](#). Paul Halsall. Fordham University. *ORB Medieval Sourcebook*. Gummere’s Modern English translation.
- [*Beowulf*](#). Paul Halsall. Fordham University. *ORB Medieval Sourcebook*. Klaeber’s Old English edition.
- [*Beowulf in Hypertext*](#). Dr. Anne Savage. McMaster University. Old English and modern English texts.

Audio in Old English

- “[Anglo-Saxon Aloud](#).” Professor Michael D. C. Drout. Wheaton College.
- “[Beowulf](#).” *Learning: Changing Language*. British Library.
- “[Readings from Beowulf](#).” *Old English at the University of Virginia*. Peter S. Baker. University of Virginia.

Composition

Although the events in the poem take place in the 5th century, the poem was likely composed somewhere from the 8th century to the early 11th century. No one, however, knows exactly when the poem was composed or who composed it. It is also possible that the poem had existed through generations as an oral work.



Subject

Although *Beowulf* is considered the first great English poem, the events are set in what is now Scandinavia. Beowulf and his people, the Geats, are from an area that is now part of Sweden; Hrothgar is king of the Danes. The culture portrayed, however, is the Anglo-Saxon culture using the language brought to Britain beginning with the 5th-century Anglo-Saxon invasions. View a [video about the Sutton Hoo ship burial](#), an archaeological source of much information about the culture portrayed in *Beowulf*.



Structure

Some scholars see *Beowulf* as having a two-part structure:

- Beowulf in his prime, fighting Grendel and his mother for the Danes
- Beowulf in old age, fighting the dragon for his own people, the Geats

Other scholars see the structure as corresponding to the three battles:

- Beowulf against Grendel
- Beowulf against Grendel's mother
- Beowulf against the dragon

Theme

One theme of *Beowulf* involves the preservation of the Anglo-Saxon societal structure. Every society worries that their values and standards will be abandoned and that their social order will die out as a result. An elegiac tone and a mood of longing for the past permeates the epic *Beowulf*. At the end of the poem, Wiglaf mourns both the death of Beowulf and the potential passing of his tribe, vulnerable to attack because their reputation for cowardice will spread among other tribes after the retainers fail in their vows of loyalty.

Anglo-Saxon society was based on the **Germanic heroic ideal**¹⁰, the standard of excellence required of a leader, excellence in all that was important to the tribe: hunting, sea-faring, fighting. The leader of each tribal unit, often family units especially in earlier years, gained his position because of his physical strength and capabilities in the activities necessary for survival. The men of the tribe, the thanes or retainers, swore loyalty to the leader and in return he rewarded them with the spoils of their battles and raids.



Beowulf challenged by the coast guard by Evelyn Paul, from Guerber's Myths & Legends of the Middle Ages (1911).

An important part of the Germanic heroic ideal was the **king-retainer relationship**¹¹, a reciprocal relationship which dictated that the thanes should be loyal to their leader and in return the leader would protect them and share the treasures obtained in battle with them. The group bound by this relationship, the *comitatus*, formed the basis of Anglo-Saxon society.

Theme and 3-Part Structure

The theme of concern for cultural values, in this case the *comitatus*, plays out in the details of the three battles:

10. the standard of excellence required of a leader, excellence in all that was important to the tribe: hunting, sea-faring, fighting
11. a reciprocal relationship which dictated that the thanes should be loyal to their leader and in return the leader would protect them and share the treasures obtained in battle with them

- first battle: Beowulf has the “home field” advantage because he fights with Grendel in the mead hall, and he defeats the monster with his bare hands. During the fight, his retainers and Hrothgar’s retainers all stand close by in case Beowulf needs help. They won’t interfere unless Beowulf needs them because they don’t want to detract from their leader’s glory in battle.
- second battle: Beowulf has to go into the monster’s home territory to fight Grendel’s mother, and he has to use a sword—which suggests his

strength isn't quite as great. Not only does Beowulf use Hrunting, the sword Unferth presented him, but when Hrunting fails, Beowulf finds an enormous sword, a sword made by giants (perhaps an ancient Roman sword) which he uses to kill Grendel's mother. When they see the blood bubbling up through the mere, Hrothgar's retainers are not faithful—they give up and go home, assuming Beowulf is dead. Only Beowulf's personal retainers stay at the mere until he returns. There seems to be a direct connection between the loyalty of the retainers and Beowulf's strength.

- third battle: Fifty years later Beowulf fights the dragon in its lair. All the retainers except Wiglaf abandon their leader and run to hide in the woods. Beowulf not only has to use a weapon to kill the dragon, but he also has to have help from Wiglaf. Again Beowulf's strength fades as his retainers fail in loyalty.

Notice the speeches that Wiglaf makes to the cowardly retainers. He shames them for running, and he even tells them that now their society will fall. Other tribes will hear about how cowardly they are and, believing them to be easy targets, will come to attack them. The three battles, then, form the structure of the poem and suggest the theme of failing values.

Oral Formulaic Tradition

Many scholars believe that the story of Beowulf existed in oral tradition, perhaps for hundreds of years, before it was recorded in writing, the story told around the fires of the mead hall by the **scop**¹², the singer, the shaper or creator of tales. The scop may have used certain memory aids to help him remember the long story, one of which was the **formula**¹³, a set pattern of words. For example: “Ðæt wæs god cyning” in line 11 (line numbers may differ according to the translation consulted) of the Prologue uses the formula “Ðæt wæs X Y.” The X and Y are filled in with different words each time the formula is used.

- in line 11, “Ðæt wæs god cyning” [that was good king]
- in line 170, “Ðæt wæs wræc micel” [that was much misery]
- in line 309 “Ðæt wæs foremærost” [that was most famous {hall}]
- in line 348 “Ðæt wæs Wendla leod” [that was the Wendles' (Vandals') chieftain]
- in line 705 “Ðæt wæs yldum cuþ” [that was widely known]
- in line 765 “Ðæt wæs geocor sið” [that was terrible journey]
- in line 834 “Ðæt wæs tacen sweotol” [that was clear symbol]
- in line 864 “Ðæt wæs god cyning” [that was good king]
- in line 1039 “Ðæt wæs hilde-setl” [that was war seat (saddle)]
- in line 1075 “Ðæt wæs geomuru ides” [that was woeful woman]

12. the singer, the shaper or creator of tales

13. a set pattern of words

- in line 1458 “Ðæt wæs an foran” [that was of early times]
- in line 1559 “Ðæt wæs wæpna cyst” [that was choicest weapon]
- in line 1594 “Ðæt wæs yðgeblond” [that was wave mixture]
- in line 1608 “Ðæt wæs wundra sum” [that was wondrous thing]
- in line 1692 “Ðæt wæs fremde ðeod” [that was estranged people]
- in line 1812 “Ðæt wæs modig secg” [that was bold hero]
- in line 1885 “Ðæt wæs an cyning” [that was unequaled king]
- in line 2390 “Ðæt wæs god cyning” [that was good king]
- in line 2441 “Ðæt wæs feohleas gefeoht” [that was fee-less fight (no wergild could be claimed)]
- in line 2817 “Ðæt wæs ðam gomelan” [that was last word]

Another formula is “X maþelode [X spoke].

- in line 348 “Wulfgar maþelode” [Wulfgar spoke]
- in line 371 “Hroðgar maþelode” [Hrothgar spoke]
- in line 405 “Beowulf maþelode” [Beowulf spoke]

The idea of the formula is that the scop could remember the list of set phrases to remind him of various events in the plot which he needed to tell. Think of telling a children’s story such as “Goldilocks and the Three Bears.” No one uses exactly the same words each time the story is told. However, we all remember the formula: “This X is just right!” And we remember the variation of the formula: this porridge, this chair, this bed, and thus we remember the main events of the plot that need to be told. The formula worked the same way for the Anglo-Saxon scop.

Names to Know From *Beowulf*

The names from *Beowulf* are unusual and hard to remember; use the following list to identify major characters in the poem.

- Hrothgar—King whose hall is attacked by Grendel
- Grendel—monster
- Hygelac—Beowulf’s king
- Ecgtheow—Beowulf’s father
- Healfdene—Hrothgar’s father
- Hrethel—Beowulf’s grandfather and Hygelac’s father
- Unferth—character vexed by Beowulf
- Breca—character with whom Beowulf contended in the sea
- Wealhtheow—Hrothgar’s wife
- Aeschere—Hrothgar’s thane killed by Grendel’s mother
- Wiglaf—Beowulf’s faithful thane

- Scyldings—Hrothgar’s people
- Geats—Beowulf’s people
- Heorot—Hrothgar’s hall
- Hrunting—sword given to Beowulf by Unferth

Literary Techniques

- **cæsura and half lines**¹⁴

Old English verses are divided into two half lines with a pause in the middle of the line. The **cæsura**¹⁵, the pause in the middle of a line of Old English poetry, is indicated in print by the space in the middle of each line:

line 1	Hwæt! wē Gār-Dena	in geār-dagum
line 2	ưeod-cyninga	ưrym gefrūnon,
line 3	hū ưā æðelingas	ellen fremedon.
line 4	Oft Scyld Scēfing	sceaðena ưrēatum,
line 5	monegum mægðum	meodo-setla oftēah.
line 6	Egsode eorl,	syððan ærest wearð
line 7	fēa-sceaft funden:	hē ưæs frōfre gebād,
line 8	wēox under wolcnum,	weorð-myndum ðāh,
line 9	oð ưæt him æghwylc	ưāra ymb-sittendra
line 10	ofer hron-rāde	hȳran scolde,
line 11	gomban gyldan:	ưæt wæs gōd cyning!

- **alliteration**

Old English poetry does not use rhyme. Instead, it uses **alliteration**¹⁶, the repetition of initial sounds of words in a line of poetry. For example, note the repetition of initial “s” sounds in line 4 above and the repetition of initial “m” sounds in line 5.

- **kennings**

Old English poetry is characterized by the use of **kennings**¹⁷, compound metaphors used in place of a simple noun. Examples include

14.

15. the pause in the middle of a line of Old English poetry

16. the repetition of initial sounds of words in a line of poetry

17. a compound metaphor used in place of a simple noun

whale's way or *swan's road* for ocean, *heaven's candle* for the sun, *battle sweat* for blood, and *ring-giver* for king.

- **litotes**

Old English poetry sometimes expresses ideas with the use of **litotes**¹⁸, a type of understatement in which meaning is expressed by negating its opposite. For example, litotes may be found in the “that was X Y” formula in statements such as “That was not a good place” to mean it was a bad place.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. *Beowulf* is probably about 1000 years old although the dates of its composition and its recording in writing are unknown.
2. *Beowulf* probably was part of the oral tradition for a long period of time before it was recorded in writing.
3. *Beowulf* depicts the Germanic heroic ideal and the king-retainer relationship typical of Anglo-Saxon society.
4. *Beowulf* uses literary techniques typical of Old English poetry such as the caesura, alliteration, kennings, and litotes.

18. a type of understatement in which meaning is expressed by negating its opposite

EXERCISES

1. The Germanic heroic ideal was an important standard of behavior and of judging the worth of a leader among the Anglo-Saxons. Locate passages in *Beowulf* that illustrate the heroic ideal. For example, physical strength is an important quality of a hero; point out specific incidents in *Beowulf* that illustrate strength.
2. The king-retainer relationship formed the basis of Anglo-Saxon society. Locate passages in *Beowulf* that illustrate this reciprocal relationship. For example, loyalty to one's leader was an important quality; find specific incidents that illustrate loyalty (or a failure to be loyal).
3. One of the curious features of *Beowulf* is its blend of pagan and Christian allusions. Scholars long believed that the poem was composed by a pagan society but recorded in writing by a monk who added Christian references. Current scholarly opinion is that the poem, which may have had its origins in a pagan society, was composed by Anglo-Saxons who already had been exposed to Christianity after St. Augustine's efforts beginning in 597. Locate examples of pagan and of Christian references in *Beowulf*. For example, a reference to fate would be typical of pagan beliefs. Any mention of God or Biblical allusions would be Christian references.
4. Old English literature uses literary devices such as epithets, alliteration, kennings, and litotes. Find examples of each of these techniques in *Beowulf*.
5. In addition to the formulas, the Anglo-Saxon scop used a pattern of motifs (recurring images or actions in a literary work) to remember the long, complicated stories which he sang. Find examples of motifs such as *beots* (boasts), sword failings, gift-giving, and revenge which are repeated in *Beowulf*.

Boasting, for example, would likely be considered an unattractive trait in our society. However, in the Anglo-Saxon culture, the *beot* served two important functions. First, it became a type of vow. When Beowulf boasted to Unferth about his exploits in the swimming match against Breca, he not only established himself as a hero with the physical strength and cunning to defeat Grendel, he obligated himself to fight Grendel to the death. He also helped insure his own immortality by making his deeds the subject of legends that would be told by scops long after his death.

Sword failings parallel the degree of loyalty of retainers and become a means to trace the theme of loyalty through the various battles that comprise the plot of *Beowulf*.

Gift-giving and revenge are essential components of the Anglo-Saxon king-retainer relationship, and they too become a means to trace the plot and theme.

Resources

Text

- [Beowulf](#). Clarence Griffin Child. *In Parentheses*. Old English Series. York University, Canada. Modern English prose translation.
- [Beowulf](#). Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia. Modern English translation.
- [Beowulf Gummere translation](#). *Project Gutenberg*. Modern English translation.
- [Beowulf Old English text](#). *Project Gutenberg*.
- [Beowulf](#). Paul Halsall. Fordham University. *ORB Medieval Sourcebook*. Gummere's Modern English translation.
- [Beowulf](#). Paul Halsall. Fordham University. *ORB Medieval Sourcebook*. Klaeber's Old English edition.
- [Beowulf in Hypertext](#). Dr. Anne Savage. McMaster University. Old English and modern English texts.

Audio

- [Beowulf](#). *Project Gutenberg*. Complete modern English text of *Beowulf*.
- [Beowulf](#). *Internet Archive*. *LibriVox*. Gummere translation.

Audio in Old English

- ["Anglo-Saxon Aloud"](#). Professor Michael D. C. Drout. Wheaton College.
- ["Beowulf"](#). *Learning: Changing Language*. British Library.
- ["Readings from Beowulf"](#). *Old English at the University of Virginia*. Peter S. Baker. University of Virginia.

Video

- ["Sutton Hoo and Beowulf"](#). Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College.

Beowulf manuscript

- [“What Is Beowulf?”](#) Julian Harrison, Curator of Medieval Manuscripts, British Library.
- video, print, image of manuscript, podcast.

Anglo-Saxon Culture

- [“Anglo-Saxons.”](#) Ancient History In-Depth. BBC.
- [“English and Norman Society.”](#) Dr. Mike Ibeji. History In-Depth. BBC. Differences between Anglo-Saxon (*Beowulf*) and Anglo-Norman culture (Chaucer).
- [Excavations at Sutton Hoo.](#) British Museum. Articles about Anglo-Saxon culture as evidenced by findings at Sutton Hoo and links to images of objects in the British Museum.
- [Middle Ages.](#) Annenberg Media Learner.org.
- [The Sutton Hoo Society.](#) Information about the archaeology of the Sutton Hoo ship burial, an interactive tour of the excavation site, and a picture gallery.

Anglo-Saxon Language

- [The Electronic Introduction to Old English.](#) Peter S. Baker. Chapter 1: [The Anglo-Saxons and Their Language.](#)
- [Modern English to Old English Vocabulary.](#) Memorial University, Canada.

Anglo-Saxon Poetics

- [Beowulf: Language and Poetics Quick Reference Sheet.](#) *Read, Write, Think (International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of English).*
- [The Electronic Introduction to Old English.](#) Peter S. Baker. Chapters 13 and 14.
- [Literary Guide: Beowulf.](#) *Read, Write, Think (International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of English).* Interactive slide presentation on *Beowulf*, the story, language, translations, and poetics; designed for high school students.
- [“What Is Beowulf?”](#) Julian Harrison, Curator of Medieval Manuscripts, British Museum.
- Video, print, image of manuscript, podcast.

Anglo-Saxon Dictionary

- An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Bosworth and Toller.
- Modern English to Old English Vocabulary. Memorial University, Canada.

Chapter 2

Middle English Literature

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

2.1 Introduction to Middle English Literature: The Medieval World

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Compare and contrast the comitatus organization of Old English society with medieval feudalism.
2. Identify the three estates of medieval society and appraise their function.
3. Assess the influence of the Church on the literature of the Middle Ages.
4. Understand the correlation between the Church and the concept of chivalry in the Middle Ages.
5. Recognize types of religious literature of the Middle Ages, including medieval drama.
6. Assess the impact of Caxton's printing press on the Middle English language and literature.

The world about which Chaucer wrote was a very different world from that which produced *Beowulf*. Developments in language, new structures in society, and changes in how people viewed the world and their place in it produced literature unlike the heroic literature of the Old English period.

Language

After the Norman Conquest in 1066, Old English was suppressed in records and official venues in favor of the Norman French language. However, the English language survived among the conquered Anglo-Saxons. The peasant classes spoke only English, and the Normans who spread out into the countryside to take over estates soon learned English of necessity. By the 14th century, English reemerged as the dominant language but in a form very different from Anglo-Saxon Old English. Writers of the 13th and 14th centuries described the co-existence of Norman French and the emerging English now known as Middle English.

Society

In the Middle Ages, the king-retainer structure of Anglo-Saxon society evolved into **feudalism**¹, a method of organizing society consisting of three estates: clergymen, the noblemen who were granted fiefs by the king, and the peasant class who worked on the fief. Medieval society saw the social order as part of the **Great Chain of Being**², the metaphor used in the Middle Ages to describe the social hierarchy believed to be created by God. Originating with Aristotle and, in the Middle Ages, believed to be ordained by God, the idea of Great Chain of Being, or *Scala Naturae*, attempted to establish order in the universe by picturing each creation as a link in a chain beginning with God at the top, followed by the various orders of angels, down through classes of people, then animals, and even inanimate parts of nature. The hierarchical arrangement of feudalism provided the medieval world with three estates, or orders of society: the clergy (those who tended to the spiritual realm and spiritual needs), the nobility (those who ruled, protected, and provided civil order), and the commoners (those who physically labored to produce the necessities of life for all three estates). However, by Chaucer's lifetime (late 14th century), another social class, a merchant middle class, developed in the growing cities. Many of Chaucer's pilgrims represent the emerging middle class: the Merchant, the Guildsmen, and even the Wife of Bath.



A medieval university from a 13th-century illuminated manuscript.

Philosophy

The Church

The most important philosophical influence of the Middle Ages was the Church, which dominated life and literature. In medieval Britain, “the Church” referred to the Roman Catholic Church.

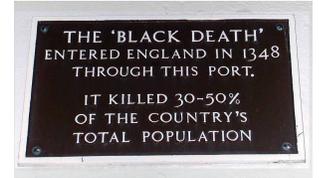
Although works such as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* reveal an exuberant, and often bawdy, sense of humor in the Middle Ages, people also seemed to have a pervasive sense of the brevity of human life and the transitory nature of life on earth.



Canterbury Cathedral.

1. a method of organizing society consisting of three estates: clergymen, the noblemen who were granted fiefs by the king, and the peasant class who worked on the fief
2. the metaphor used in the Middle Ages to describe the social hierarchy believed to be created by God

Outbreaks of the plague, known as the Black Death, affected both the everyday lives and the philosophy of the Middle Ages. It was not unusual for the populations of entire villages to die of plague. Labor shortages resulted, as did a fear of being near others who might carry the contagion. In households where one member of a family contracted the plague, other members of the family were quarantined, their doors marked with a red x to warn others of the presence of plague in the house. Usually other members of the family did contract and die from the disease although there were instances of individuals, particularly children, dying from starvation after their parents succumbed to plague.



Plaque in Weymouth, England.

Even beyond the outbreaks of plague, the Middle Ages were a dangerous, unhealthy time. Women frequently died in childbirth, infant and child mortality rates were high and life expectancies short, what would now be minor injuries frequently resulted in infection and death, and sanitary conditions and personal hygiene, particularly among the poor, were practically non-existent. Even the moats around castles that seem romantic in the 21st century were often little more than open sewers.



Bodiam Castle.

With these conditions, it's not surprising that people of the Middle Ages lived with a persistent sense of mortality and, for many, a devout grasp on the Church's promise of Heaven. Life on earth was viewed as a vale of tears, a hardship to endure until one reached the afterlife. In addition, some believed physical disabilities and ailments, including the plague, to be the judgment of God for sin.

An important image in the Middle Ages was the wheel of fortune. Picturing life as a wheel of chance, where an individual might be on top of the wheel (symbolic of having good fortune in life) one minute and on the bottom of the wheel the next, the image expressed the belief that life was precarious and unpredictable. In Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the monk, for example, tells of individuals who enjoyed good fortune in life until a turn of the wheel brought them tragedy.



Fortuna spinning her Wheel of Fortune, from a work of Boccaccio.

The Church incorporated the wheel of fortune in its imagery. Many medieval cathedrals feature rose windows. From the exterior of the church, the stone tracery of the window looks similar to a wheel of fortune; from within the church, sunlight floods through the glass, revealing its beauty. Symbolically, those outside the Church are at the mercy of fortune's vagaries; those in the Church see the light through the stonework, suggesting the light of truth and faith, the light of Christ, available to those within the Church.

Chivalry

In addition to religion, a second philosophical influence on medieval thought and literature was **chivalry**³, the code of conduct that bound and defined a knight's behavior.



Rose window in the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi, Italy. Note how the stone tracery from the outside looks like a wheel of fortune. From inside the Church, the light is apparent.

The ideals of chivalry form the basis of the familiar Arthurian legends, the stories of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. Historians generally agree that, if Arthur existed, it was most likely in the time period after the Roman legions left Britain undefended in the fifth century. Arthur was likely a Celtic/Roman leader who, for a time, repelled the invading Anglo-Saxons. However, the King Arthur of the familiar legends is a fictional figure of the later Middle Ages, along with his Queen Guinevere, the familiar knights such as Lancelot and Gawain, his sword Excalibur, Merlin the magician, and his kingdom of Camelot.

3. the code of conduct which bound and defined a knight's behavior

The concepts of chivalry and courtly love, unlike King Arthur, were real. The word *chivalry*, based on the French word *chevalerie*, derives from the French words for horse (*cheval*) and horsemen, indicating that chivalry applies only to knights, the

nobility. Under the code of chivalry, the knight vowed not only to protect his vassals, as demanded by the feudal system, but also to be the champion of the Church.

Literature

Because the Church and the concept of chivalry were dominant factors in the philosophy of the Middle Ages, these two ideas also figure prominently in medieval literature.

Religious Literature

Religious literature appeared in several genres:

- devotional books
 - books of hours [collections of prayers and devotionals, often illuminated]
 - sermons
 - psalters [books containing psalms and other devotional material, often illuminated]
 - missals [books containing the prayers and other texts read during the celebration of mass throughout the year]
 - breviaries [books containing prayers and instructions for celebrating mass]
- hagiographies [stories of the lives of saints]
- medieval drama
 - **mystery plays**⁴ [plays depicting events from the Bible]
 - **morality plays**⁵ [plays, often allegories, intended to teach a moral lesson]

4. a play depicting events from the Bible

5. a play depicting representative characters in moral dilemmas with both the good and the evil parts of their character struggling for dominance

Like the oral tradition of the Anglo-Saxon age, mystery plays and morality plays served a predominantly illiterate population.

Britain's National Trust presents a video describing the Sarum Missal printed by Caxton, an important extant example of the religious literature of the Middle Ages, as well as a second brief video of their turn-the-pages digital copy of the missal that allows a closer inspection of several pages. The British Library features a turn-the-pages digital copy of the Sherborne Missal.



John the Baptist from a medieval book of hours.

Chivalric Literature

In Britain, chivalric literature, particularly the legends of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, flowered in the **medieval romance**⁶, a narrative, in either prose or poetry, presenting a knight and his adventures. The word *romance* originally indicated languages that derived from Latin (the Roman language) and is not related to modern usage of the word to signify romantic love. Instead a medieval romance presents a knight in a series of adventures (a quest) featuring battles, supernatural elements, repeated events, and standardized characters.

Caxton and the Printing Press

Caxton revolutionized the history of literature in the English language in 1476 when he set up the first printing press in England somewhere in the precincts of Westminster Abbey. The first to print books in English, Caxton helped to standardize English vocabulary and spelling.

Video Clip 1

William Caxton and the Printing Press

[\(click to see video\)](#)

The all-encompassing influence of the Church helped create a demand for devotional literature as literacy spread, particularly among the upper and middle classes. Although more people could read, they seldom could read Latin, the language in which clergy recorded most literature. To meet the demand for literature in the vernacular, Caxton printed works in English, including Chaucer's

6. a narrative, in either prose or poetry, presenting a knight and his adventures

Canterbury Tales. The British Library provides digital images of both the first and second editions that Caxton printed.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- After the Norman conquest in 1066, the English language began its gradual transformation from Old English to Middle English.
- Feudalism and chivalry are evident in much Middle English literature.
- The Church was highly influential in daily life of the Middle Ages and in medieval literature.
- William Caxton helped standardize the language and satisfied a demand for literature in the vernacular when he introduced the printing press to England in 1476.

Resources: The Medieval World

Language

- The English Language in the Fourteenth Century. *The Geoffrey Chaucer Page*. Harvard University. Text, contemporaneous quotations, additional links. <http://courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/language.htm>
- “The Norman Conquest.” Learning: Changing Language. British Library. <http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/changlang/activities/lang/norman/normaninvasion.html>

Society

- “Feudal Life.” *Annenberg Media Learner.org*. Interactives. Text and additional topics. <http://www.learner.org/interactives/middleages/feudal.html>
- “Feudalism and Medieval Life.” *Britain Express*. English History. http://www.britainexpress.com/History/Feudalism_and_Medieval_life.htm
- “The Great Chain of Being.” *100 Years of Carnegie*. Aristotle. Image and explanation. <http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/history/carnegie/aristotle/chainofbeing.html>
- “Medieval Realms.” Alixe Bovey. Learning: Medieval Realms. British Library. Rural life slideshow, text, and images. <http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/medieval/rural/rurallife.html>

- “Towns.” Alixe Bovey. Learning: Medieval Realms. British Library. Slideshow, text, and images. <http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/medieval/towns/medievaltowns.html>

Philosophy

- “Black Death.” Mike Ibeji. British History In-Depth. BBC. Text, images, contemporaneous quotation. http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/middle_ages/black_01.shtml#top
- “The Black Death: Art.” E.L. Skip Knox. History of Western Civilization. Boise State University. <http://www.boisestate.edu/courses/westciv/plague/19.shtml>
- “Chivalry.” The End of Europe’s Middle Ages. Applied History Research Group. University of Calgary. http://www.ucalgary.ca/applied_history/tutor/endmiddle/FRAMES/feudframe.html
- “Church.” Alixe Bovey. Learning: Medieval Realms. British Library. Slideshow, text, and images. <http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/medieval/thechurch/church.html>
- “Death.” Alixe Bovey. Learning Medieval Realms. British Library. Text and images. <http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/medieval/death/medievaldeath.html>
- “King Arthur.” Alan Lupack and Barbara Tapa Lupack, Editors. *The Camelot Project*. University of Rochester. Texts, background, images, bibliographies. <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/arthmenu.htm>
- “Medieval Tragedy.” *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. University of Victoria and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Image, text, and additional links. <http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/drama/medievaltragedy.html>
- “Religion.” Annenberg Media Learner.org. Interactives. Text and additional topics. <http://www.learner.org/interactives/middleages/religion.html>
- “The Spread of the Black Death.” Applied History Research Group. University of Calgary. Map and text. http://www.ucalgary.ca/applied_history/tutor/endmiddle/bluedot/blackdeath.html
- “Thomas Malory’s ‘Le Morte Darthur.’” Online Gallery. British Library. information on Malory, Malory’s manuscript, the Arthurian legend, and the historical Arthur. <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/englit/malory/index.html>

Literature

- The Morality Plays. *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. University of Victoria and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Image, text, and additional links. <http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/drama/moralities.html>

- The Mystery Cycles. *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. University of Victoria and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Image, text, and additional links. <http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/drama/mysteries.html>
- “The Sarum Missal—Lyme Park, Cheshire.” Turning the Pages of History: The Lyme Caxton Missal. The National Trust. <http://youtu.be/hDXki-iiiqM>
- “The Sherborne Missal.” Virtual Books. Online Gallery. British Library. http://ttdownload.bl.uk/app_files/silverlight/default.html?id=181afc99-df1f-4951-8981-df7e26625850
- “Turning the Pages: The Sarum Missal, Lyme Park, Cheshire. The National Trust. <http://youtu.be/B0rZyH5U44w>

Caxton and the Printing Press

- Caxton’s English. British Library. Treasures in Full. Text, images, additional links. <http://www.bl.uk/treasures/caxton/english.html>
- Caxton’s Chaucer. British Library. Treasures in Full. Text, images, additional links. <http://www.bl.uk/treasures/caxton/caxtonslife.html>
- Caxton’s Chaucer. British Library. Treasures in Full. Interactive digital images of the first and second editions of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. <http://www.bl.uk/treasures/caxton/homepage.html>
- William Caxton and the Printing Press. Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College. Video. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lMn5OGJrPU>
- William Caxton (c.1422–1492). Historic Figures. BBC. http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/caxton_william.shtml
- William Caxton and the Printing Press. Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College. Video. <http://youtu.be/rQ1-9VsUY1o>
- William Caxton (c.1422–1492). Historic Figures. BBC. http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/caxton_william.shtml

2.2 William Caxton and Printing in England

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Recognize the effects of William Caxton's printing press on the development of the English language and British literature.

With the suppression of the Old English language at the time of the Norman Conquest and the replacement of English with French in official venues, English might have been lost forever. Instead, the English language survived and eventually flourished in the late Middle Ages. The future of the English language was further ensured with the arrival of William Caxton and the printing press in England. View a video mini-lecture on Caxton to learn about Caxton's influence on the English language.



The Printing Press

In 1476, Caxton set up a printing press in the vicinity of Westminster Abbey and began to print books, some in Latin as had been traditional, but Caxton also printed books in English. Because there was no standardization in English spelling, Caxton's choices often became the standard.



Caxton's printing device.

The British Library has made available online a comparison of Caxton's two printings of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, 1476 and 1483. In addition, Barbara Bordalejo in the *Canterbury Tales Project* at De Montfort University provides a digitized version of the British Library manuscripts that allows the reader to see the Middle English text side by side with the manuscript version and to search for specific lines and words. Britain's National Archives contains the first document printed by Caxton.



Caxton showing the first specimen of his printing to King Edward IV at the Almonry, Westminster.

KUHF radio station in Houston, Texas broadcasts "Engines of Our Ingenuity." John H. Lienhard, Professor Emeritus of Mechanical Engineering and History at the University of Houston, wrote and narrates an audio of an episode on Caxton and the printing press. The website includes both the podcast and a written text.

Daniel Maclise, 1851

KEY TAKEAWAY

- Caxton's establishment of the printing press in England helped standardize the English language and promote the use of English in written texts.

EXERCISES

1. The Folger Shakespeare Library provides a video demonstration of an early modern printing press. While watching the video, make a list of words used in early printing techniques that are still used, even with today's computerized printing techniques.
2. Caxton is credited with helping to promote the use of the English language. After reading the British Library's section on Caxton's Texts, including the section on Caxton's English, write a brief paragraph explaining why Caxton chose to print works in the vernacular rather than in Latin.

Resources: William Caxton and Printing in England Biography

- “Caxton’s Chaucer.” Treasures in Full. British Library. <http://www.bl.uk/treasures/caxton/homepage.html>
- “Caxton’s Life.” Treasures in Full: Caxton’s Chaucer. British Library. <http://www.bl.uk/treasures/caxton/caxtonslife.html>
- William Caxton (c.1422–1492). Historic Figures. BBC. http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/caxton_william.shtml
- “William Caxton.” History. Famous People and the Abbey. Westminster Abbey. <http://www.westminster-abbey.org/our-history/people/william-caxton>

Printing Press

- “Caxton’s English.” Treasures in Full: Caxton’s Chaucer. British Library. <http://www.bl.uk/treasures/caxton/english.html>
- “Caxton’s Technologies.” Treasures in Full: Caxton’s Chaucer. British Library. <http://www.bl.uk/treasures/caxton/caxtonstechnologies.html>
- “Caxton’s Texts.” Treasures in Full: Caxton’s Chaucer. British Library. <http://www.bl.uk/treasures/caxton/caxtonstexts.html>
- “The First Page Printed in England.” Treasures. National Archives. http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/museum/item.asp?item_id=9
- “William Caxton.” John H. Leinhard. *Engines of Our Ingenuity*. University of Houston’s College of Engineering. podcast and text. <http://www.uh.edu/engines/epi785.htm>

Caxton’s Chaucer

- Caxton’s *Canterbury Tales*: The British Library Copies. Barbara Bordalejo. *Canterbury Tales* Project. De Montfort University. <http://www.cts.dmu.ac.uk/Caxtons/>
- “Caxton’s Chaucer.” Treasures in Full. British Library. <http://www.bl.uk/treasures/caxton/homepage.html>

Video

- “Printing 101.” Steven Galbraith, Andrew W. Mellon Curator of Books. Folger Shakespeare Library. <http://youtu.be/lX6e8Q2nc5A>
- William Caxton and the Printing Press. Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College. <http://www.youtube.com/user/DrLoweMCC#p/u/18/1lMn5OGJrPU>

2.3 Medieval Drama

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

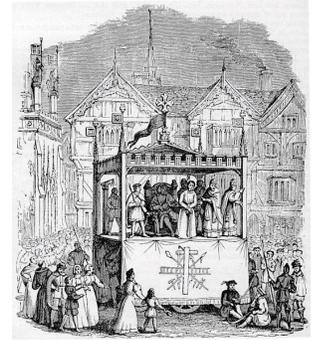
1. Define and explain the purpose of mystery plays and morality plays.
2. Identify an example of a mystery play and of a morality play.

The long-held scholarly account of medieval drama asserts that the religious drama of the Middle Ages grew from the Church's services, masses conducted in Latin before a crowd of peasants who undoubtedly did not understand what they were hearing. This idea certainly fits with the concept of church architecture in its cruciform shape to picture the cross, its stained glass windows to portray biblical stories, and other features designed to convey meaning to an illiterate population. Many scholars suggest that on special days in the liturgical year, the clergy would act out an event from the Bible, such as a nativity scene or a reenactment of the resurrection. Gradually, these productions became more complex and moved outside to the churchyard and then into the village commons.

Other scholars, however, suggest a different origin of medieval drama, claiming that it grew parallel to but outside of Church services which continued with their dramatic features as part of the mass.

Mystery Plays

Mystery plays depict events from the Bible. Often mystery plays were performed as **cycle plays**⁷, a sequence of plays portraying all the major events of the Bible, from the fall of Satan to the last judgment. Some play cycles were performed by guilds, each guild taking one event to dramatize. One of the most famous of the play cycles, the York mystery plays, is still performed in the English city of York. Records from the Chester cycle, also still performed, list which guilds were involved and which plays each guild presented. In a few places, such as York, the cycles were performed on pageant wagons that moved on a pre-determined route through the city. By staying in the same place, the audience could see each individual play as the wagon stopped and the actors performed before moving on to perform again at the next station. Four English cities were particularly noted for their cycles of mystery plays: Chester, York, Coventry, and Towneley (referred to as the Wakefield plays). Dennis G. Jerz, Associate Professor of English at Seton Hall University, created a simulation of the path of the pageant wagons through York, showing the route and the order of the plays.



A pageant wagon in Chester, England.

From *Book of Days* by Robert Chamber

The Second Shepherds' Play

One of the most well-known of the mystery plays is *The Second Shepherds' Play*, part of the Wakefield cycle. The play blends comic action, serious social commentary, and the religious story of the angelic announcement of Christ's birth to shepherds. At the beginning of the play, three shepherds complain of the injustices of their lives on the lowest rung of the medieval social ladder. When another peasant steals one of their lambs, the thief and his wife try to hide the animal by disguising it as their infant son; thus, an identification of a new-born son with the symbolic lamb foreshadows the biblical story. At the end of the play, the religious message becomes clear when angels announce the birth of Christ.

The text of *The Second Shepherds' Play* is available on the following sites:

- *Bibliotheca Anglica Middle English Literature*. Bibliotheca Augustana. University of Augsburg. http://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/anglica/Chronology/15thC/WakefieldMaster/wak_shep.html
- *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*. University of Michigan. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text->

7. a sequence of plays portraying all the major events of the Bible, from the fall of Satan to the last judgment

[idx?c=cme;idno=Towneley;rgn=div1;view=text;cc=cme;node=Towneley%3A13](http://people.ucalgary.ca/~scriptor/towneley/plays/second.html)

- “The Second Shepherds’ Play.” *The Electric Scriptorium*. University of Calgary, Canada. <http://people.ucalgary.ca/~scriptor/towneley/plays/second.html>
- “The Second Shepherds’ Play.” Ernest Rhys, ed. *Project Gutenberg*. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/19481/19481-h/19481-h.htm>

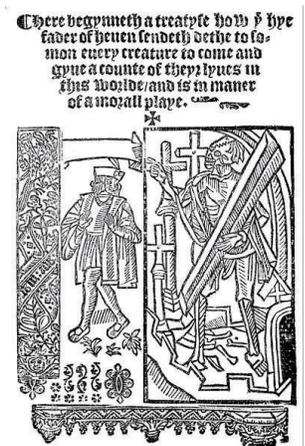
Morality Plays

Morality plays are intended to teach a moral lesson. These plays often employ **allegory**⁸, the use of characters or events in a literary work to represent abstract ideas or concepts. Morality plays, particularly those that are allegorical, depict representative characters in moral dilemmas with both the good and the evil parts of their character struggling for dominance. Similar to mystery plays, morality plays did not act out events from the Bible but instead portrayed characters much like the members of the audience who watched the play. From the characters’ difficulties, the audience could learn the moral lessons the Church wished to instill in its followers.

One of the most well-known of extant morality plays is *Everyman*. In this morality play, God sends Death to tell Everyman that his time on earth has come to an end.

The text of *Everyman* is available on the following sites:

- *Everyman*. *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*. University of Michigan. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text->



First page of medieval print version of *Everyman*.

[idx?c=cme;cc=cme;view=toc;idno=Everyman](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/19481/19481-h/19481-h.htm)

- *Everyman*. Ernest Rhys, ed. *Project Gutenberg*. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/19481/19481-h/19481-h.htm>
- *Everyman*. *Renaissance Editions*. University of Oregon. <http://www.luminarium.org/renaissance-editions/everyman.html>

8. the use of characters or events in a literary work to represent abstract ideas or concepts

- *Everyman*. W. Carew Hazlitt, ed. *Project Gutenberg*. <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/9050/pg9050.html>

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Medieval drama provided a method for the Church to teach a largely illiterate population.
- Two primary forms of medieval drama were the mystery play and the morality play.

Resources: Medieval Drama

History of Medieval Drama

- “The Dawn of the English Drama.” *Theater Database*. rpt. from Truman. J. Backus. *The Outlines of Literature: English and American*. New York: Sheldon and Company, 1897. 80–84. http://www.theatredatabase.com/medieval/dawn_of_the_english_drama.html
- “Drama of the Middle Ages.” *Theater Database*. http://www.theatredatabase.com/medieval/medieval_theatre_001.html
- “The Medieval Drama.” *Theater Database*. rpt. from Robert Huntington Fletcher. *A History of English Literature for Students*. Boston: Richard G. Badger, 1916. 82–91. http://www.theatredatabase.com/medieval/medieval_drama_001.html
- “The Medieval Drama.” *TheatreHistory.com*. rpt. from Brander Matthews. *The Development of the Drama*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1912. 107–146. <http://www.theatrehistory.com/medieval/medieval001.html>
- “Medieval Drama: Myths of Evolution, Pageant Wagons, and (lack of) Entertainment Value.” Carolyn Coulson-Grigsby. *The ORB: Online Reference Book for Medieval Studies*. http://www.the-orb.net/non_spec/missteps/ch5.html
- “Medieval Drama: An Introduction of Middle English Plays.” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*. rpt. from Robert Huntington Fletcher. *A History of English Literature*. Boston: Richard G. Badger, 1916. 85–91. <http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/medievaldrama.htm>
- “Middle English Plays.” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*. Links to an introduction of medieval drama in England, texts of plays, and scholarly information on medieval drama. <http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/plays.htm>

Mystery Plays

- “The Chester Guilds.” *Chester Mystery Plays*. History including a pop-up list of guilds responsible for specific plays in the Chester cycle. <http://www.chestermysteryplays.com/history/history/morehistory.html>
- “The Collective Story of the English Cycles.” *Theatre Database.com*. rpt. from Charles Mills Gayley. *Plays of Our Forefathers*. New York: Duffield & Co., 1907. 118–24. http://www.theatredatabase.com/medieval/collective_story_of_the_english_cycles.html
- “Medieval Church Plays.” *TheatreHistory.com*. rpt. from Alfred Bates, ed. *The Drama: Its History, Literature and Influence on Civilization*, Vol. 7. London: Historical Publishing Company, 1906. 2–3, 6–10. <http://www.theatrehistory.com/medieval/mysteries001.html>
- “Mysteries and Pageants in England.” *TheatreHistory.com*. rpt. from Martha Fletcher Bellinger. *A Short History of the Drama*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1927. 132–7. <http://www.theatrehistory.com/medieval/mysteries002.html>
- “Popular English Drama: The Mystery Plays.” L.D. Benson. *The Geoffrey Chaucer Page*. Harvard University. <http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/special/litsubs/drama/>
- *Simulation of York Corpus Christi Play*. Dennis G. Jerz. An interactive map that illustrates the progression of the plays through the city of York. <http://jerz.setonhill.edu/resources/PSim/applet/index.html>
- “What Are the York Mystery Plays?” *York Mystery Plays*. A brief history of the York plays and information about current productions. <http://www.yorkmysteryplays.org/default.asp?idno=4>
- “What’s the Mystery?: Medieval Miracle Plays.” Folger Shakespeare Library. <http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=2514>
- “The York Plays.” Chester N. Scoville and Kimberley M. Yates. *Records of Early English Drama (REED): Centre for Research in Early English Drama*. University of Toronto. <http://www.reed.utoronto.ca/yorkplays/york.html#pag>

Text of *The Second Shepherds’ Play*

- Bibliotheca Anglica Middle English Literature. Bibliotheca Augustana. University of Augsburg. http://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/anglica/Chronology/15thC/WakefieldMaster/wak_shep.html
- Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse. University of Michigan. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=cme;idno=Towneley;rgn=div1;view=text;cc=cme;node=Towneley%3A13>

- “The Second Shepherds’ Play.” The Electric Scriptorium. University of Calgary, Canada. <http://people.ucalgary.ca/~scriptor/towneley/plays/second.html>
- “The Second Shepherds’ Play.” Ernest Rhys, ed. *Project Gutenberg*. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/19481/19481-h/19481-h.htm>

Morality Plays

- “Allegory.” *The University of Victoria’s Hypertext Writer’s Guide*. Department of English. University of Victoria. <http://web.uvic.ca/wguide/Pages/LTAllegory.html>
- *Everyman*. Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*. Links to an introduction to *Everyman*, sites including the text of the play, and scholarly information about the play. <http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/everyman.htm>
- “Moralties, Interludes and Farces of the Middle Ages.” *Moonstruck Drama Bookstore*. rpt. from Martha Fletcher Bellinger. *A Short History of the Drama*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1927. 138–44. <http://www.imagi-nation.com/moonstruck/spectop006.html>
- “The Morality Plays.” Drama. *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. University of Victoria. <http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/drama/moralties.html>

Text of *Everyman*

- *Everyman*. *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*. University of Michigan. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=cme;cc=cme;view=toc;idno=Everyman>
- *Everyman*. Ernest Rhys, ed. *Project Gutenberg*. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/19481/19481-h/19481-h.htm>
- *Everyman*. *Renascence Editions*. University of Oregon. <http://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/everyman.html>
- *Everyman*. W. Carew Hazlitt, ed. *Project Gutenberg*. <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/9050/pg9050.html>

Video

- A Brief Introduction to the York Mystery Plays 2010. Information about the modern production of the York cycle. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nyFLOlEupM>
- “From an Ill-Spun Wool: The Second Shepherds’ Play and Early English Theater.” Folger Shakespeare Library. Podcast lectures about the

staging of the play and the origin of the play. <http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=2615>

- The History of the Theatre: Medieval Theatre. Richard Parker. Theatre Arts Instructor, Columbia Gorge Community College. Lecture on early drama from an online theater history class at Columbia Gorge Community College. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxdDoUoFQhM>
- “Noah’s Deluge, Part 2.” *Chester Mystery Plays*. A video of one of the 2009 Chester plays. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PxQ6sihBKmU&p=1D92A5E5AEF6B6A5&playnext=1&index=3>

2.4 Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

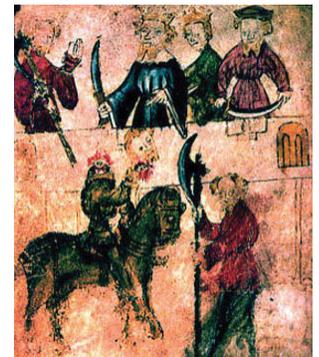
PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify literary techniques used in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.
2. Identify and account for the pagan and Christian elements in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.
3. Define medieval romance and apply the definition of the genre to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

The last 40 years of the Middle Ages, from 1360 to 1400, produced the three greatest works of medieval literature:

- Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*
- Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* by the **Pearl Poet**⁹, the unidentified author of *Pearl*, *Patience*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.



Beheading of the Green Knight.

Scholars believe the same unknown individual wrote *Pearl*, *Patience*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, thus referring to him as the Pearl poet.

From the manuscript Cotton Nero A.x, f. 94b

Text

Modern English Text

- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Jessie L. Weston. In *Parentheses*. Middle English Series. York University. Verse translation. <http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/>

9. the unidentified author of *Pearl*, *Patience*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Jessie L. Weston. University of Rochester. *The Camelot Project*. Prose translation. <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/sggk.htm>
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Paul Deane. *Forgotten Ground Regained: A Treasury of Alliterative and Accentual Poetry*. Verse translation. <http://alliteration.net/Pearl.htm>
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. University of Toronto Libraries. Middle English with prose translation. <http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/62.html>
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. W. A. Neilson. *In Parentheses*. Middle English Series. York University. Prose translation. http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/sggk_neilson.pdf
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Close Verse Translation*. Geoffrey Chaucer Page. Harvard University. <http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/ready.htm>
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Middle English Arthurian Romance Retold in Modern Prose*. Jessie L. Weston. *Google Books*. http://books.google.com/books?id=j8l7-HnlMfkC&printsec=frontcover&dq=sir+gawain+and+the+green+knight&source=bl&ots=C7I7E8GMVE&sig=cvMDxdXVp1PqOueBlJSEZPjXhpE&hl=en&ei=x2twTMmFKoL7lweM6smADg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=13&ved=0CFsQ6AEwDA#v=onepage&

Original Text

- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The Cotton Nero A.x. Project. Dr. Murray McGillivray, University of Calgary, Team Leader. University of Calgary. <http://people.ucalgary.ca/~scriptor/cotton/transnew.html>
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. University of Toronto Libraries. Middle English with prose translation. <http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/62.html>
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon. *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*. University of Michigan. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=cme;cc=cme;rgn=main;view=text;idno=Gawain>

Audio

- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. W. H. Neilson. *LibriVox*. Recording in modern English. http://www.archive.org/details/gawain_mj_librivox

Alliterative Revival

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is part of a movement known as the **alliterative revival**¹⁰, a resurgent use of the alliterative verse form of oral Old English poetry such as *Beowulf*. In the following lines, the first two lines of the poem, note the repetition of the *s* sounds in line 1 and in line 2 the *b* sounds:

Sidebar 2.1.

SiDen De sege and De assaut watz sesed at Troye,

De borz brittened and brent to brondez and askez

Sidebar 2.2.

Since the siege and the assault was ceased at Troy,

The burg [city] broken and burned to brands [cinders] and ashes

Bob and Wheel

As these first two lines of the poem illustrate, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is written in long alliterative lines, each stanza having a varying number of lines. These long alliterative lines are followed by the **bob and wheel**¹¹, a group of five short lines at the end of an alliterative verse rhyming ABABA.

For example, in stanza three, beginning with line 37, the story begins with a description of King Arthur and his court at Camelot in eighteen long alliterative lines followed by the five short lines of the bob and wheel:

10. a resurgent use of the alliterative verse form of oral Old English poetry such as *Beowulf*

11. a group of five short lines at the end of an alliterative verse rhyming ABABA

Sidebar 2.3.

on sille

þe hapnest under heuen

kyng hyzest mon of wylle

hit werere now gret nye to neuen

so hardy ahere on hille

Sidebar 2.4.

in the hall

the most fortunate ones under heaven

highest king of most will

it is now hard to name

so hardy a one on the hill

Notice the two-syllable line called the **bob** and the four lines called the *wheel*:

Sidebar 2.5.

on sille

Ʒe hapnest under heuen

kyng hyzest mon of wylle

hit werere now gret nye to neuen

so hardy ahere on hille

Also notice the ABABA rhyme scheme:

Sidebar 2.6.

<i>on sille</i>	A
<i>Ʒe hapnest under heuen</i>	B
<i>kyng hyzest mon of wylle</i>	A
<i>hit werere now gret nye to neuen</i>	B
<i>so hardy ahere on hille</i>	A

Green Man Myth

Also like Old English poetry, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, although composed well into the Middle Ages when the Church dominated society, combines hints of paganism in the figure of the Green Knight with obvious Christian elements in Sir Gawain. The Green Knight is a type of **Green Man**¹², a character in ancient fertility myths representing spring and the renewal of life, a parallel of Christian belief in resurrection. In some decapitation myths, a motif found in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the blood of the Green Man symbolizes the fertilizing of crops, thus insuring an adequate food supply. Surprisingly, Green Man symbols are common in Gothic

12. a character in ancient fertility myths representing spring and the renewal of life

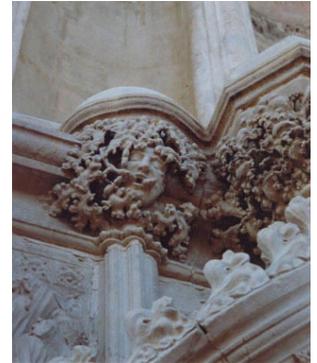
cathedrals, such as these in Ely Cathedral, in York Minster, and in the ruins of Fountains Abbey.

Chivalry and Courtly Love

In this story, the actions of Sir Gawain and the rest of King Arthur's knights are measured by chivalry, the code of conduct which bound and defined a knight's behavior. In fact, the ordeal that Sir Gawain endures is eventually revealed to be a test of the Court's dedication to their vows of knighthood.

The concept of medieval chivalry was famously described in 1891 by Leon Gautier, who listed ten rules of chivalry from the 11th and 12th centuries:

1. Thou shalt believe all that the Church teaches and shalt observe all its directions.
2. Thou shalt defend the Church.
3. Thou shalt respect all weaknesses and shalt constitute thyself the defender of them.
4. Thou shalt love the country in the which thou wast born.
5. Thou shalt not recoil before thine enemy.
6. Thou shalt make war against the infidel without cessation, and without mercy.
7. Thou shalt perform scrupulously thy feudal duties, if they be not contrary to the laws of God.
8. Thou shalt never lie, and shalt remain faithful to thy pledged word.
9. Thou shalt be generous, and give *largesse* to everyone.
10. Thou shalt be everywhere and always the champion of the Right and the Good against Injustice and Evil.



Green Man in Ely Cathedral.



Green Man in York Minster.



Green Man in the ruins of Fountains Abbey.

13. rules governing the behavior of knights and ladies in a ritualistic, formalized system of flirtation

In addition to the ideals of chivalry, the nobility often modeled their behavior, in literature at least, on the concept of **courtly love**¹³, rules governing the behavior of knights and ladies in a ritualistic, formalized system of flirtation. Courtly love is an integral part of the medieval romances sung by troubadours as entertainment in

the courts of France, stories of knights inspired to great deeds by their love for fair damsels, sometimes a damsel in distress rescued by the knight. The idea behind *amour courtois* is that a knight idealized a lady, a lady not his wife and often in fact married to another, and performed deeds of chivalry to honor her.

“Rules” governing the conduct of a knight involved in courtly love were outlined by Andreas Capellanus in his 12th-century book *The Art of Courtly Love*. *The ORB: Online Reference Book for Medieval Studies* lists Capellanus’ rules:

1. Marriage is no real excuse for not loving.
2. He who is not jealous cannot love.
3. No one can be bound by a double love.
4. It is well known that love is always increasing or decreasing.
5. That which a lover takes against his will of his beloved has no relish.
6. Boys do not love until they arrive at the age of maturity.
7. When one lover dies, a widowhood of two years is required of the survivor.
8. No one should be deprived of love without the very best of reasons.
9. No one can love unless he is impelled by the persuasion of love.
10. Love is always a stranger in the home of avarice.
11. It is not proper to love any woman whom one should be ashamed to seek to marry.
12. A true lover does not desire to embrace in love anyone except his beloved.
13. When made public love rarely endures.
14. The easy attainment of love makes it of little value; difficulty of attainment makes it prized.
15. Every lover regularly turns pale in the presence of his beloved.
16. When a lover suddenly catches sight of his beloved his heart palpitates.
17. A new love puts to flight an old one.
18. Good character alone makes any man worthy of love.
19. If love diminishes, it quickly fails and rarely revives.
20. A man in love is always apprehensive.
21. Real jealousy always increases the feeling of love.
22. Jealousy, and therefore love, are increased when one suspects his beloved.
23. He whom the thought of love vexes, eats and sleeps very little.
24. Every act of a lover ends with the thought of his beloved.
25. A true lover considers nothing good except what he thinks will please his beloved.
26. Love can deny nothing to love.
27. A lover can never have enough of the solaces of his beloved.
28. A slight presumption causes a lover to suspect his beloved.

29. A man who is vexed by too much passion usually does not love.
30. A true lover is constantly and without intermission possessed by the thought of his beloved.
31. Nothing forbids one woman being loved by two men or one man by two women.

Note that many of the stereotypical signs of being in love are listed, such as appearing pale (#15), being unable to eat or sleep (#23), and displaying jealousy (#21). Other familiar concepts such as playing hard to get (#14) and secret loves (#13) come from the rules of courtly love. The rules also make clear that engaging in the rituals of courtly love is only for the nobility (#11).

The concept of courtly love and the medieval romance arrived in Britain with Eleanor, Duchess of Aquitaine, a region in what is now France, and her marriage to the English King Henry II.

Images from the Middle Ages portray noble couples in typical aristocratic medieval activities: playing chess, hunting with falcons, dancing, and, in some images, obviously engaging in courtly flirtations. In one scene, for example, a lady appears to be presenting a token to a knight. In another, a knight appears to have stabbed himself, possibly in despair over his unrequited love. In another scene, knights fight in a tournament while adoring ladies watch from the stands.



*Temptation of Sir Gawain by
Lady Bertilak.*

Medieval Romance

*From the manuscript Cotton Nero
A. x, f. 129*

In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, both the code of chivalry and the rituals of courtly love govern Sir Gawain's behavior and decisions, as would be expected in a medieval romance, a narrative with the following characteristics:

- a plot about knights and their adventures
- improbable, often supernatural, elements
- conventions of courtly love
- standardized characters (the same types of characters appearing in many stories: the chivalrous knight; the beautiful lady; the mysterious old hag)
- repeated events, often repeated in numbers with religious significance such as three

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- One of the major writers of the Middle Ages is the unidentified Pearl Poet, and one of his major works is *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* exhibits literary techniques typical of the alliterative revival.
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* reveals vestiges of paganism in a society dominated by Christianity.
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* illustrates two concepts important to medieval nobility: chivalry and courtly love.
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* exemplifies the medieval romance genre.

EXERCISES

1. Review the rules of chivalry as reported by Leon Gautier. On which points does Sir Gawain fail to live up to his vows of knighthood?
2. How do the tenets of courtly love affect Sir Gawain's interaction with Lady Bertilak?
3. Do you detect any incongruities in the two systems of chivalry and courtly love?
4. Describe the two "games" in which Sir Gawain becomes involved. What was the purpose of these two challenges?
5. Identify examples of the characteristics of medieval romance apparent in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.

Resources: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

General Resources

- "Music, Literature and Illuminated Manuscripts." Learning: Medieval Realms. British Library. <http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/medieval/musicartlit/musicartliterature.html>
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*. Links to text, images, and scholarly information. <http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/gawainre.htm>

Modern English Text

- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Jessie L. Weston. In *Parentheses*. Middle English Series. York University. Verse translation. <http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/>
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Jessie L. Weston. University of Rochester. *The Camelot Project*. Prose translation. <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/ssggk.htm>
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Paul Deane. *Forgotten Ground Regained: A Treasury of Alliterative and Accentual Poetry*. Verse translation. <http://alliteration.net/Pearl.htm>
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. University of Toronto Libraries. Middle English with prose translation. <http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/62.html>
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. W. A. Neilson. In *Parentheses*. Middle English Series. York University. Prose translation. http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/ssggk_neilson.pdf

- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Close Verse Translation*. Geoffrey Chaucer Page. Harvard University. <http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/ready.htm>
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Middle English Arthurian Romance Retold in Modern Prose*. Jessie L. Weston. *Google Books*. http://books.google.com/books?id=j8l7-HnlMfkC&printsec=frontcover&dq=sir+gawain+and+the+green+knight&source=bl&ots=C7I7E8GMVE&sig=cvMDxdXVp1PqOueBLJSEZPjXhpE&hl=en&ei=x2twTMmFKoL7lweM6smADg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=13&ved=0CFsQ6AEwDA#v=onepage&

Original Text

- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The Cotton Nero A.x. Project. Dr. Murray McGillivray, University of Calgary, Team Leader. University of Calgary. <http://people.ucalgary.ca/~scriptor/cotton/transnew.html>
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon. *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*. University of Michigan. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=cme;cc=cme;rgn=main;view=text;idno=Gawain>
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. University of Toronto Libraries. Middle English with prose translation. <http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/62.html>

Audio

- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. W. H. Neilson. *LibriVox*. Recording in modern English. http://www.archive.org/details/gawain_mj_librivox

The Pearl Poet

- “The Pearl Poet.” Paul Deane. *Forgotten Ground Regained: A Treasury of Alliterative and Accentual Poetry*. <http://alliteration.net/Pearlman.html>
- “The Pearl- (Gawain-) Poet.” *Online Companion to Middle English Literature*. Chair of Medieval English Literature and Historical Linguistics of the Heinrich-Heine-University Duesseldorf. <http://user.phil-fak.uni-duesseldorf.de/~holteir/companion/Navigation/Authors/Pearl-Poet/pearl-poet.html>

Courtly Love

- Andreas Capellanus. *The Geoffrey Chaucer Page*. Harvard University. <http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/special/authors/andreas/index.html>
- Andreas Capellanus: The Art of Courtly Love, (btw. 1174–1186). Paul Halsall. *Internet Medieval Sourcebook*. The ORB: Online Reference Book for Medieval Studies. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/capellanus.asp>
- “Chivalry and Courtly Love.” David L. Simpson. DePaul University. <http://condor.depaul.edu/dsimpson/tlove/courtlylove.html>
- “‘Courtly Love’ Images.” Dr. Debora B. Schwartz. English Department, College of Liberal Arts. California Polytechnic State University. <http://cla.calpoly.edu/~dschwartz/engl513/courtly/images.htm>

2.5 Geoffrey Chaucer (1343–1400)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explain the literary techniques Chaucer uses that distinguish *Canterbury Tales* from collections of unrelated stories.
2. List and define types of tales used in *Canterbury Tales*.
3. Categorize individual tales.
4. Identify the social strata to which each pilgrim belongs and correlate the description of each character with the tale he/she tells.

“He [Chaucer] must have been a man of a most wonderful comprehensive nature, because, as has been truly observed of him, he has taken into the compass of his *Canterbury Tales* the various manners and humours (as we now call them) of the whole English nation in his age ... ‘tis sufficient to say, according to the old proverb, that here is God’s plenty.”

- John Dryden

With this quotation, John Dryden, 17th-century poet, essayist, and literary critic, encapsulates what many consider to be one of the prominent features of Chaucer’s work: *The Canterbury Tales* pictures the medieval world with a richness of description that makes it vibrant and alive. “The General Prologue” introduces individuals from every level of society—peasant, nobleman, clergy, and the new middle class—with vividness and detail.



Biography

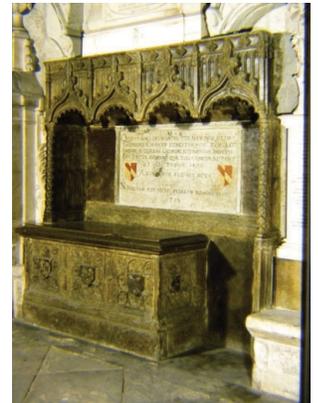
Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343–1400) was born into an apparently prosperous merchant family. As a boy he served as a page to a noble family and throughout his life worked in increasingly more prominent government positions. Chaucer's wife Phillipa was the sister of John of Gaunt's third wife Katherine, who had been a governess to the children of John and his wife Blanche. John of Gaunt, a wealthy and politically powerful younger son of King Edward III, became Chaucer's patron. Whether through this family connection or on his own merit, Chaucer maintained a comfortable life through his position in the court. Chaucer's poem *The Book of the Duchess* was written to commemorate the death of John of Gaunt's wife Blanche.

When Chaucer died in 1400, he was buried in Westminster Abbey, an indication of his high social status. His tomb in the south transept of Westminster Abbey began the tradition of Poet's Corner.

Chaucer's Pilgrims by late 18th-century poet and artist William Blake.



Anonymous portrait of Chaucer.



Chaucer's tomb in Westminster Abbey.

Text

Text in Modern English Translation

- The Canterbury Tales. Michael Murphy. Brooklyn College, City University of New York. “The General Prologue” and selected tales in Middle English with “reader-friendly” prose translations. <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/webcore/murphy/canterbury/canterbury.htm>
- “The Canterbury Tales and Other Works.” *Librarius*. side-by-side translations. <http://www.librarius.com/>
- “Canterbury Tales: Prologue [Parallel Texts].” *Internet Medieval Sourcebook*. Paul Halsall. Fordham University. parallel edition of “The General Prologue.” <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/CT-prolog-para.html>
- “ELF Presents The Canterbury Tales.” The Electronic Literature Foundation. http://www.canterburytales.org/canterbury_tales.html
- “Interlinear Translations of Some of The Canterbury Tales.” *Geoffrey Chaucer Page*. L.D. Benson. Harvard University. interlinear translations. <http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/tr-index.htm>



Westminster Abbey.

Text in Middle English

- “Chaucer Texts.” *eChaucer: Chaucer in the Twenty-First Century*. Gerard NeCastro. University of Maine at Machias. Middle English text and prose translations. <http://www.umm.maine.edu/faculty/necastro/chaucer/texts/>
- The Canterbury Tales, and Other Poems. Project Gutenberg. http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1448814&pageno=26
- Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse. University of Michigan Library Digital Collections. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=cme;idno=CT>
- “Selected Poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer.” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English. University of Toronto. <http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poet/61.html>

Audio

- “The Canterbury Tales.” Ed. D. Laing Purves (1838–1873). *Librivox*. complete audio files. <http://librivox.org/the-canterbury-tales-by-geoffrey-chaucer/>
- “The Canterbury Tales Audio Links.” *Librarius*. selected audio files. <http://www.librarius.com/cantlink/audiofs.htm>
- “Chaucer Canterbury Tales.” *Luminarium*. Annina Jokinen. selected audio files. <http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/canterbury.htm>
- The Chaucer Metapage Audio Files. Virginia Military Institute. Audio files of “The General Prologue,” “The Knight’s Tale,” “The Miller’s Tale,” “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” “The Envoy to the Clerk’s Tale,” “The Pardoner’s Tale,” and “The Nun’s Priest Tale.” <http://www.vmi.edu/fswebs.aspx?tid=34099&id=34249>

Types of Tales

Chaucer uses several types of tales typical in the Middle Ages.

- medieval romance—a narrative with the following characteristics:
 - a plot about knights and their adventures
 - improbable, often supernatural elements
 - inclusion of the conventions of courtly love
 - standardized characters (the same types of characters appearing in many stories: the chivalrous knight; the beautiful lady; the mysterious old hag)
 - repeated events, often repeated in numbers with religious significance such as three
 - examples of medieval romances in *The Canterbury Tales*: “The Knight’s Tale,” “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” (an Arthurian romance)
 - **fabliau**¹⁴—a humorous, bawdy tale, often including satire of foolish characters
 - examples of fabliaux in *The Canterbury Tales*: “The Miller’s Tale,” “The Reeve’s Tale,” “The Summoner’s Tale”
 - **exemplum**¹⁵—a moral tale, often used to illustrate a point in a sermon
 - examples of exempla in *The Canterbury Tales*: “The Clerk’s Tale,” “The Pardoner’s Tale,” “The Monk’s Tale”
 - **saint’s legend**¹⁶—a story depicting the life and martyr’s death of a saint
 - examples of saints’ legends in *The Canterbury Tales*: “The Prioress’s Tale,” “The Second Nun’s Tale”

14. a humorous, bawdy tale, often including satire of foolish characters

15. a moral tale, often used to illustrate a point in a sermon

16. a story depicting the life and martyr’s death of a saint

- **beast epic**¹⁷—a fable, often allegorical, that features animal characters
- example of a beast epic in *The Canterbury Tales*: “The Nun’s Priest’s Tale”

Many of the tales Chaucer uses in *The Canterbury Tales* are not his original stories. Many come from other sources or are traditional stories. Chaucer’s originality is in his artful use of the material to create a unified work that portrays a vast array of medieval characters.

“The General Prologue”

Although collections of stories were not uncommon in the Middle Ages, Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* are unique because they are more than a collection of unrelated tales; Chaucer produces a unified work through two techniques. First, he uses a **framework**¹⁸, a narrative that contains another narrative: in *Canterbury Tales*, the fiction of the pilgrims on a pilgrimage that provides the structure and the rationale for the various tales. Thus the various stories form a whole fiction. Second, Chaucer provides **links**¹⁹, conversations among the various pilgrims between the stories to tie the stories together.

The first component of the framework is “The General Prologue” which introduces characters who tell the stories and who continue to function as characters in the links between the tales. In the first few lines Chaucer sets the stage, explaining the setting and the situation:

17. a fable, often allegorical, that features animal characters

18. a narrative that contains another narrative: in *Canterbury Tales*, the fiction of the pilgrims on a pilgrimage that provides the structure and the rationale for the various tales

19. conversations among the various pilgrims between the stories to tie the stories together

Sidebar 2.7.

Whan that Aprille, with hise shoures soote,
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed euery veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth
Inspired hath in euery holt and heath
The tendre croppes and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours yronne,
And smale foweles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open eye,
So priketh hem nature in hir corages;
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
And Palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
To ferne halwes kowthe in sondry londes
And specially, from euery shires ende
Of Engelond, to Caunturbury they wende,

The hooly blisful martir for to seke,

That hem hath holpen, whan þat they were secke.

from Frederick J. Furnivall's edition of the Ellesmere Manuscript, 1868

These lines tell us that the pilgrims are on their way to Canterbury Cathedral. The following presentation provides pictures of and information about Canterbury Cathedral.

PowerPoint 2.1.

Follow-along file: PowerPoint title and URL to come.

Video Clip 2

Thomas Becket and the reason Chaucer's pilgrims are traveling to Canterbury Cathedral.

[\(click to see video\)](#)



Canterbury Cathedral.

The following study guide to “The General Prologue” will help identify key features of each of the pilgrims Chaucer introduces in the prologue.

PowerPoint 2.2.

Follow-along file: PowerPoint title and URL to come.

Selected Individual Tales

“The Miller’s Tale”

An interlinear translation by Larry D. Benson is available on the *Harvard Geoffrey Chaucer* website.

“The Miller’s Tale” is an example of a fabliau. Fabliaux often involve students from the two great British medieval universities, Oxford and Cambridge, such as Nicholas, the Oxford student in “The Miller’s Tale.” (Only males attended medieval universities.) Many fabliaux probably were composed by students. Modern students may be surprised to learn that people of the Middle Ages thought college students might be involved in pursuing women, drinking, and playing pranks, or in making up stories that involved these activities. Or maybe modern college students would think that students haven’t changed much throughout the ages!



Eastbridge “Hospital” (a place of hospitality) in Canterbury where pilgrims to Canterbury Cathedral found food and shelter, built in the late 12th century.

In “The Miller’s Tale” Chaucer brings together two plots from traditional stories:

- a student creates an opportunity to sleep with a woman by convincing her husband that Noah’s flood is about to be repeated
- a lover who is tricked into a humiliating misdirected kiss takes vengeance on his tormentor

These are traditional plots; Chaucer may or may not have been the first to write them. However, their union, culminating in Nicholas’s cry “Water,” is brilliantly handled by Chaucer.

“The Wife of Bath’s Tale”

The text of “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” is available on the *Litrix Reading Room* website.

“The Wife of Bath’s Tale” is a medieval romance, specifically an Arthurian romance. Not a major character in the tale, King Arthur appears in the story to pass judgment on the guilty knight, only to have his Queen Guinevere ask him to change his ruling. Thus, King Arthur’s giving in to the Queen’s desire is the first intimation of the lesson the errant knight must learn.

The Wife of Bath’s character and her tale have been seen as a reaction to the anti-feminism cultivated by the medieval church. Note the characters who interrupt her prologue and tale. Also often referred to as “the first feminist,” the Wife of Bath, as

an actual medieval woman, would have had no concept of modern feminist viewpoints.

“The Clerk’s Tale”

An interlinear translation by Larry D. Benson is available on the *Harvard Geoffrey Chaucer* website.

Chaucer’s Clerk is also an Oxford student, but one much different from the gallant rascal Nicholas in the Miller’s story. A charity student, the Clerk has taken lower orders in the Church and studies philosophy. Serious about his studies, the Clerk has neither time for pranks nor money for drink; Chaucer in “The General Prologue” tells us that he spends his money on books. Another significant description of the Clerk is Chaucer’s assertion: “Gladly would he learn and gladly teach.”

“The Clerk’s Tale” with its apparent admonition about wives being submissive to their husbands is often contrasted with “The Wife of Bath’s Tale.” However, the fifth and sixth stanzas from the end of the tale reveal the Clerk’s real point in telling this story. Even the Clerk himself says that it would be unthinkable for wives to react as Griselda did, and he then establishes his story as an exemplum by explaining its religious lesson.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* provides a vivid description of life in the Middle Ages by picturing in detail characters from every level of medieval society.
- Chaucer moves beyond the traditional collection of unrelated tales by making *Canterbury Tales* a unified whole through the use of literary techniques such as the framework of the pilgrimage, links, and the matching of a tale’s content to the personality of the pilgrim who tells it.
- Various types of tales such as medieval romance, fabliau, exemplum, saint’s legend, and beast epic make up *Canterbury Tales*.

EXERCISES

1. Although collections of stories were not uncommon in the Middle Ages, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* are unique because they are more than a collection of unrelated tales; Chaucer produces a unified work through two techniques. First, he uses the framework of the pilgrimage to make the various stories part of a whole fiction. Part of that framework consists of conversations among the various characters between the stories to help tie the stories together. These bits of conversation which tie the stories together are called links. Locate examples of links. Explain the content of each link and evaluate the effectiveness of the link in relating the characters and the stories to each other.
2. Another technique Chaucer used to make *Canterbury Tales* a unified work is the careful choosing of a story that is appropriate for the character who tells it. Chaucer introduces each character in the "General Prologue," and then he frequently adds information in the links or in the character's prologue to his/her story that helps complete the portrait of that person. The story told by the Miller, for example, is just the type of story we expect him to tell because of what we know about his personality. Analyze the elements that make "The Miller's Tale," "The Wife of Bath's Tale," and "The Clerk's Tale" appropriate for those characters.
3. After hearing the recordings and seeing the visual examples of the Old English of *Beowulf* in [Chapter 1 "Old English Literature"](#) and the Middle English of Chaucer, compare and contrast these two precursors of the modern English language.
4. Why did Chaucer choose Canterbury Cathedral as the destination for his pilgrims?

Resources: Geoffrey Chaucer (1343–1400)

General Resources

- Chaucer *Canterbury Tales*. Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*. Links to the text, images, audio, and scholarly sources.
<http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/canterbury.htm>
- Chaucer MetaPage. International Congress of Medieval Studies and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Links to the text, images, audio, scholarly sources, and other Chaucer websites.
<http://englishcomplit.unc.edu/chaucer/index.html>
- Geoffrey Chaucer Page. Harvard University. Biographical information, background information, interlinear translations, glossary.
<http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/>

- “Pardoners and Indulgences.” *Treasures in Full: Caxton’s Chaucer*. British Library. Image of the Pardoner and information on medieval indulgences. <http://www.bl.uk/treasures/caxton/pardoners.html>

Biography

- “Chaucer.” *Bartleby.com*. rpt. from *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature* in 18 Volumes (1907–21). Volume II. The End of the Middle Ages. <http://www.bartleby.com/212/0701.html>
- “Chaucer Chronology.” *eChaucer: Chaucer in the Twenty-First Century*. Gerard NeCastro. University of Maine at Machias. <http://www.umm.maine.edu/faculty/necastro/chaucer/chronology/>
- “Geoffrey Chaucer (c1343–1400).” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*. rpt. from A. W. Pollard. “Geoffrey Chaucer.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th Ed., Vol. VI. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910. 17–22. <http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/chaucerbio.htm>
- “The Life of Chaucer.” *Geoffrey Chaucer Page*. Harvard University. http://courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/special/varia/life_of_Ch/ch-life.html/

Text in Modern English Translation

- The Canterbury Tales. Michael Murphy. Brooklyn College, City University of New York. “The General Prologue” and selected tales in Middle English with “reader-friendly” prose translations. <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/webcore/murphy/canterbury/canterbury.htm>
- “The Canterbury Tales and Other Works.” *Librarius*. side-by-side translations. <http://www.librarius.com/>
- “Canterbury Tales: Prologue [Parallel Texts].” *Internet Medieval Sourcebook*. Paul Halsall. Fordham University. parallel edition of “The General Prologue.” <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/CT-prolog-para.html>
- “ELF Presents The Canterbury Tales.” The Electronic Literature Foundation. http://www.canterburytales.org/canterbury_tales.html
- “Interlinear Translations of Some of The Canterbury Tales.” *Geoffrey Chaucer Page*. L.D. Benson. Harvard University. interlinear translations. <http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/tr-index.htm>

Text in Middle English

- “Chaucer Texts.” *eChaucer: Chaucer in the Twenty-First Century*. Gerard NeCastro. University of Maine at Machias. Middle English text and

prose translations. <http://www.umm.maine.edu/faculty/necastro/chaucer/texts/>

- The Canterbury Tales, and Other Poems. Project Gutenberg. http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1448814&pageno=26
- Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse. University of Michigan Library Digital Collections. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=cme;idno=CT>
- “Selected Poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer.” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English. University of Toronto. <http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poet/61.html>

Audio

- “The Canterbury Tales.” Ed. D. Laing Purves (1838–1873). *Librivox*. complete audio files. <http://librivox.org/the-canterbury-tales-by-geoffrey-chaucer/>
- “The Canterbury Tales Audio Links.” *Librarius*. selected audio files. <http://www.librarius.com/cantlink/audios.htm>
- “Chaucer Canterbury Tales.” *Luminarium*. Anniina Jokinen. selected audio files. <http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/canterbury.htm>
- The Chaucer Metapage Audio Files. Virginia Military Institute. Audio files of “The General Prologue,” “The Knight’s Tale,” “The Miller’s Tale,” “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” “The Envoy to the Clerk’s Tale,” “The Pardoner’s Tale,” and “The Nun’s Priest Tale.” <http://www.vmi.edu/fswebs.aspx?tid=34099&id=34249>

Video

- “Geoffrey Chaucer and the Canterbury Tales.” Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College. <http://www.youtube.com/user/DrLoweMCC#p/u/24/2KVcMjtgb8Q>

Caxton’s Chaucer

- “Caxton’s Chaucer.” British Library. Online Gallery. Information on and images of Caxton, Caxton’s printing of Chaucer, digital images of Caxton’s editions of Canterbury Tales, links to sources, glossary. <http://www.bl.uk/treasures/caxton/homepage.html>
- “Image from William Caxton’s Chaucer.” British Library. Online Gallery. Image of knight and page of print from Caxton’s Chaucer. <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/landprint/chaucer/large17666.html>

Manuscripts and Images

- Corpus Christi College. Oxford University. Early 15th-century handwritten manuscript of *Canterbury Tales*, including unfinished illustrations and notes from the scribe. <http://image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=corpus&manuscript=ms198>
- Digital Scriptorium. Huntington Catalog Database. University of California, Berkeley. Images of manuscripts, including the Ellesmere manuscript. http://dpg.lib.berkeley.edu/webdb/dsheh/heh_brf?Description=&CallNumber=EL+26+C+9
- “Geoffrey Chaucer The Canterbury Tales The Classic Text: Traditions and Interpretations.” University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. Information and images of texts and illustrations, including the Ellesmere manuscript and Caxton’s text. <http://www4.uwm.edu/libraries/special/exhibits/clastext/clspg073.cfm>
- “The World of Chaucer: Medieval Books and Manuscripts.” University of Glasgow exhibit. <http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/exhibns/chaucer/index.html>

Concordance

- Chaucer Concordance. *eChaucer: Chaucer in the Twenty-First Century*. Gerard NeCastro. University of Maine at Machias. <http://www.umm.maine.edu/faculty/necastro/chaucer/concordance/>

Middle English Dictionary/Glossary

- Chaucer Glossary. *eChaucer: Chaucer in the Twenty-First Century*. Gerard NeCastro. University of Maine at Machias. <http://www.umm.maine.edu/faculty/necastro/chaucer/glossary/>
- Middle English Dictionary. University of Michigan. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>

2.6 Julian of Norwich (1342–1416)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define the term *showing* as used in the Middle Ages and explain why it is an appropriate title for the work of Julian of Norwich.
2. Account for the Lady Julian's writing skill in an age in which illiteracy, particularly among women, was common.

Biography

Little is known of the woman now called Julian of Norwich before she became an **anchoress**²⁰, a woman called to a contemplative life closed away from other people. As part of her renunciation of her worldly life, she gave up her birth name and adopted the name Julian from the Church of St. Julian in Norwich, England. Julian of Norwich lived in a small room, typical of anchorites and anchoresses, called a cell attached to the church. Unlike many anchoresses, who often had not taken religious orders, Julian may have been a Benedictine nun before beginning her reclusive life.

An anchoress's cell typically had a window that opened into the church proper, allowing the recluse to listen to and participate in worship services. Another window would open into a small room where a servant, who took care of her worldly needs, lived, and a third window opened to the outside to allow the anchoress to converse with people who sought her spiritual guidance.



St. Julian's Church, Norwich.

20. a woman called to a contemplative life closed away from other people

According to her own account, when Julian was thirty years old, she suffered a nearly fatal illness. As she recovered she experienced a series of visions. Deciding to become an anchoress, over the next several years she wrote two versions of her *Showings of Love*.



Lady Julian's cell and the window opening into the church.

Video Clip 3

Julian of Norwich

[\(click to see video\)](#)

Text

“Revelations of Divine Love.” Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Calvin College. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/julian/revelations.html>

Showings of Love (also known as Revelations of Divine Love)

Although her work bears various titles, Julian chose the word **showing**²¹, a word used in the Middle Ages to describe a manifestation, a revelation, a dream, or a vision, usually of a religious nature. Her work encompasses her descriptions and explanations of the spiritual insight gained through a series of spiritual visions and visitations she experienced during her severe illness.

In contrast to the teachings of the medieval church and to commonly held beliefs of the Middle Ages, Julian's writings emphasize the love and compassion of Christ; unlike most people of that era, Julian did not consider illness or suffering a punishment from God but a means of becoming close to God. Rather than emphasizing the fear of damnation in the next world, Julian hoped that all people would be saved from Hell and would receive the blessing of eternal life with God. Also, Julian metaphorically referred to God as both Father and Mother, in opposition to the medieval Church's paternalistic view of God as Father.

In one of her more well-known passages, Julian describes holding a hazelnut in the palm of her hand and realizing three things from the experience: 1. that God made it; 2. that God loves it; 3. that God keeps it. Perhaps the most recognized quotation from her work is her saying, “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.”

21. a word used in the Middle Ages to describe a manifestation, a revelation, a dream, or a vision, usually of a religious nature

The British Library provides a digitized view of a medieval manuscript which includes Julian's work.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Little is known about Julian of Norwich before she became an anchoress and adopted the name Julian.
- Her major work, *Showings of Love*, is an explanation of the visions she had during a serious illness.
- Some of Julian's theology conflicts with the teachings of the medieval Church.

EXERCISES

1. Find the medieval definition of showing from the Oxford English Dictionary, and apply the definition to Julian's works.
2. What, according to her comments, is the significance of Julian's observations about the hazelnut? What other images or metaphors does Julian of Norwich use to express her spiritual insights?
3. What aspects of Julian's life and writings might contradict the traditional teachings of the medieval Church? Speculate on why the Church did not attempt to suppress her writing or to reprimand her for ideas that, from other individuals, might be considered heretical, such as the idea of God as a Mother figure.

Resources: Julian of Norwich

General Resources

- Julian of Norwich 1342-c.1416. Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*. Biographical information, text of *Revelations*, and scholarly articles. <http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/julian.htm>
- "Women." Learning: Medieval Realms. British Library. <http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/medieval/women2/medievalwomen.html>

Text

- "Revelations of Divine Love." Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Calvin College. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/julian/revelations.html>

Biography

- “The Beginning of Julian’s Spiritual Vision, in a Collection of Theological Works, including Julian of Norwich.” Illuminated Manuscripts. Online Gallery. British Library. <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/illmanus/other/011add000037790u00097v00.html>
- “Julian of Norwich.” Karen Rae Keck. The Ecole Glossary. *The Ecole Initiative*. University of Evansville. Brief biographical information. <http://ecole.evansville.edu/glossary/juliann.html>
- “The Lady Julian and Her Cell.” and “Julian’s Visions.” *Julian of Norwich*. St. Julian’s Church and Shrine. Information about Julian from the church to which her cell was attached. <http://www.julianofnorwich.org/julian.shtml>, <http://www.julianofnorwich.org/visions.shtml>

Manuscript

- “The Beginning of Julian’s Spiritual Vision, in a Collection of Theological Works, including Julian of Norwich.” Illuminated Manuscripts. Online Gallery. British Library. <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/illmanus/other/011add000037790u00097v00.html>
- “The Westminster Cathedral/Abbey Manuscript of Julian of Norwich’s *Showing of Love*.” Julia Bolton Holloway. *Julian of Norwich, Her Showing of Love and Its Contexts*. Information on and images of the manuscript. <http://www.umilta.net/westmins.html>

Chapter 3

The Sixteenth Century

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

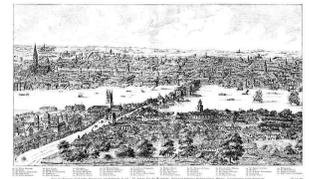
3.1 The Sixteenth Century

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize the atmosphere of energy and turbulence in the political and religious realms that influenced 16th-century literature, including the ideas of the Renaissance and the Reformation.
2. Define the types of literature typical of the 16th century including the sonnet, pastoral poetry, and drama.
3. Understand the development of purpose-built theaters and how this development influenced 16th-century drama.

Brash, exciting, bustling, expanding, prosperous, dangerous, precarious—all these words describe sixteenth-century England. As a nation, England was sure of herself and her dominance of the seas and the exploration for which names such as Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Francis Drake became famous. London, which began to thrive with the emerging middle class during the Middle Ages, grew overcrowded and, like the River Thames that flowed through her center, congested with all the flotsam and jetsam of a thriving metropolis. The city incorporated great wealth and beauty next to squalor and wretched poverty. Business and commerce flourished on the river and in the city, but so did crime and disease.



Wyngaerde's "Panorama of London in 1543."

The Tudor Court

The Tudor court echoed all the qualities of the city of London, including the danger and intrigue.

Throughout the last fifty years of the Middle Ages, England was embroiled in civil strife between two branches of the royal Plantagenet family, the Lancasters and the Yorks. Because the emblem of the Lancasters was the red rose and the emblem of the Yorks was the white rose, these battles were referred to as the Wars of the Roses. When Henry Tudor (of the house of Lancaster) defeated Richard III (of the House of York) in 1485, he established the Tudor rulers that provided one of the most powerful yet turbulent dynasties to reign in Britain.



The Tudor Rose—the emblem of the Tudor rulers, symbolizing the unification of the white rose of the Yorks and the red rose of the Lancasters.

Henry VII

Henry Tudor, King Henry VII, married Elizabeth of York, daughter of Yorkist King Edward IV. Their marriage united the two warring factions of the royal family, bringing an end to the Wars of the Roses. Their son Henry became one of England’s most notorious monarchs, King Henry VIII.

Henry VIII

“The Rose both White and Red

In one Rose now doth grow”

- John Skelton

King Henry VIII succeeded to the throne in 1509 ending the Wars of the Roses that had torn England asunder for years, bringing unity to a war-weary country. Unfortunately, Henry VIII soon had the country embroiled in new struggles. Large in physical stature and in character, Henry VIII ruled with an iron hand. He is perhaps remembered most for his six wives. Henry was a second born son; his older brother and the heir apparent Arthur died shortly after he was married to Catherine of Aragon to establish an alliance with Spain. Henry VIII married his brother’s widow, again for dynastic reasons. Years passed, however, without a male heir from their union. Catherine did give birth to a daughter Mary, but Henry felt the need for a male heir to ensure the continuance of the Tudor line.

Henry's desire to divorce Catherine led to the **Reformation**¹, the movement to reform the Roman Catholic Church which led to the establishment of Protestant denominations, in England. Although the Reformation, led by Martin Luther, was well under way on the European continent, Henry VIII's break from the Roman Catholic Church was to suit his own purposes, not a result of his religious convictions. When the Roman Catholic Church refused to grant Henry's divorce from Catherine of Aragon, Henry declared himself the head of the Church in England, essentially breaking away from the Roman Church and the Pope's authority and establishing what is now the Anglican Church, the Church of England. With the Act of Supremacy in 1534, Henry VIII became the head of both Church and State. The Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer, appointed by Henry, nullified Henry's marriage to Catherine, allowing him to marry Anne Boleyn, who gave birth to a daughter Elizabeth. When Anne, too, failed to provide a male heir, Henry had her beheaded based on charges of adultery and incest, accusations many historians believe to be false. He soon married Jane Seymour, who finally gave Henry his long-awaited male heir, Edward.



Edward VI

Upon Henry VIII's death in 1547, his nine-year-old son became King Edward VI. Because of his age and frail health, a bevy of relatives and advisors attempted to control the throne through the young king. He died at age 15, after attempting to exclude his sisters from ascending to the throne.

Mary I

Henry VIII's older daughter Mary I was, like her mother Catherine of Aragon, devoutly Roman Catholic. Her accession to the throne brought about a return to the Roman Catholic Church as the official church in England. Just as her father Henry VIII had persecuted those who refused to renounce their Catholic faith and acknowledge him rather than the Pope as head of the Church, Mary I persecuted those who resisted the return to the Roman Catholic faith. Possibly as many as three hundred people were burned at the stake as heretics under her rule, earning her the nickname Bloody Mary. One of those burned at the stake was Archbishop Cranmer who had granted her father's divorce from her mother.

1. the movement to reform the Roman Catholic Church which led to the establishment of Protestant denominations

Elizabeth I

When Mary I died in 1558, the last surviving child of Henry VIII became Queen Elizabeth I and led England into a time of prosperity, predominance in world power, and relative religious peace at home. Although she restored the Protestant Church of England her father had established, she was more tolerant in her religious governing than either her father or her sister Bloody Mary had been. The defeat of the Spanish Armada established England as a dominant naval power, and English explorers established colonies that set the stage for the British Empire of the 19th century. Her reign is considered a Golden Age for England, an era often referred to as the Elizabethan Age.



This cross in Broad Street in the city of Oxford marks the place where three bishops, Ridley, Latimer, and Cranmer, were burned at the stake on the orders of Mary I.

The English Renaissance

The word **renaissance**² literally means “re-birth” and is generally used to refer to a renewed interest in classical learning and a desire to seek new knowledge. Beginning in Italy in the early 14th century, the Renaissance (a term not used until modern times) spread to Britain in the 16th century. The English Renaissance provided fertile ground for literature. Renaissance ideas included an emphasis on education that led to increased literacy and an emphasis on form and order that affected the types of literature produced in 16th-century Britain.



Literature

The architectural style of Elizabethan stately homes reveals a penchant for symmetry and order. To honor Henry VIII or Elizabeth I, great houses were sometimes built in the shape of the letters H or E. The knot garden and topiary also became popular ornamentation on great estates.

2. literally means “re-birth”;
generally used to refer to a
renewed interest in classical
learning and a desire to seek
new knowledge

In [Figure 3.1](#), the contemporary garden at Broughton Castle, is a knot garden, a garden with clearly defined lines and boundaries forming geometric shapes.

Figure 3.1



In [Figure 3.2](#), this contemporary garden is at Hampton Court Palace, originally the home of Henry VIII's advisor Cardinal Wolsey, and then, at Henry's suggestion, the home of the King and his second queen, Anne Boleyn. Note the flowers planted in colorful but orderly straight rows and the bushes trimmed to geometrical shapes.

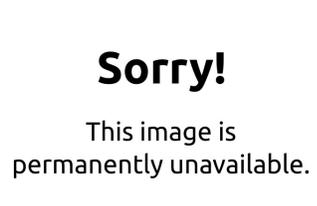
Figure 3.2



As seen in [Figure 3.3](#), at Hampton Court Palace, even the trees were trimmed into artificial shapes.

This preference for symmetry and order is seen not only in Elizabethan houses and gardens, but also in the literature of the 16th century. Reflecting a belief that art was nature improved by human enhancement, the literature of the period often used structured forms and styles such as the sonnet and the [Spenserian stanza](#).

Figure 3.3



The Sonnet

In an age which valued highly structured poetry, the **sonnet**³, a poem of 14 lines and a set rhyme scheme, was one of the most popular forms. The [Sonnet Central Time Line](#) illustrates the concentration of sonnets written during the 16th and early 17th century, as well as a later renewed interest in sonnets during the 19th century.

PowerPoint 3.1.

Follow-along file: PowerPoint title and URL to come.

3. a poem of 14 lines and a set rhyme scheme

The Pastoral Mode

In the Elizabethan courtier's world of political maneuvering for status with the monarch, intrigue and betrayal by others also striving for power, it's not surprising that the classical idea of *otium*, a peaceful leisure filled with art and nature, appealed to courtier/writers.

Derived from the Latin root word *pastor*, meaning shepherd, the **pastoral mode**⁴ is a type of literature that portrays shepherds in an idealized rural setting, engaging in contests of singing or poetry, flirting with country maidens, watching their flocks in a peaceful and beautiful natural world. Although this idealized, fairy-tale world bore little resemblance to the lives of peasants who actually attempted to make a living raising sheep, the pastoral mode charmed the courtier whose life and fortune depended not just on his skills in battle but also on the vagaries of the monarch.

Drama

In 1576, James Burbage built the first theater in London, aptly named The Theatre. Before dedicated theaters were built, plays were often performed in the yards of coaching inns, open cobblestone areas where coaches stopped for passengers to eat, rest, or stay overnight at the inn. Many inns had galleries, covered walkways or balconies on the second floor leading to rooms that could be rented. When a play was performed, the audience could stand in the yard or pay extra to stand on one of the galleries for a better view. This basic layout was followed in the design of Elizabethan theatres.

Video Clip 1

The George Inn London

[\(click to see video\)](#)

4. a type of literature that portrays shepherds in an idealized rural setting, engaging in contests of singing or poetry, flirting with country maidens, watching their flocks in a peaceful and beautiful natural world

A few drawings from the 16th century provide information about how 16th-century theatres, including the Rose, were designed. *Internet Shakespeare Editions* from the University of Victoria provides an interactive look at a 16th century stage, and the Folger Shakespeare Library explains the origins and the workings of the theatres familiar to Shakespeare.



The George Inn, the only remaining galleried inn in London.

Although not the first of Elizabethan theatres, the Globe is the most well-known and the most closely associated with Shakespeare.

Video Clip 2

Shakespeare's Globe Theatre

[\(click to see video\)](#)

Wesleyan University provides a 3-D model of the Globe Theatre and an animation of how the parts of the stage might have been used in the graveyard scene from *Hamlet*. Clemson University provides a virtual tour of the Globe Theatre as it likely appeared in Shakespeare's time. Shakespeare's Globe in London, a replica of the original Globe theatre, offers a virtual tour of this contemporary active theatre. Although designed for children, Cambridge University's Converse program presents an entertaining and informative interactive animation depicting the 16th-century play-going experience.



Replica of the Globe in London.

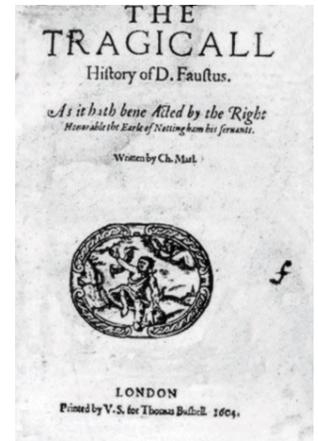
The “University Wits”

While Shakespeare's name dominates English Renaissance drama, he was not the only, or even the first, dramatist of the era. Preceding Shakespeare was a group of playwrights known as the “University Wits.” Perhaps the best known of the University Wits, Christopher Marlowe developed what Ben Jonson called “Marlowe's mighty line,” the sonorous use of blank verse also employed by Shakespeare.



Nicholas Visscher's map of the City of London (1616), showing the Globe Theatre.

Shakespearean drama represents a high point unequalled in literature. On the heels of the flowering of Elizabethan drama, the Puritans shut down the theatres in England. Thus, a dearth of drama quickly followed the wealth of Shakespeare's time period.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The 16th century was a highlight in British history, resulting in literature that reflected the vitality but also the turbulence of the period.
- Highly structured forms of literature such as the sonnet, the Spenserian stanza, and the blank verse of Marlowe's and Shakespeare's drama reflected the Renaissance's interest in classical literature.
- Literature written in the pastoral mode reflected a desire for a simple, peaceful existence away from the intrigue of court life.
- The 16th century saw the development of purpose-built theaters.

Resources

Background

- "[City Life](#)." Michael Best. *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. University of Victoria and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
- "[The City of London](#)." Life in Elizabethan London. *A Compendium of Common Knowledge*.
- "[Elizabethan England](#)." *Shakespeare Resource Center*.
- "[London Bridge Virtual Tour](#)." *British History In-Depth*. BBC.
- "[Sir Francis Drake](#)." *Historic Figures*. BBC.

The Tudor Court

- [Anne Boleyn](#). Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.

- “Catherine of Aragon.” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.
- “Court Politics.” History of England. *Britain Express*.
- “Edward VI.” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.
- “Elizabeth.” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.
- “Elizabeth I: An Overview.” Alexandra Briscoe. BBC. *British History In-Depth*.
- “Elizabeth of York.” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.
- “Elizabethan Life.” History of England. *Britain Express*.
- “Henry VIII and the Break with Rome.” Michael Best. *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. University of Victoria and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
- “Jane Seymour.” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.
- “King Henry VIII.” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.
- “Queen Mary I.” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.
- “The Act of Supremacy.” National Archives.
- “The Reformation.” E. L. Skip Knox. Boise State University.
- “The Six Wives of Henry VIII.” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.
- “The Spanish Armada.” Simon Adams. BBC. *British History In-Depth*.
- “The Wars of the Roses.” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.
- “The Wars of the Roses.” Michael Best. *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. University of Victoria and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

The English Renaissance

- “Education.” Michael Best. *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. University of Victoria and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
- “Putting Nature in Order.” Michael Best. *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. University of Victoria and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
- “A Rebirth of Knowledge.” Michael Best. *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. University of Victoria and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
- “Renaissance.” English Department. Brooklyn College.
- “Syrup of Violet.” Folger Shakespeare Library. Women’s contributions to science in the Renaissance.

Literature

- “The Spenserian Stanza.” Department of English. Emory University.

The Sonnet

- [Sonnet Central Timeline](#).

The Pastoral Mode

- [“Court Life: Hoping for Reward.”](#) Museum of London.
- [“Pastoral.”](#) *The UVic Writer’s Guide*. Department of English University of Victoria.
- [“Queen Elizabeth: Courtship and Love.”](#) Folger Shakespeare Library.
- [“The Queen’s Court.”](#) National Maritime Museum.

Drama

- [“Blank Verse.”](#) *The Poetry Archive*.
- [“Christopher Marlowe.”](#) Michael Best. *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. University of Victoria and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
- [“The Elizabethan Theatre.”](#) Hilda D. Spear. University of Dundee. University of Cologne.
- [The George Inn](#) video. Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College.
- [Globe Theatre](#) video. Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College.
- [“Globe Tour.”](#) Clemson Shakespeare Festival. Clemson University.
- [“How Do We Know About Shakespeare’s Stage?”](#) Michael Best. *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. University of Victoria and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
- [“James Burbage.”](#) *Theatredatabase*. rpt. from *A Dictionary of the Drama*. W. Davenport Adams. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1904.
- [“The Parts of the Stage.”](#) Michael Best. *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. University of Victoria and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
- [“Playhouses.”](#) Treasures in Full: Shakespeare in Quarto. British Library.
- [“The Plays of the University Wits.”](#) *Bartleby.com*. Rpt. from *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature in 18 Volumes* (1907–21). Volume V. The Drama to 1642, Part One.
- [“The Rose.”](#) Michael Best. *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. University of Victoria and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
- [“Shakespeare’s Globe Theater.”](#) Learning Objects Program. Wesleyan University.
- [“Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre.”](#) Virtual Tour. *Converse: The Literature Website*. University of Cambridge.
- [“Shakespeare’s Theater.”](#) Folger Shakespeare Library.

- “The University Wits.” Michael Best. *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. University of Victoria and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
- “Virtual Tour.” Shakespeare’s Globe. The Shakespeare Globe Trust.

3.2 Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define sonnet sequence and apply the term to Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*.
2. Characterize Sidney as a courtier poet and identify subject elements of *Astrophil and Stella* typical of the poetry of a courtier.
3. Analyze individual sonnets in *Astrophil and Stella* to identify English and Petrarchan elements in structure and content. Classify individual sonnets as English or Italian.

The epitome of the Elizabethan courtier, the Renaissance man, Sir Philip Sidney was a valiant and recognized soldier, a respected nobleman and statesman, a patron of the arts, and a brilliant writer. He died at age 32 from a wound suffered in battle.

Video Clip 3

Sir Philip Sidney Astrophil and Stella

[\(click to see video\)](#)

Astrophil and Stella

Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* is an example of a **sonnet sequence**⁵, a group of sonnets exploring all aspects of a topic. This group of sonnets describes all facets—the good times and bad times, the ups and downs—of the love that “Astrophil” has for “Stella.” Stella means *star* and Astrophil, *star-lover*; most scholars believe that the fictional names disguise Sidney himself and the woman he loved, Penelope Devereux, who later married another man, Lord Rich. Notice Sonnet 37 which plays on the word *rich*.

5. a group of sonnets exploring all aspects of a topic

These sonnets are Petrarchan in content. They follow the convention of the exaggerated lover's complaint, lamenting his unrequited love for an impossibly beautiful woman. In some of the sonnets, Astrophil is elated because of his love; in others he exhibits despair bordering on a suicidal despondency.

Text

Astrophil and Stella may be read on the following websites:

- [The Complete Poems of Sir Philip Sidney](#) edited, with memorial introduction and notes by Alexander B. Grosart. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*.
- [The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney](#), ed. with an introduction by John Drinkwater. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*.
- [Renascence Editions](#). An Online Repository of Works Printed in English Between the Years 1477 and 1799. Risa S. Bear. University of Oregon.
- [Representative Poetry Online](#). Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- [Sir Philip Sidney's Astrophel & Stella Wherein the Excellence of Sweet Poesy is Concluded](#), edited from the folio of MDXCVIII. Alfred Pollard. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*.
- [Sonnet Central](#).



Penshurst, home of Sir Philip Sidney.

Selected Sonnets:

Sonnet 1

Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show,
That she, dear she, might take some pleasure of my pain,
Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make her know,
Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain,—
I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe;
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain,
Oft turning others' leaves to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sun-burned brain.
But words came halting forth, wanting invention's stay;
Invention, nature's child, fled step-dame Study's blows,
And others' feet still seemed but strangers in my way.
Thus, great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,
Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite,
Fool, said my muse to me, look in thy heart and write.

This sonnet is the introduction to Sidney's sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella*. The speaker states that he's so much in love that he wants to tell his beloved in writing

how much he loves her. A point to remember is that in the 16th-century court flirtations and affairs in the courtly love tradition were still common. Although the Sidney and Devereux families at one time considered a marriage, this arrangement did not work out, and in all but the earliest sonnets, Sidney is writing to a married woman. Because this sonnet sequence is in the Petrarchan convention, we expect exaggerated claims about his beloved's unearthly beauty and how he is dying for love of this woman.

Astrophil studies other people's writing ("inventions") and turns pages ("leaves") of their books, trying to get ideas for his own poem. When he says other "feet" get in his way, he's talking about poetic meter, poetic feet—another reference to other people's poetry. He even compares himself to a pregnant woman struggling to give birth to a child; he's "great with child" trying to give birth to a poem. Finally, his Muse tells him where he should look for his ideas for a poem to Stella—in his own heart.

Sonnet 7

When Nature made her chief work, Stella's eyes,
In color black why wrapped she beams so bright?
Would she in beamy black, like painter wise,
Frame daintiest luster mixed of shades and light?
Or did she else that sober hue devise
In object best to knit and strength our sight,
Lest, if no veil these brave gleams did disguise,
They, sunlike, should more dazzle than delight?
Or would she her miraculous power show,
That, whereas black seems beauty's contrary,
She even in black doth make all beauties flow?
Both so, and thus,—she, minding Love should be
Placed ever there, gave him this mourning weed
To honor all their deaths who for her bleed.

This poem is typical Petrarchan praise of the beloved's beauty, the overly-sentimental love poem content that seems extreme to modern sensibilities. Stella's eyes are the most beautiful thing in nature. But, he asks, why would nature color something as brilliant as her eyes black? Black is usually the color of mourning.

Maybe it's because her eyes are so dazzling that men would be blinded by them if they weren't a dark color, Astrophil surmises in a typical Petrarchan exaggeration. (This is the type of content Shakespeare mocks in his Sonnet 130). He finally concludes that nature made her eyes black to mourn all the men that have died for love of Stella.

Sonnet 31

With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climb'st the skies !

How silently, and with how wan a face !

What, may it be that even in heavenly place

That busy archer his sharp arrows tries?

Sure, if that long with love-acquainted eyes

Can judge of love, thou feel'st a lover's case;

I read it in thy looks; thy languisht grace

To me that feel the like, thy state descries.

Then, even of fellowship, O Moon, tell me,

Is constant love deemed there but want of wit?

Are beauties there as proud as here they be?

Do they above love to be loved, and yet

Those lovers scorn whom that love doth possess?

Do they call virtue there, ungratefulness?

6. an address to an inanimate object or an abstract quality

A sonnet sequence records the ups and downs of a love affair. This poem is one of the “downs.” In an **apostrophe**⁶, an address to an inanimate object or an abstract quality, Astrophil is speaking to the moon, asking if the moon is moving so slowly and is so pale because he (the moon) is love-sick like Astrophil. Has Cupid been

shooting the moon with his arrows as he's been shooting Astrophil? Note the stereotypical marks of being in love that appear in Capellanus' rules of courtly love.

Note that in the last six lines Astrophil seems a bit sarcastic or bitter. He's been seen as behaving stupidly (having a "want of wit") for chasing Stella, and she apparently has scorned him (he says the beautiful women are proud and love to be loved—love the attention they get). Then in the last line he finally tells us what is really annoying him: "Do they call virtue there [in the moon's realm] ungratefulness?" Apparently Stella has refused his sexual advances, but he thinks that her "virtue" is just "ungratefulness." In other words, she ought to be so grateful for all the attention he's showered upon her that she gives in to his sexual advances. And he's annoyed that she won't.

Sonnet 39

Come Sleep! O Sleep, the certain knot of peace,
The baiting place of wit, the balm of woe,
The poor man's wealth, the prisoner's release,
The indifferent judge between the high and low;
With shield of proof, shield me from out the prease
Of those fierce darts Despair at me doth throw;
O make in me those civil wars to cease;
I will good tribute pay, if thou do so.
Take thou of me smooth pillows, sweetest bed,
A chamber deaf to noise and blind to light,
A rosy garland and a weary head:
And if these things, as being thine by right,
Move not thy heavy grace, thou shalt in me,
Livelier than elsewhere, Stella's image see.

This sonnet is the low point of the sonnet sequence. While he is annoyed in Sonnet 31, he's depressed in this one because Stella rejects him. He wishes he could sleep because sleep would be a resting place, a respite from the pain of his unrequited

love. Some critics even go so far as to see the poem as a death wish. But, Astrophil says, there is pain even in his sleep because he may dream of Stella.

Sonnet 41

Having this day my horse, my hand, my lance

Guided so well, that I obtained the prize,

Both by the judgment of the English eyes,

And of some sent from that sweet enemy, France;

Horsemen my skill in horsemanship advance,

Townsfolds my strength; a daintier judge applies

His praise to sleight, which from good use doth rise;

Some lucky wits impute it but to chance;

Others, because of both sides I do take

My blood from them who did excel in this,

Think Nature me a man of arms did make.

How far they shot awry! the true cause is,

Stella looked on, and from her heavenly face

Sent forth the beams which made so fair my race.

Astrophil is happy again in this sonnet. He's won a tournament (the typical knights jousting on horseback). People wonder what enabled him to win: his inherited strength and skill, his fine horsemanship, or maybe he was just lucky. But Astrophil says the reason he won is that Stella was there watching and just the sight of her "heavenly face" inspired him to victory.

Sonnet 49

I on my horse, and Love on me doth try
Our horsemanships, while by strange work I prove
A horseman to my horse, a horse to Love;
And now man's wrongs in me, poor beast, descry.
The reins wherewith my rider doth me tie,
Are humbled thoughts, which bit of reverence move,
Curb'd in with fear, but with gilt boss above
Of hope, which makes it seem fair to the eye.
The wand is will; thou, fancy, saddle art,
Girt fast by memory, and while I spur
My horse, he spurs with sharp desire my heart:
He sits me fast, however I do stir:
And now hath made me to his hand so right,
That in the manage myself takes delight.

This sonnet is an amusing view of how Astrophil feels about his obsessive love for Stella. Astrophil compares the way he controls his horse to the way his love is controlling him. As you read through the sonnet, you'll see references to the bit, the reins, the saddle—all the things he uses to control his horse. And his love is

controlling him just as thoroughly. And surprisingly enough, he says he loves her so much he doesn't mind being controlled by his love.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Sir Philip Sidney's sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella* explores all aspects of its topic, the love of the fictional Astrophil and Stella.
- Although Sidney's sonnets are Petrarchan in the content of a lover's lament and exaggerated praise of the beloved's beauty, the structure features elements of both English and Italian sonnets.

EXERCISES

1. Review the characteristics of Italian and English sonnets. Classify each of the selected sonnets by Sidney. Consider both the content and the structure.
2. Describe the mood of the lover Astrophil in each of the selected sonnets.

Resources

Background

- *Sir Philip Sidney's Astrophel [sic] and Stella*. *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature in 18 Volumes (1907–21)*. Volume III. Renaissance and Reformation. XII. The Elizabethan Sonnet. § 6. *Bartleby.com*.

Text

- *The Complete Poems of Sir Philip Sidney* edited, with memorial introduction and notes by Alexander B. Grosart. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*.
- *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. with an introduction by John Drinkwater. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*.
- *Renascence Editions*. An Online Repository of Works Printed in English Between the Years 1477 and 1799. Risa S. Bear. University of Oregon.
- *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.

- [Sir Philip Sidney's Astrophel & Stella Wherein the Excellence of Sweet Poesy is Concluded](#), edited from the folio of MDXCVIII. Alfred Pollard. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*.
- [Sonnet Central](#).

Audio of *Astrophil and Stella*

- [*Astrophil and Stella*](#). Read by Elizabeth Klett. *LibriVox*.
- [Audio of Selected Sonnets](#). Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.

Biography

- ["Sir Philip Sidney"](#). Folger Shakespeare Library.
- ["Sir Philip Sidney \(1554–1586\)"](#). Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.

Video

- ["Sir Philip Sidney"](#). Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College.

3.3 William Shakespeare (1564–1616)—The Sonnets

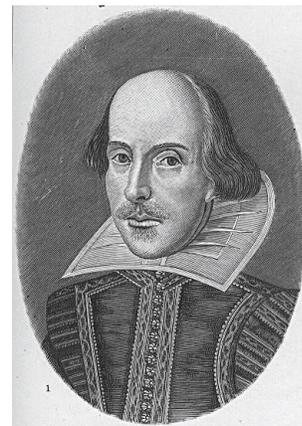
PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the English sonnet structure of Shakespeare's sonnets.
2. Recognize vestiges of the Italian sonnet structure in the content of some Shakespearian sonnets.
3. Analyze the use of 5 key themes in Shakespeare's sonnets: time, poetry, beauty, love, and friendship.

Biography

William Shakespeare (1564–1616) is undoubtedly the most well-known and revered name in British literature.



Video Clip 4

William Shakespeare

[\(click to see video\)](#)

Although entire books of speculation about Shakespeare's personal life and history abound, little documentary evidence exists. The [Folger Shakespeare Library](#), the [British Library](#), and [BBC Historic Figures](#) provide basic biographical information.

His [birth, his marriage, the births of his children](#), and his death are recorded in the [parish records of Holy Trinity Church](#) in Stratford-upon-Avon. Also, a few [records of business transactions](#) and a few [government documents](#) provide enough information for scholars to know that he lived in several places in London, bought a large house in Stratford-upon-Avon, and was involved in some legal proceedings. Shakespeare's [will](#) survives in the National Archives.

Text

- Facsimile of The Sonnets Quarto One. The Library of the University of California, Los Angeles. *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. University of Toronto.
- Sonnets. *Open Source Shakespeare: An Experiment in Literary Technology*. George Mason University.
- Shakespeare's Sonnets by William Shakespeare. *Project Gutenberg*.
- Sonnets. *Electronic Text Center*. University of Virginia Library.



Shakespeare's birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon.

The Sonnets

Although Shakespearian sonnets are named for Shakespeare, he was not the first, or the only, person to write sonnets in this form. And not all of his sonnets are entirely English in form. Shakespeare also used elements of the Italian form.



Shakespeare's grave in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon.

Shakespeare's sonnets do not constitute a typical sonnet sequence because they do not all address a single topic. By the time Shakespeare was writing his sonnets, the sonnet sequence, usually tracing a love story, had declined in popularity. However, there are five themes that appear throughout all his sonnets: time, poetry, beauty, love, and friendship.

Some scholars, such as Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine, editors of the *New Folger Library Shakespeare edition of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, view Shakespeare's sonnets as autobiographical, referring to "the story that the sequence as a whole seems to tell about Shakespeare's love life."



Statue of Shakespeare at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon.

Other critics find that interpretations of Shakespeare's sonnets often reveal as much or more about the age in which the critiques are written than about the sonnets themselves. Michael Schoenfeldt, for example, writing in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's Poetry* (Ed. Patrick Cheney. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Cambridge Collections Online.) asserts that “... the Sonnets have frequently functioned as a mirror in which cultures reveal their own critical presuppositions about the nature of poetic creation and the comparative instabilities of gender, race, and class. Although the Sonnets have proven particularly amenable to some of the central developments of late twentieth-century modes of criticism—particularly feminism and gender and gay studies—they continue to be richer and more complex than anything that can be said about them.”

Although some scholars read Shakespeare’s sonnets as autobiographical, others remind us that in literature the narrative voice should not be assumed to be the author but is instead a persona created by the author. Scholar Helen Vendler, for example, uses the term “fictive speaker” in reference to the speaker of the sonnets (*The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets*. Harvard University Press, 1997).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Shakespeare’s sonnets consistently develop 5 themes: time, poetry, beauty, love, and friendship.
- Shakespeare’s sonnets are English in structure although some sonnets retain elements of the Italian structure.
- Many theories of literary criticism posit that Shakespeare’s sonnets, like most literature, should not be read autobiographically.

EXERCISES

1. In Shakespeare’s Sonnet 29, identify elements that belong to the Petrarchan or Italian tradition. Also locate elements that would characterize the sonnet as an English sonnet.
2. In Sonnets 55 and 73, identify the topic of each of the three quatrains. What images are developed in each quatrain? How are these images related? How do the couplets function in these two sonnets?
3. In Sonnet 130, how does the speaker address the Petrarchan convention? How does the couplet affect the reader’s perception of the rest of the sonnet?

Resources

Biography

- “[Excerpts from Shakespeare’s Will.](#)” Treasures. *The National Archives*.

- “[Shakespeare](#).” *Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon*.
- “[The Shakespeare Paper Trail: The Early Years](#).” British History In-depth. BBC.
- “[The Shakespeare Paper Trail: The Later Years](#).” British History In-depth. BBC.
- “[Shakespeare’s Biography](#).” *Shakespeare Resource Center*.
- “[Shakespeare’s Life](#).” Folger Shakespeare Library.
- “[Shakespeare’s Life](#).” *Treasures in Full: Shakespeare in Quarto*. British Library.
- [William Shakespeare](#). Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College.
- “[William Shakespeare](#).” *Historic Figures*. BBC.

Text

- [Facsimile of The Sonnets Quarto One 1609](#) at the Library of the University of California, Los Angeles. *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. University of Toronto.
- [Open Source Shakespeare: An Experiment in Literary Technology](#). George Mason University.
- [Shakespeare’s Sonnets by William Shakespeare](#). *Project Gutenberg*.
- [Sonnets](#). Shakespeare, William, 1564–1616. *Electronic Text Center*. University of Virginia Library.

Audio

- [Shakespeare’s Sonnets](#). Read by Sir John Gielgud. HarperAudio. *Internet Multicasting Service*.
- [Sonnets](#). By William Shakespeare. *LibriVox*.
- [Sonnet Central Listening Room](#).

Video

- “[William Shakespeare](#).” Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College.

Images

- “[William Shakespeare](#).” *Great Britons: Treasures from the National Portrait Gallery, London*.

3.4 Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize characteristics of Senecan tragedy used in Marlowe's drama.
2. Apply the definition of the pastoral mode to Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love."

Biography

Christopher Marlowe is a good example of an individual caught up in the intrigue and danger of court life who might long to escape to the seemingly simple, leisurely life of the rustic shepherd. Although not born into the nobility, Marlowe attended Cambridge University, then moved to London where he moved in court circles and wrote the plays that secured his fame. He also apparently was engaged in espionage for Elizabeth's court. At age 29 Marlowe was stabbed to death in an argument over the dinner bill in an inn. Only a week before his death, one of his associates and fellow dramatist, Thomas Kyd, claimed under torture that Marlowe was an atheist, and a warrant was issued for Marlowe's arrest. This sequence of events has led some historians to believe that Marlowe's death was staged to help him escape arrest and certain torture. Some have even gone so far as to suggest that Marlowe, in hiding, wrote the plays attributed to Shakespeare although this theory is now considered unlikely.

Marlowe's Plays

The Tragedy of Dido, Queen of Carthage

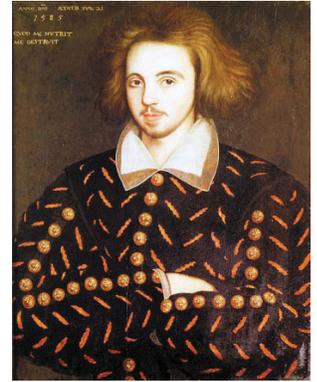
- [*Perseus Digital Library*](#). Tufts University. Gregory R. Crane, editor.
- [*Project Gutenberg*](#).

Tamburlaine the Great, Part I

- [*Perseus Digital Library*](#). Tufts University. Gregory R. Crane, editor.
- [*Project Gutenberg*](#).
- [*Renascence Editions*](#). An Online Repository of Works Printed in English Between the Years 1477 and 1799. Risa Stephanie Bear. The University of Oregon.

Tamburlaine the Great, Part II

- [*Perseus Digital Library*](#). Tufts University. Gregory R. Crane, editor.
- [*Project Gutenberg*](#).
- [*Renascence Editions*](#). An Online Repository of Works Printed in English Between the Years 1477 and 1799. Risa Stephanie Bear. The University of Oregon.



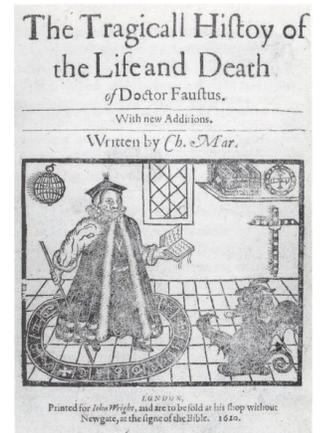
Portrait believed to be Christopher Marlowe.



Plaque marking the rooms where Christopher Marlowe lived at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge University.

The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus

- [A Text](#). *Perseus Digital Library*. Tufts University. Gregory R. Crane, editor.
- [B Text](#). *Perseus Digital Library*. Tufts University. Gregory R. Crane, editor.
- [Project Gutenberg](#).
- [Renaissance Editions](#). An Online Repository of Works Printed in English Between the Years 1477 and 1799. Risa Stephanie Bear. The University of Oregon.



Title page of a late edition of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*.

The Jew of Malta

- [Perseus Digital Library](#). Tufts University. Gregory R. Crane, editor.
- [Project Gutenberg](#).
- [Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text & Image](#). The University of Pennsylvania Libraries. The Horace Howard Furness Shakespeare Library.

The Tragedy of Edward II

- [Perseus Digital Library](#). Tufts University. Gregory R. Crane, editor.
- [Project Gutenberg](#).

The Massacre at Paris

- [Project Gutenberg](#).

Marlowe's contemporary and fellow playwright and poet Ben Jonson, in his poem "[To the Memory of My Beloved Master William Shakespeare](#)," coined the phrase "Marlowe's mighty line" to refer to Marlowe's use of **blank verse**⁷, unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter, considered the meter most closely resembling normal English speech. The sonorous lines of **blank verse** lent themselves to the tragic content of plays such as *Tamburlaine* and *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*.

In the Renaissance spirit of celebrating and imitating classical art and literature, Marlowe wrote heroic tales in the tradition of the classical Roman dramatist Seneca. **Senecan tragedy**⁸ featured violence, revenge, emotional speeches, and supernatural, usually dark supernatural, elements. Marlowe's tragedies portray

7. unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter, often considered the meter most closely resembling normal English speech

8. drama featuring violence, revenge, emotional speeches, and supernatural, usually dark supernatural, elements

men with aspiring spirits who rise to greatness and then fall, usually through some weakness or flaw in the hero's own character. Perhaps his most famous character, Dr. Faustus deals with the demon Mephistopheles to sell his soul to the devil to achieve his ambition of power through knowledge only to disappear, presumably to Hell, at the end of the play.

“The Passionate Shepherd to His Love”

Text

- *Luminarium*. Anniina Jokinen.
- *Project Gutenberg*.
- *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.

Sidebar 3.1.

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That hills and vallies, dales and fields,
Woods or steepy mountain yields.
And we will sit upon the rocks,
Seeing the shepherds feed their flocks
By shallow rivers to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.
And I will make thee beds of roses
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cup of flowers and a kirtle
Embroidered all with leaves of myrtle.
A gown made of the finest wool
Which from our pretty lambs we pull;
Fair-lined slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold.

A belt of straw and ivy-buds,
With coral clasps and amber studs;
An if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me, and be my love.
The shepherd-swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May-morning:
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me, and be my love.

Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" is one of the most well-known examples of pastoral poetry, a type of literature that portrays shepherds in an idealized rural setting, engaging in contests of singing or poetry, flirting with country maidens, watching their flocks in a peaceful and beautiful natural world. Most of the people who wrote pastoral poetry were, however, men of the court who had only a "fairy tale" view of a shepherd's life. They imagined shepherds sitting in the meadows watching their sheep while singing songs and flirting with the shepherdesses. They had little idea of the hard lives led by the peasants. Marlowe's reference to "pulling" the wool off the sheep, for example, demonstrates that he had little real knowledge of sheep herding, and his mistaken belief that a shepherd would have gold for his lady's buckles indicates that his life was far removed from that of a poor shepherd.

EXERCISES

1. In Marlowe's poem, what does the shepherd offer to entice his love to live with him?
2. How do these enticements fit into the pastoral convention?

Resources

Biography

- “[Christopher Marlowe](#).” *Theatre History.com*. rpt. from *Elizabethan and Stuart Plays*. Ed. Charles Read Baskerville. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1934. 307–308.
- “[Christopher Marlowe’s Canterbury Childhood](#).” *Theatre History.com*. rpt. from *Christopher Marlowe and His Associates*. John H. Ingram. London: Grant Richards, 1904.
- “[The Life and Work of Christopher Marlowe](#).” *Theatre History.com*. rpt. from *Christopher Marlowe*. William Lyon Phelps. New York: American Book Company, 1912.
- [Luminarium](#). Anniina Jokinen. rpt. from *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th Ed. Vol XVII. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910. 744.
- “[Marlowe Timeline](#).” OpenLearn. The Open University.

Play Texts

The Tragedy of Dido, Queen of Carthage

- [Perseus Digital Library](#). Tufts University. Gregory R. Crane, editor.
- [Project Gutenberg](#).

Tamburlaine the Great, Part I

- [Perseus Digital Library](#). Tufts University. Gregory R. Crane, editor.
- [Project Gutenberg](#).
- [Renaissance Editions](#). An Online Repository of Works Printed in English Between the Years 1477 and 1799. Risa Stephanie Bear. The University of Oregon.

Tamburlaine the Great, Part II

- [Perseus Digital Library](#). Tufts University. Gregory R. Crane, editor.
- [Project Gutenberg](#).
- [Renaissance Editions](#). An Online Repository of Works Printed in English Between the Years 1477 and 1799. Risa Stephanie Bear. The University of Oregon.

The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus

- [A Text](#). [Perseus Digital Library](#). Tufts University. Gregory R. Crane, editor.

- [B Text](#). *Perseus Digital Library*. Tufts University. Gregory R. Crane, editor.
- [Project Gutenberg](#).
- [Renascence Editions](#). An Online Repository of Works Printed in English Between the Years 1477 and 1799. Risa Stephanie Bear. The University of Oregon.

The Jew of Malta

- [Perseus Digital Library](#). Tufts University. Gregory R. Crane, editor.
- [Project Gutenberg](#).
- [Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text & Image](#). The University of Pennsylvania Libraries. The Horace Howard Furness Shakespeare Library.

The Tragedy of Edward II

- [Perseus Digital Library](#). Tufts University. Gregory R. Crane, editor.
- [Project Gutenberg](#).

The Massacre at Paris

- [Project Gutenberg](#).

Text “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love”

- [Representative Poetry Online](#). Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- [Luminarium](#). Anniina Jokinen.
- [Project Gutenberg](#).

The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus

- [“Christopher Marlowe, Doctor Faustus.”](#) Dr Anita Pacheco. Learning Space. The Open University. course materials from The Open University course.

Audio

- [“The Passionate Shepherd to His Love.”](#) *Eaglesweb.com*. Audio Anthology of Lyrical Poetry in Modern English. Recorded by Walter Rufus Eagles.

Selections from *Librivox*

- [Marlowe, Christopher. "Doctor Faustus \(closing lines\)" \(in "Poems Recorded in Deptford and Greenwich"\)](#).
- [Marlowe, Christopher. "Hero and Leander."](#)
- [Marlowe, Christopher. "Jew of Malta, The."](#)
- [Marlowe, Christopher. "Passionate Shepherd to His Love" \(in "Short Poetry Collection 061"\)](#) [Marlowe, Christopher. "Passionate Shepherd to his Love, The" \(in "Wedding Poems"\)](#).
- [Marlowe, Christopher. "Passionate Shepherd to His Love, The" \(in "Romantic Poetry Collection 001"\)](#).
- [Marlowe, Christopher. "Passionate Shepherd to His Love, The" \(in "Short Poetry Collection 088"\)](#).
- [Marlowe, Christopher. "Tragical History of Doctor Faustus, The."](#)

Works in Progress From *LibriVox*

- [Marlowe, Christopher. "Tamburlaine the Great Part 1" \(Open\)](#).
- [Marlowe, Christopher. "Tamburlaine the Great Part 2" \(Open\)](#).

3.5 Sir Walter Raleigh (1552–1618)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Analyze the Nymph’s response to the elements of the pastoral mode in “The Nymph’s Reply to the Shepherd.”

“The Nymph’s Reply to the Shepherd”

One of many replies to Marlowe’s “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love” is “The Nymph’s Reply to the Shepherd” written by Sir Walter Raleigh. Rather than the idealistic view of life seen in Marlowe’s poem, Raleigh’s reply concentrates on the transitory nature of earthly joys. When considered in the light of Raleigh’s biography, the poem’s bitterness seems to reflect the author’s own experiences. Although Raleigh was for a time a great favorite of Queen Elizabeth and a renowned, successful explorer of the New World, establishing the Roanoke Colony, he fell from favor when he married one of the Queen’s ladies-in-waiting without the Queen’s permission. After the death of Elizabeth I and the succession of James I, Raleigh’s influence in court fell. Disillusioned and angered by his declining status and resultant financial difficulties, he apparently took part in a failed conspiracy against the King and was imprisoned in the Tower of London. A letter written to his wife before his execution reveals Raleigh’s bitterness about his fate.

Text

- “The Nymph’s Reply.” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire, Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “The Nymph’s Reply to the Shepherd.” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.



Sidebar 3.2.

If all the world and love were young,
And truth in every shepherd's tongue,
These pretty pleasures might me move
To live with thee and be thy love.
Time drives the flocks from field to fold,
When rivers rage and rocks grow cold;
And Philomel becometh dumb;
The rest complains of cares to come.
The flowers do fade, and wanton fields
To wayward winter reckoning yields:
A honey tongue, a heart of gall,
Is fancy's spring, but sorrow's fall.
The gowns, thy shoes, thy beds of roses,
Thy cap, thy kirtle, and thy posies
Soon break, soon wither, soon forgotten,—
In folly ripe, in reason rotten.

Thy belt of straw and ivy buds,
Thy coral clasps and amber studs,
All these in me no means can move
To come to thee and be thy love.
But could youth last and love still breed,
Had joys no date nor age no need,
Then these delights my mind might move
To live with thee and be thy love.

Sidebar 3.3.

Sir Walter Raleigh is perhaps best known to Americans as one of the first to attempt to colonize the New World. The colony he established in Virginia (named for Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen) has become known as the lost colony of Roanoke. Raleigh and a group of the settlers returned to England for supplies, and when the settlers, without Raleigh, returned the entire colony had disappeared. He is also well known for a story, unlikely to be true, that when Queen Elizabeth visited his ship, he threw his cloak over a mud puddle so that she would not have to get her shoes wet or muddy, a gesture more impressive when one considers the cost of the materials needed to make a gentleman's cloak in the 16th century. He's also known for introducing tobacco to England.

Imprisoned when the Queen discovered he had married one of her ladies-in-waiting without her permission, Raleigh was eventually released although he remained out of favor with the Queen for many years. After Elizabeth I's death, Raleigh was again imprisoned in the Tower of London, accused of plotting against the new King James I. Although he was sentenced to death, the sentence was not carried out, and Raleigh eventually was released to lead another expedition in search of riches in the New World. During this expedition, his troops attacked a Spanish settlement, and the Spanish demanded that King James I carry out the death sentence earlier imposed. Raleigh was beheaded and buried in St. Margaret's Church.

Figure 3.4



Figure 3.4. shows the room in the Tower of London in which Raleigh was imprisoned. Wealthy prisoners often lived in relative comfort while in captivity. Their families and friends were allowed to purchase food, fuel for

heat, and other comforts for the prisoners. Here Raleigh began to write *A History of the World*, a work which he never finished.

Figure 3.5

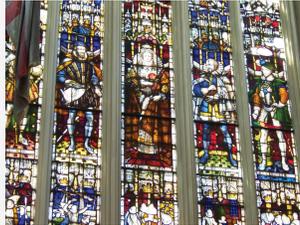


Figure 3.5. shows the stained glass window in St. Margaret's church which commemorates Sir Walter Raleigh as one of Elizabeth I's favorites. Raleigh is the figure to the left of Elizabeth I in the center.

Figure 3.6



The plaque in Figure 3.6. states that Sir Walter Raleigh is interred in St. Margaret's Church.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- Sir Walter Raleigh's reply to Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" emphasizes the transitory nature of pastoral pleasures.

EXERCISES

1. Compare the content of Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" and Raleigh's "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd." What specific natural items referred to in Marlowe's poem does the Nymph mention?
2. How does the young woman (the "nymph") in Raleigh's poem answer the shepherd? What is her reasoning for her answer?
3. How would you characterize the tone of the Nymph's reply?

Resources: Walter Raleigh

Biography

- "[Sir Walter Raleigh \(1562-1618\)](#). Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.
- [Walter Raleigh](#). Historic Figures. BBC.
- "[Letter: Sir Walter Raleigh Bids Farewell to His Wife a Few Hours Before He Expects to be Executed](#)." Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.

Text

- "[The Nymph's Reply](#)." *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- "[The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd](#)." Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.

Audio

- "[The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd](#)." *Eaglesweb.com Audio Anthology of Lyrical Poetry in Modern English*. Recorded by Walter Rufus Eagles.
- "[The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd](#)." *LibriVox*.

3.6 Elizabeth I (1533–1603)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the political and literary achievements of Elizabeth I.
2. Recognize the influence of 16th-century religious turmoil on the literature of the time.

Biography

Daughter of Henry VIII and his second wife Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth became queen only after the deaths of her younger brother Edward VI and her older sister Mary I. Leading England to an unprecedented position of world power and influence, Elizabeth gave her name to the age while encouraging trade, exploration, and the arts, including Shakespeare. This portrait of Elizabeth by George Gower (1540–1596) is known as the Armada portrait, picturing Elizabeth after the defeat of the Spanish Armada, at the height of her and her country’s power. The defeated Armada can be seen in the upper left, a crown below signifying Elizabeth’s royal power, her hand resting on a globe indicating England’s world dominance. Even the sumptuous costume, jewels, and surroundings evoke the glories of Elizabeth and her court. In addition to being a patron of the arts, Elizabeth I was a poet and musician.

“Written on a Wall at Woodstock”

When her half-sister Mary Tudor ascended the throne as Mary I, Elizabeth, age 21, was imprisoned in the Tower of London and for a time at Woodstock Manor. Mary I and her advisors feared that the Princess Elizabeth would be a rallying point for Protestants who wanted to replace the Roman Catholic Mary. Confined in the Woodstock Manor Gatehouse, Elizabeth wrote verses expressing her frustration at her fate.



Text

- *Luminarium*. Anniina Jokinen.
- *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.

Written on a Wall at Woodstock

By Princess Elizabeth (later Elizabeth I)

O FORTUNE! how thy restless wavering State

Hath fraught with Cares my troubled Wit!

Witness this present Prison whither Fate

Hath borne me, and the Joys I quit.

Thou causedest the Guilty to be loosed

From Bands, wherewith are Innocents inclosed;

Causing the Guiltless to be strait reserved,

And freeing those that Death had well deserved:

But by her Envy can be nothing wrought,

So God send to my Foes all they have thought.

ELIZABETH PRISONER.

A.D. M.D.LV.

“The Doubt of Future Foes”

Later as Queen, Elizabeth again expressed her fears and frustration at being surrounded by those who would seek to influence her or even to replace her on the throne, particularly her cousin Mary Queen of Scots, the “daughter of debate” referred to in the poem. Like Elizabeth’s half-sister Mary Tudor, Mary Queen of Scots was Roman Catholic, and after the death of Mary Tudor she became a rallying point for those who wanted a Catholic monarch. Just as Mary Tudor had Elizabeth imprisoned, Elizabeth ordered the imprisonment of Mary Queen of Scots. While Mary Tudor had stopped short of having Elizabeth executed, Elizabeth eventually was persuaded to order Mary Queen of Scots beheaded.

Text

- *Luminarium*. Anniina Jokinen. text and audio.
- *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.

The Doubt of Future Foes

By Elizabeth I, Queen of England

The doubt of future foes exiles my present joy,

And wit me warns to shun such snares as threaten mine annoy;

For falsehood now doth flow, and subjects' faith doth ebb,

Which should not be if reason ruled or wisdom weaved the web.

But clouds of joys untried do cloak aspiring minds,

Which turn to rain of late repent by changèd course of winds.

The top of hope supposed, the root of rue shall be,

And fruitless all their grafted guile, as shortly ye shall see.

The dazzled eyes with pride, which great ambition blinds,

Shall be unsealed by worthy wights whose foresight falsehood finds.

The daughter of debate that discord aye doth sow

Shall reap no gain where former rule still peace hath taught to know.

No foreign banished wight shall anchor in this port;

Our realm brooks not seditious sects, let them elsewhere resort.

My rusty sword through rest shall first his edge employ

To poll their tops that seek such change or gape for future joy.

“Speech to the Troops at Tilbury”

One of the highlights of Elizabeth’s reign was the defeat of the Spanish Armada, a victory which established England as a world power. The following speech purportedly was given by Elizabeth to her troops gathered at Tilbury to repel the Spanish troops that succeeded in getting through the English navy and invading England itself. These land troops, however, were never needed because of the success of the English navy. Whether Elizabeth actually delivered this speech, including the famous line “I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too...,” or whether it was composed later and circulated as a means of reinforcing Elizabeth’s reputation and the importance of the battle in the minds of the people, no one is sure.

Text

- *Luminarium*. Anniina Jokinen. text and audio.
- “Queen Elizabeth I: Against the Spanish Armada, 1588.” *Modern History Sourcebook*. Paul Halsall. Fordham University.

Speech to the Troops at Tilbury

My loving people,

We have been persuaded by some that are careful of our safety, to take heed how we commit our selves to armed multitudes, for fear of treachery; but I assure you I do not desire to live to distrust my faithful and loving people. Let tyrants fear, I have always so behaved myself that, under God, I have placed my chiefest strength and safeguard in the loyal hearts and good-will of my subjects; and therefore I am come amongst you, as you see, at this time, not for my recreation and disport, but being resolved, in the midst and heat of the battle, to live and die amongst you all; to lay down for my God, and for my kingdom, and my people, my honour and my blood, even in the dust. I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too, and think fowl scorn that Parma or Spain, or any prince of Europe, should dare to invade the borders of my realm; to which rather than any dishonour shall grow by me, I myself will take up arms, I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of every one of your virtues in the field. I know already, for your forwardness you have deserved rewards and crowns; and We do assure you in the word of a prince, they shall be duly paid you. In the mean time, my lieutenant general shall be in my stead, than whom never prince commanded a more noble or worthy subject; not doubting but by your obedience to my general, by your concord in the camp, and your valour in the field, we shall shortly have a famous victory over those enemies of my God, of my kingdom, and of my people.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- In an age in which few women wrote literature, particularly literature that survives, Elizabeth I, because of her royal birth, is an exception in education and social acceptance of activities not usually considered suitable for women.

EXERCISES

1. In “Written on a Wall at Woodstock” Elizabeth I addresses fortune, an example of the literary technique apostrophe, an address to an inanimate object or an abstract quality. What specific events does she ascribe to fortune? What fate does she request that God send her foes?
2. How does the tone of “Written on a Wall at Woodstock” compare with that of “The Doubt of Future Foes”? How do the circumstances in which the two poems were written compare?
3. How would you evaluate “Speech to the Troops at Tilbury” as a public relations tool?
4. What does Elizabeth mean when she says, “I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too....” Why would it be important for her to include this remark?

Resources

Biography

- “[Elizabeth \(1533–1603\)](#).” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.
- [Elizabeth I](#). Historic Figures. BBC.
- “[Woodstock Manor](#).” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*. rpt. from Paul Hentzner. *A Journey Into England*, (1598). Horace Walpole, ed. 1757. *Fugitive Pieces on Various Subjects*. Vol II. Robert Dodsley, ed. London: J. Dodsley, 1771. 258.

Texts

“Written on a Wall at Woodstock”

- [Luminarium](#). Anniina Jokinen.
- [Representative Poetry Online](#). Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.

“The Doubt of Future Foes”

- [Luminarium](#). Anniina Jokinen. text and audio.
- [Representative Poetry Online](#). Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.

“Speech to the Troops at Tilbury”

- *Luminarium*. Anniina Jokinen. text and audio.
- “Queen Elizabeth I: Against the Spanish Armada, 1588.” *Modern History Sourcebook*. Paul Halsall. Fordham University.

Audio

“The Doubt of Future Foes”

- *Luminarium*. Anniina Jokinen. text and audio.

“Speech to the Troops at Tilbury”

- *Luminarium*. Anniina Jokinen. text and audio.

3.7 William Shakespeare (1564–1616)—The Plays

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Comprehend the significance of Renaissance drama in the history of the theater.
2. Understand Elizabethan era printing.

Just as the Elizabethan period is called a Golden Age in British history, the time period in which Shakespeare wrote, acted, and produced plays is a Golden Age of British, and even world, drama. Ironically, hard on the heels of this flowering of Elizabethan drama, the Puritans shut down the theatres in England during the English Civil War. Thus, a dearth of drama quickly followed the wealth of Shakespeare's time period.

None of Shakespeare's plays exists in manuscript format. Instead, Shakespeare's plays have come to us through early published copies, some of which were inaccurately recorded by actors or others who thought to profit by publishing their own copies of the popular plays. During the 16th century, copyrights as we know them didn't exist. The Stationers' Company, a city guild for printers and book sellers, controlled what was printed, thus providing a means of government censorship. The Folger Shakespeare Library provides a video explaining Renaissance printing techniques.

Many of the early publications were in **quarto**⁹, a sheet of paper folded into quarters, creating 4 leaves (8 pages). The British Library and The Shakespeare Quartos Archive provide digital images of all the plays published in quarto.

A **folio**¹⁰ was the same piece of paper folded in half, forming a larger sized book. In 1623, the **First Folio**¹¹, the first complete collection of Shakespeare's plays, was compiled and published by John Hemminge and Henry Condell, two of Shakespeare's fellow actors. Digital images of Shakespeare's First Folio are available

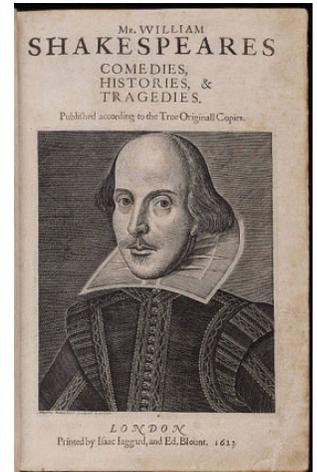
9. a sheet of paper folded into quarters, creating 4 leaves (8 pages)
10. a sheet of paper folded in half, forming a larger sized book
11. the first complete collection of Shakespeare's plays

from the [Folger Shakespeare Library](#), the [Perseus Digital Library](#), and from the [Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text and Image, Furness Collection](#).

Shakespeare's plays are generally divided into three categories: tragedies, comedies, and history plays, a division first seen in the *First Folio*. George Mason University's [Open Source Shakespeare](#) lists the plays by genre.

Text

- [The Complete Works of Shakespeare](#). Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- [Open Source Shakespeare: An Experiment in Literary Technology](#). George Mason University.
- [Project Gutenberg](#).



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Renaissance drama is a highlight in the history of the English theatre.
- The *First Folio*, compiled after Shakespeare's death, is the first complete collection of Shakespeare's plays.

EXERCISES

1. What are some ways in which the limitations of a 16th-century theatre, such as the Globe, would have affected the production of Shakespeare's plays?
2. What purposes did the Stationers' Company serve? How does it differ from modern copyright laws?
3. What difficulties would you imagine are encountered by modern editors because Shakespeare's original manuscripts do not exist?

Resources

Background

- “[London Book Trade](#).” Treasures in Full: Shakespeare in Quarto. British Library.
- [Multi-Media Tutorials](#). The English Renaissance in Context. Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text and Image. Furness Collection. University of Pennsylvania Library.
- [Open Source Shakespeare: An Experiment in Literary Technology](#). George Mason University. concordance, character search, keyword search, plays by genre, plays by date.
- “[Publishers, Players, and Planning](#).” Treasures in Full: Shakespeare in Quarto. British Library.
- “[Renaissance Printing 101](#).” Folger Shakespeare Library.
- [Treasures in Full: Shakespeare in Quarto](#). British Library.

Text

- [The Complete Works of Shakespeare](#). Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- [Open Shakespeare](#). Open Knowledge Foundation.
- [Open Source Shakespeare: An Experiment in Literary Technology](#). George Mason University.
- [Project Gutenberg](#).

First Folio and Quartos

- [First Folio](#). Perseus Digital Library. digital images of the *First Folio*.
- [First Folio](#). Rare Book Room. digital images of the *First Folio*.
- “[The First Folio of Shakespeare](#).” Folger Shakespeare Library. information about the *First Folio* and image of the title page.
- [The Horace Howard Furness Shakespeare Library](#). [First Folio](#). Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text and Image. The University of Pennsylvania Libraries.
- “[The Quartos of Shakespeare](#).” Rare Book Room. digital images of the quartos.
- [The Shakespeare Quartos Archive](#).
- [Treasures in Full: Shakespeare in Quarto](#). British Library. digital images of all of Shakespeare’s plays published in quarto.

Background Information on the Plays

- [“The Plays.”](#) Folger Shakespeare Library. Background information about each play and image of first page of quarto or folio publication.
- [“The World of Shakespeare: A Research Guide.”](#) J. Eugene Smith Library. Eastern Connecticut State University.

Audio

- [British Library. Selections from *I Henry IV*.](#)
- [Folger Director Gail Paster on the *First Folio*.](#) Folger Shakespeare Library.
- [LibriVox. selections from the poems and plays.](#)
- [Speak the Speech: Universal Shakespeare Broadcasting. audio of selected plays.](#)

Video

- [Folger Shakespeare Library YouTube channel.](#)
- [Shakespeare After All: The Later Plays.](#) Dr. Marjorie Garber. Harvard Open Learning Initiative.
- [Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre.](#) Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College.
- [Shakespeare’s *I Henry IV*: Henry Hotspur Percy.](#) Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College.

3.8 *I Henry IV*

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Categorize Shakespeare's *I Henry IV* as a history play.
2. Understand the actual history behind the conflicts portrayed in *I Henry IV*, recognize historical elements Shakespeare fictionalized, and explain the reasons for those changes.
3. Trace the development of the character of Prince Hal.
4. Analyze Shakespeare's use of structure to reflect character, including the evolving character of Prince Hal.
5. Identify major characters.

I Henry IV falls into the category of history plays. Elizabeth I was a direct descendent of Henry IV and Prince Hal (Henry V); therefore, the plays which glorified her ancestors were quite popular with the Queen and her court. Shakespeare apparently realized the advantages of taking dramatic liberties with historical facts, sometimes to improve the story and sometimes to please the Queen.

I Henry IV was entered in the Stationers' Register on February 25, 1598 and published in the First Quarto in 1598. Additional printings followed frequently, attesting to the popularity of the play.

The Folger Shakespeare Library presents a brief video introduction, *I Henry IV Insider's Guide*, which features actors for its production of the play discussing plot and character.

Plot

Shakespeare's basic historical plot was likely taken from Holinshed's *Chronicles*; however, Shakespeare took



dramatic liberties with the timing of events. In *I Henry IV*, Shakespeare presents the Percies' revolt in 1403, Archbishop Scroop's rebellion in 1405, and Northumberland's and the Welsh uprising in 1408 as if they occurred together in order to create a coherent plot. In another departure from historical fact, Shakespeare makes Hotspur the contemporary of Hal, thus allowing the audience to contrast the two. The historical Hotspur was closer in age to Hal's father.

Video Clip 5

Shakespeare's I Henry IV: Henry Hotspur Percy

[\(click to see video\)](#)

Shakespeare's history plays *Richard II*, *I Henry IV*, *II Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *Henry VI Parts I, II*, and *III*, and *Richard III*, present the dynastic struggles between two branches of the royal family known as the Wars of the Roses.

William Shakespeare and the Wars of the Roses

Throughout the last fifty years of the Middle Ages, England was embroiled in civil strife between two branches of the royal Plantagenet family, the Lancasters and the Yorks. Because the emblem of the Lancasters was the red rose and the emblem of the Yorks was the white rose, these battles were referred to as the Wars of the Roses. Although the Wars of the Roses are usually dated from around 1450 until 1485, the struggle stretched all the way back to the reign of Edward III which ended with his death in 1377 (during the time Chaucer was writing).



The tomb of Edward the Black Prince in Canterbury Cathedral.

The death of Edward III's oldest son, known as Edward the Black Prince, resulted in conflict between supporters of Richard (Edward III's grandson and Edward the Black Prince's son) and supporters of his third son John of Gaunt (Chaucer's patron) and his descendents (the house of Lancaster). Richard did become King Richard II, but died under mysterious circumstances while imprisoned by his cousin Henry who then became King Henry IV.

In the late 16th century, Shakespeare wrote a series of history plays which chronicled the Wars of the Roses:

<i>Edward III</i> (attributed to Shakespeare by some scholars)	1596
<i>Richard II</i>	1595
<i>Henry IV, Part 1</i>	1596–1597
<i>Henry IV, Part 2</i>	1597–1598

<i>Henry V</i>	1598–1599
<i>Henry VI, Part 1</i>	1590–1591
<i>Henry VI, Part 2</i>	1590–1591
<i>Henry VI, Part 3</i>	1591–1592
<i>Richard III</i>	1592–1593

Edward III

Edward III was a politically and militarily strong king who had 4 sons, all of whom had the strong personality and leadership abilities of their father. Had the oldest son, Edward the Black Prince, lived, the Wars of the Roses might never have taken place; the throne would without question have passed to Edward. Edward the Black Prince, however, died before his father, leaving his 10-year-old son Richard as his heir.

During the 14th century, a king still had to be a warrior to hold on to his throne; an important part of a king's job was holding territory against invaders. A boy-king was dependent on his "protectors" to fight his battles for him and to ward off usurpers until he could physically protect himself and his domain.

When King Edward III died, many people felt that the crown should pass not to his 10-year-old grandson Richard, but to one of his other sons, John Duke of Lancaster (red rose) or Edmund Duke of York (white rose). John and Edmund agreed! (Lionel, the second son, had also died, but his descendents were the Nevilles, who by marriage figured prominently in the future royal line.)

The battle for the crown had begun.

Richard II

The grandson Richard was crowned but proved to be a weak, unpopular king. His cousin Henry, son of John Duke of Lancaster, felt that he would be a much better king and that his father really should have been king anyway. Henry staged a rebellion against Richard, captured him, and Richard soon "died" in prison. Henry declared himself King Henry IV.

Henry IV

Henry IV was a strong king who put down 4 separate rebellions led by people who had supported Richard II.

Henry V

Henry V was one of the best of English kings. He recaptured parts of France and sealed the bargain by marrying Katherine, daughter of the French king. England probably could have peacefully united behind Henry V, ending the dynastic conflict. Unfortunately, Henry V died, leaving his infant son Henry as his heir.

Henry VI

Henry VI grew up to be a weak leader, a scholarly, religious man who really wanted to be a priest, not a king. He ignored affairs of state in favor of solitary study and worship. He lost all the lands in France won by his father, and his cousin, Richard Duke of York, soon started a military campaign to overthrow the Lancastrian King Henry VI. Richard and one of his sons were captured and executed by Henry's armies, their heads posted on stakes over Micklegate Bar in the city of York. The surviving sons Edward, George, and Richard continued their father's battle with the substantial help of another cousin, Richard Neville (known as Warwick the Kingmaker). Henry VI's troops were defeated, and he was imprisoned in the Tower of London where he "died" during Edward's reign.

Edward IV

With Henry VI in prison, Edward was crowned King Edward IV. He was a young, tall, handsome man with strong military and political skills, and the English people generally welcomed his leadership. Since Henry VI's only son Edmund (son of Margaret and husband of Anne Neville in *Richard III*) had been killed in battle, he had the strongest claim to the throne. Both his mother and his father were descendents of Edward III. But again, the death of the father before his sons were of age plunged the country into another war of the red rose of Lancaster and white rose of York. Before he died, Edward IV named his younger brother Richard "protector" of his heir.

Edward V

The 12-year-old son of Edward IV was never officially crowned but is referred to as Edward V. His uncle Richard had him taken to the Tower of London for security reasons, and young Edward V was never seen again. No one knows when or how he and his younger brother Richard died.

Richard III

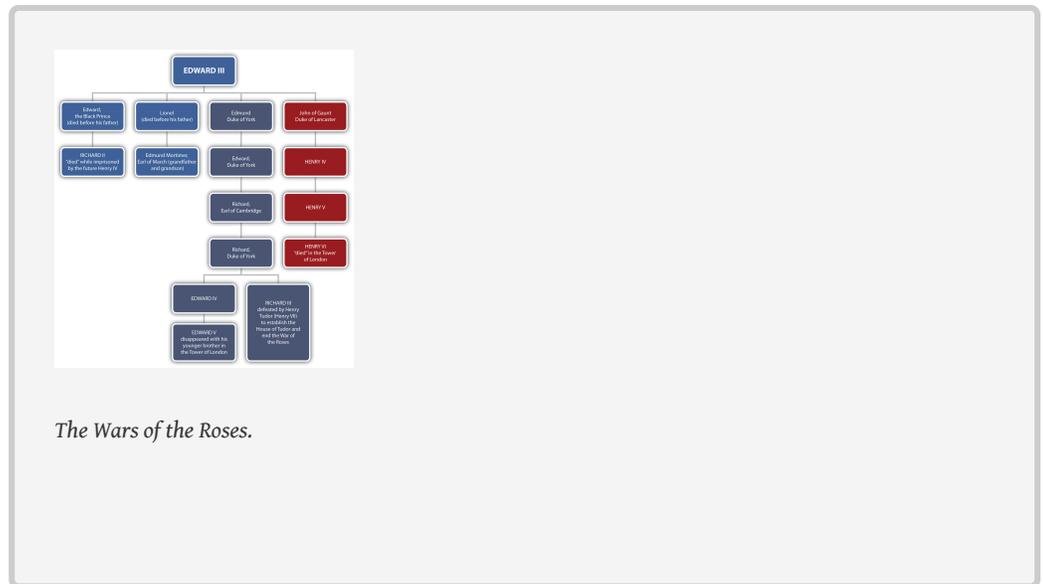
With all the Lancastrian claimants to the throne dead and all his older Yorkist brothers dead as well, Richard became king. He was soon challenged, however, by Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond. Henry Tudor had the weakest of claims to the throne. He was a descendent of John of Gaunt and his second wife (who had first been his mistress) and of the wife of Henry V and her second husband, Owen Tudor, a Welsh commoner.

Henry VII

Henry Tudor defeated Richard III in battle at Bosworth Field and was crowned King Henry VII. He married Elizabeth of York, daughter of Edward IV. With his Lancastrian blood and her Yorkist blood, their descendents thus united the two warring factions of the family and established the Tudor dynasty. Their son Henry VIII and his daughter Elizabeth I were two of England's strongest monarchs.

“The rose both white and rede

In one rose now doth growe”



Structure and Theme

Shakespeare’s use of a comic element, the character Falstaff and the subplot involving his exploits, as a central feature of the play is an important development in the history play as a dramatic form. Falstaff is a *miles gloriosus*¹²—the braggart soldier, a stock character in classical Roman comedy—and is often considered Shakespeare’s greatest comic character.



Statue of Falstaff in Stratford-upon-Avon.

12. the braggart soldier, a stock character in classical Roman comedy

Notice how the scenes in the play alternate between the court and the tavern, from the serious affairs of state to the practical jokes of the barroom. Also notice the alternating forms of the speeches. The regal, honorable characters' lines are written in verse; Falstaff and the tavern gang speak in prose, indicating their low status. Prince Hal is caught in the middle; he vacillates between his role as the royal prince and his role as an irresponsible jokester. The alternating tavern scenes and political-military scenes correspond with Hal the rogue and Hal the Prince. They also provide contrast between Hal and Hotspur (responsibility) and Hal and Falstaff (revelry). One of the major themes of the play is Hal's preparation to become king—his growing up.



Statue of Prince Hal in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Characters

The King's Entourage

- King Henry IV—reigning monarch (house of Lancaster); became king by overthrowing and killing his cousin Richard II; Bullingbrook (sometimes called Henry Bullingbrook or Bolingbroke because he was born in the town of Bolingbroke)
- Prince Hal—Henry, Prince of Wales; King Henry IV's oldest, wayward son and heir to the throne; sometimes called Henry Monmouth because Monmouth was his birthplace)
- Prince John of Lancaster—King Henry IV's younger son
- Earl of Westmoreland—King Henry's "gentle cousin"
- Sir Walter Blunt—King Henry's "dear, true, industrious friend"

The Percy Party

- Henry Percy—Earl of Northumberland; Hotspur's father
- Thomas Percy—Earl of Worcester; Hotspur's uncle
- Hotspur (Henry) Percy—son of Northumberland; Prince Hal's contemporary; held up by Henry IV as an example to Prince Hal
- Edmund Mortimer—Earl of March; Richard II's legal heir to the throne
- Archibald—Earl of Douglas; Scottish ally
- Owen Glendower—Welsh magician
- Sir Richard Vernon
- Richard Scroop—Archbishop of York
- Sir Michael—a friend of the Archbishop
- Lady Percy—Hotspur's wife and Mortimer's sister

- Lady Mortimer—Glendower’s daughter and Mortimer’s wife; speaks only Welsh

Prince Hal’s Tavern Gang

- Sir John Falstaff—the *miles gloriosus*; one of Shakespeare’s most famous characters
- Poins, Gadshill, Peto, Bardolph—friends of Falstaff and members of the tavern gang
- Mistress Quickly—hostess of the tavern frequented by Falstaff

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *I Henry IV* is based on historical events but has some deviation from actual history
- Falstaff, the *miles gloriosus*, is one of Shakespeare’s most famous comic characters
- The structure of the play’s lines echoes the theme of Prince Hal’s evolving character.

EXERCISES

1. At the beginning of the play, our opinion of Hotspur is quite high. He is described by King Henry IV as “the theme of honor’s tongue.” What are some of the details that establish this picture of Hotspur as the essence of honor and nobility?
2. As the play progresses, our picture of Hotspur begins to deteriorate. What are some of the details that gradually let us see Hotspur’s less-than-admirable qualities?
3. At the end of Act I, scene 2 is Hal’s famous soliloquy, a speech delivered when a character is alone on stage, used for the purpose of revealing the character’s thoughts or feelings. Explain Hal’s comparison of himself to the sun. Compare this reference to the sun with two others in the play: Act IV, scene 1, lines 94–102 and Act V, scene 1, lines 1–2.
4. In Act I, scene 2, Hal speaks in prose when he’s talking with Falstaff and the others at the tavern, but in his soliloquy his speech is in verse. What does the change in form of Hal’s speech suggest about Hal’s character?
5. In Act II, while his father and his younger brother are planning battles to preserve the throne and state, what is Hal planning? How do these plans contribute to our estimation of Hal?
6. In Act III, Hal finally must confront his father King Henry IV. The king makes a typical fatherly “when I was your age” speech to his son. How does Hal vow to redeem himself in his father’s eyes?
7. Does Hal prove himself worthy to be the heir to the throne? How?

3.9 *Much Ado About Nothing*

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Summarize themes found in *Much Ado About Nothing* and specific incidents in the plot which exemplify those themes.
2. Identify major characters.

Generally considered one of Shakespeare's greatest comedy plays, *Much Ado About Nothing* is ostensibly a play about two couples and the trials of their courtships: Benedick and Beatrice, Claudio and Hero. Within this witty and amusing portrayal of two troubled courtships, Shakespeare explores themes of deception, language, and loyalty and honor.

Theme of Deception

In the course of these courtships, the theme of deception figures prominently in both cases—in one case leading to clever repartee and an amusing “battle of the sexes,” in the other case leading to a serious accusation, broken trust, and, apparently, death.

As frequently occurs in Shakespeare's plays, a song provides a statement of an important theme: deception.

Sidebar 3.4.

Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,

Men were deceivers ever,

One foot in sea and one on shore,

To one thing constant never:

Then sigh not so, but let them go,

And be you blithe and bonny,

Converting all your sounds of woe

Into Hey nonny, nonny

As the play progresses, the audience begins to think that both Beatrice and Hero would have been better off had they heeded the advice of the song and let go of Benedick and Claudio.

Elements of deception in the play include the following:

- the song
- the masquerade—Deception is, after all, the purpose of a masquerade, and many deceptions occur in this scene: Don Pedro courts Hero for Claudio; Benedick hints at his feelings for Beatrice while pretending to be someone else; Beatrice spurns Benedick while supposedly thinking him someone else; Claudio pretends to be Benedick when Don John attempts to deceive him; Claudio, as a result of Don John's comments, believes Don Pedro has deceived him.
- “overheard” conversations for Benedick and Beatrice
- Don John's deception (Borachio's motivation=money; Don John's=jealousy)
- Margaret's deception

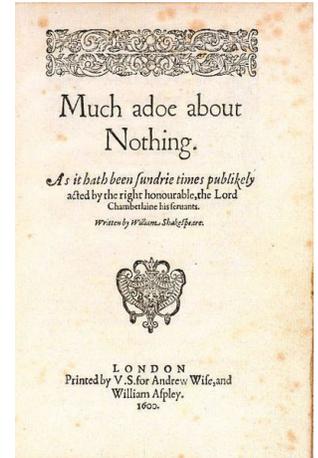
- Friar Francis' deception (Hero is dead plan)

Theme of Language

The word play and witty repartee between Benedick and Beatrice is a highlight of the play. Yet, it is Dogberry, with his mangled language, who acts nobly and solves the problem. The noble characters, with their courtly, clever language, deceive. Dogberry uncovers the truth.

Theme of Loyalty and Honor

Both couples must deal with conflicts between loyalty and honor. Claudio obviously places his honor above his loyalty to his bride when he is convinced of her infidelity and makes a public spectacle of Hero at their wedding. Benedick is torn between loyalty to his friend Claudio and honoring Beatrice's request to avenge Hero. The brothers, Don Pedro and Don John, seem to embody loyalty and honor and disloyalty and dishonor.



Characters

- Don Pedro—Prince of Aragon
- Don John—the bastard brother of Don Pedro and the main villain
- Benedick—a Lord of Padua; companion of Don Pedro
- Claudio—a Lord of Florence; companion of Don Pedro
- Balthasar—an attendant on Don Pedro
- Borachio and Conrade—followers of Don John
- Leonato—Governor of Messina
- Hero—Leonato's daughter
- Beatrice—Leonato's niece
- Antonio—brother of Leonato
- Margaret—gentlewoman attending Hero
- Ursula—gentlewoman attending Hero
- Friar Francis—a priest
- Dogberry—the constable of Messina's night watch
- Verges—Dogberry's partner
- A Sexton—the judge of the trial of Borachio
- The Watch—watchmen of Messina

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The plot of *Much Ado About Nothing* develops themes of deception, language, and loyalty and honor.
- The play ironically depicts noble characters who pride themselves on their wit and clever use of language falling into a web of deception while the clown Dogberry reveals truth.

EXERCISES

1. Identify examples of Dogberry's malapropisms, the often unintentional misuse of words, in place of similar sounding words, for humorous effect. For example, in Act III, Scene 5, Dogberry says to Leonato, "our watch, sir, have indeed comprehended two aspicious [auspicious] persons," confusing *apprehended* with *comprehended* and *suspicious* with *auspicious*.
2. In Act IV, scene 1, Claudio says, "O, what men dare do! what men may do! what men daily do, not knowing what they do!" Why is this statement ironic?
3. Why did Margaret not confess her part in the deception of Claudio, thus avoiding the conflict between Claudio and Hero?
4. In Act IV, scene 2, Dogberry asks, "Is our whole dissembly appeared?" Why is this malapropism particularly appropriate?
5. How would you judge the effectiveness of Friar Francis's plan?

3.10 *Twelfth Night*

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Describe typical Twelfth Night traditions of Elizabethan England, and examine how they pertain to the plot of *Twelfth Night*.
2. Identify major characters.

Twelfth Night is considered one of Shakespeare’s last three great comedies (*Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*) before he moved into the next stage of his writing career—the stage that produced his great tragedies. *Twelfth Night* was first performed in the Middle Temple Hall in London in 1602.

The Significance of the Play’s Title

Twelfth Night is the eve of the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6; it marks the end of the Christmas festivities and celebrates the arrival of the Magi to see the Christ Child. Although contemporary American society generally celebrates leading up to Christmas Day, older societies began their celebrations on Christmas Day and the festivities lasted through the twelve days of Christmas (hence the song) until January 6. This is the custom evident in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as the author states that it is “Christmastide” (line 37) and later states that it is the day after New Year’s Day (line 60).



Middle Temple Hall, London.

Traditional Twelfth Night festivities in Elizabethan England would include masquerades and the crowning of a “king of misrule,” usually a servant boy of the lowest station. Role-reversals (nobility acting as servants and servants pretending to be nobility) and the crossing of usually strict social class distinctions were common activities during a Twelfth Night celebration. Western civilization is full of examples of festivities Christian in their origin which

through time became excuses for drinking, feasting, and decidedly un-religious behavior (for example, think of modern Mardi Gras and Carnivale celebrations).

The title of the play, then, is appropriate even though the action does not take place on or near the Twelfth Night holiday. It refers instead to the traditions of the holiday which form the basis for the plot devices that result in a rollicking comic misadventure.

Twelfth Night is the only play to which Shakespeare gave a sub-title, *What You Will*. Many scholars interpret the sub-title as an off-hand, casual way of saying, “Call the play whatever you wish.” According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, during the 16th century, the word *will* could also mean “carnal desire or appetite.” Some scholars, therefore, think the title refers to the sudden passions that many of the characters (Olivia, Orsino, Antonio, Malvolio, Viola, Sebastian) experience. One particularly inappropriate aspect of these romantic attractions that would be quite obvious to a Shakespearean audience, though less so to a modern audience, is the crossing of social class lines. Sir Toby marries a serving woman (a gentlewoman though not a noblewoman); Olivia falls in love with a page; Malvolio longs to marry a noblewoman and thus become a member of the nobility himself. The rigid Elizabethan social order might be turned upside down in *Twelfth Night* celebrations, but not in the everyday world. By the end of the play, most of these indiscretions are corrected: Olivia learns that she is married to the nobleman Sebastian; Orsino is in love with the noblewoman Viola; and Malvolio has been punished for his audacity in aspiring to marry above his station.

The Plot

In writing *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare relied on plot devices which were standard in Elizabethan comedy and which he had used himself in other plays. Women disguised as men, for example, was a common occurrence, and one which was used to particular comic effect in Shakespeare’s time when women were not allowed on stage. Men played the women’s parts, so the audience would see a man playing a woman playing a man. Shakespeare also used separated twins and mistaken identities in other plays.

The Setting

Critic Harold C. Goddard, among others, points out the similarity of the name of the play’s setting, Illyria, with the name Elysium, the mythological paradise, and claims that Illyria is a type of “counterfeit Elysium, a fool’s paradise” (*The Meaning of Shakespeare*, Vol. 1. University of Chicago Press, 1951). In the spirit of *Twelfth Night* revels, normal social order is discarded in Illyria and things are not always what

they seem. Perhaps Shakespeare suggests that Viola and Sebastian have entered a mythological, slightly unreal world after their “drowning” at sea.

The Characters

- Orsino—Duke of Illyria
- Sebastian—a young nobleman, brother to Viola
- Antonio—a sea captain, friend to Sebastian
- A Sea Captain—friend to Viola
- Valentine—gentleman attending on the Duke
- Curio—gentleman attending on the Duke
- Sir Toby Belch—uncle of Olivia
- Sir Andrew Aguecheek—friend of Sir Toby Belch; Olivia’s suitor
- Malvolio—Steward to Olivia
- Fabian—servant to Olivia
- Feste—servant to Olivia
- Olivia—a rich Countess
- Viola—young noblewoman, sister to Sebastian
- Maria—Olivia’s attendant

KEY TAKEAWAY

- The traditions of Twelfth Night celebrations form the foundation for many of the plot devices in *Twelfth Night*, such as adopting false identities and role reversals among the social classes.

EXERCISES

1. Although the play never refers to the holiday of Twelfth Night and apparently does not take place on Twelfth Night, why is it an appropriate title?
2. List the characters that experience sudden passions and the objects of those passions.
3. As you read the play, compile a list of all the characters who assume a “mask,” an alternate persona.
4. One of the more memorable characters in this play is Feste. Like many of Shakespeare’s fools, Feste often offers serious comments on life. Point out some of his philosophical observations on time and on role-reversal.
5. The sub-plot involving Malvolio lends much of the comic effect to the play. Do you think Malvolio is more attracted to Olivia or to the idea of becoming, through marriage, a nobleman? Does the trick played on Malvolio seem deserved, or do you think it is too harsh?
6. How satisfying is the end of the play? Do you think everyone “lives happily ever after”?

Chapter 4

The Early 17th Century

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

4.1 The Early Seventeenth Century

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Comprehend the political and religious turmoil that influenced the literature of the early 17th century.
2. Identify the contributions of Shakespeare and the King James Bible to early modern English, the language of the 17th century.
3. Define and compare metaphysical poetry and cavalier poetry.
4. Recognize the effects of the Puritan movement on drama and the theatre.

Political and Religious Controversy

In the sixteenth-century Tudor era, the religious turmoil that characterized the English Reformation under Henry VIII and continued, particularly during the reign of his daughter Queen Mary I, ameliorated during the reign of Elizabeth I. James I of England and VI of Scotland succeeded the childless Elizabeth, initiating the Stuart line of rulers. England's religious struggles continued into the Stuart era, within forty years culminating in the English Civil War.

Only two years after James I came to the throne in 1603, Catholic activists attempted to assassinate him in what came to be known as the Gunpowder Plot. Barrels of gunpowder were planted underneath the Houses of Parliament and were set to be detonated while James I was present to open Parliament's session. The goal was to kill the King and most if not all the Lords, thus throwing England into chaos and allowing an opportunity to establish a Catholic realm. However, the plan was discovered and the gun powder found, guarded by Guy Fawkes. The BBC presents a brief computer-generated video that portrays the history of the Gunpowder Plot.

When Charles I succeeded his father James I as king, he continued the objectionable policies of his father and, in fact, worsened the religious controversy by marrying a Roman Catholic French princess. Charles I himself favored the more formal services of the Anglican church angering those who wanted to “purify“ the Church of England. Thus he managed to alienate all religious factions—Catholic, Anglican, and Puritan.



Van Dyck's portrait of Charles I.

The controversies that led to the English Civil War were both political and religious. In the political realm, James I and his successor Charles I insisted on the divine right of kings—the belief that kings were chosen by God and answered to no one but God, a theory that included the monarch's right to rule without parliamentary intervention. On the religious front, in addition to the continuing strife between Protestant and Roman Catholic were added the additional demands of Protestant reformers who demanded reforms within the Church of England and the right to worship as dissenting organized religions. Against the monarch's belief in the divine right of kings stood the growing conviction that Parliament should have greater influence on governmental decisions.

The Puritan Revolution (The English Civil War)

Member of Parliament Oliver Cromwell distinguished himself as a radical Puritan, organized and led a cavalry regiment of Parliament forces, and quickly rose to the leadership of the Puritan Revolution. Cromwell, a leading force in convincing Parliament to raise an army against the king, led the movement to execute Charles I.

In 1649, Charles I was **executed**. Parliament's House of Commons abolished the monarchy and the House of Lords, declaring England a Commonwealth. A few years later, Oliver Cromwell was named Lord Protector. The years between 1649 and 1660 were known as the **Interregnum**—literally meaning the time between kings. Upon Cromwell's death, although Cromwell's son assumed his father's government position, the Commonwealth began to crumble under the son's inept leadership. In 1660, Charles II, son of the executed king, assumed the throne and Britain's monarchy was restored.



Statue of Oliver Cromwell outside the British Houses of Parliament.

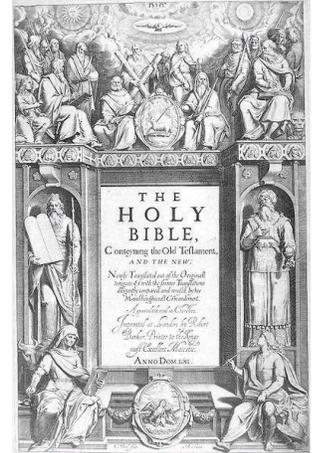
Language

The early seventeenth century is considered the era of early modern English. Although contemporary audiences may consider the language of Shakespeare and the **King James Bible** quite different from 21st-century English, comparing the English of the seventeenth century with Chaucer's Middle English reveals a vocabulary and a grammar familiar to contemporary readers. Both the works of Shakespeare and the publication of the King James Bible in 1611 helped standardize the language while at the same time enriching it with increased vocabulary and phrases now familiar to most English speakers. In her *Words in English* website, Suzanne Kemmer provides lists of words and phrases, now common in English, that originated with **Shakespeare** and the **King James Bible**. King James I authorized a committee of about 50 clergy/scholars to create a new English translation of the Bible, accessible to all lay people. The resulting translation was dedicated to King James I and is still commonly known by his name. The British Library presents a brief history of the **King James Bible** and digital images of a first edition. The *Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text & Image*, University of Pennsylvania Libraries provides an **interactive digital version** of a 1611 King James Bible.

Literature

The Metaphysical Poets

Eighteenth-century writer Samuel Johnson first used the term *metaphysical poets* to refer to John Donne, Andrew Marvell, and other early 17th-century poets whose poetry was characterized by elaborate, unusual metaphors and philosophical speculations. The term **metaphysical**¹ refers to ideas beyond the physical, to ideas that pertain to a world beyond the natural world. Metaphysical poetry often is contrasted with cavalier poetry.



Title page of 1611 King James Bible.

The Cavalier Poets

The name *cavalier*², which literally means knight, described the followers of Charles I, the gentlemen soldiers who supported the monarchy during the English Civil War. The Cavalier poets wrote light-hearted poetry that seldom had the depth of philosophical thought evident in metaphysical poetry. Often, as in the case of Herrick's "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time," the poetry was seduction poetry, concerned with the physical pleasures of life.

Drama and the Theatre

Although Shakespeare continued writing plays through the first decade of the 17th century and renamed his company of actors The King's Men in honor of King James I, the early part of the 17th century is not noted for its drama. Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, and other playwrights wrote for the stage, although like Shakespeare they are often considered to belong to the Elizabethan Age. Under Puritan influence, drama and the theaters declined until in 1642 Parliament shut down the theaters completely.

1. ideas beyond the physical; ideas that pertain to a world beyond the natural world
2. literally means knight; used to describe the followers of Charles I, the gentlemen soldiers who supported the monarchy during the English Civil War

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The political and religious turmoil of the 17th century influenced the literature of the era in the same way that such struggles affected Renaissance literature.
- The work of Shakespeare and the writing of the King James Bible influenced early modern English.
- Metaphysical poetry and cavalier poetry are significant movements in early 17th-century poetry.
- The Puritan government closed theatres in 1642, resulting in a dearth of English drama.

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Metaphysical Poetry

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4.2 John Donne (1572–1631)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. List characteristics of metaphysical poetry and apply them to the poetry of John Donne.
2. Define metaphysical conceit, paradox, apostrophe, and allusion, and identify examples in Donne's poetry.

Biography

Born into a Catholic family at a time when it was illegal to openly practice the Roman Catholic faith, **John Donne** is the chief figure in a group that has come to be known as the Metaphysical Poets. Donne held a series of clerical positions and enjoyed a prosperous life until he secretly married a relative of his employer. Fired from his position and imprisoned, Donne pleaded with his father-in-law not to punish him and his new wife, but to no avail. Because of his father-in-law's influence and because of his Catholic background, Donne and his wife lived in poverty for many years until reconciled with his father-in-law.

Donne began to question his faith after his brother died while in prison for harboring a Roman Catholic priest, and he continued his struggle with his religious beliefs until he renounced his Roman Catholic faith. Two works in which Donne denounced Roman Catholicism caught the attention of King James I. Donne became an Anglican clergyman at the King's insistence, later becoming the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, a prestigious and well-paying position, but one in which Donne was never completely comfortable.



Video Clip 1

John Donne

Donne's effigy in St. Paul's Cathedral.

[\(click to see video\)](#)

Also go to 1630s in the British Library's [English Language and Literature Timeline](#) to read about John Donne.

Characteristics of Metaphysical Poetry

As previously noted, John Donne is the most noted member of a group of poets known as the **Metaphysical Poets**³, poets whose work explores subjects beyond the physical world, including emotional and spiritual matters. They were not recognized as a group or given that name until Samuel Johnson applied it to them in the 18th century. Their poetry shares the following characteristics:

- abrupt, dramatic openings, often with a vivid image or an exclamation
- an argumentative construction
- an introspective quality; an element of self-analysis
- use of the **metaphysical conceit**⁴, an unusual, elaborate, and unexpected comparison. For example, in his poem "[The Bait](#)" the speaker compares the woman he loves to fish bait. (We might expect a comparison to a rose or a beautiful summer's day but not to fish bait.)
- use of literary devices
 - **paradox**⁵—an apparently self-contradictory statement
 - **apostrophe**⁶—an address to an inanimate object or abstract quality, for example speaking to the moon or to death
 - **allusion**⁷—a reference to something from history, literature, or any other field that the writer assumes the reader will know; for example, when Donne refers to those destroyed by "the flood," he assumes the reader will recognize the biblical allusion to Noah's flood

3. poets whose work explores subjects beyond the physical world, including spiritual matters

4. an unusual, elaborate, and unexpected comparison

5. an apparently self-contradictory statement

6. an address to an inanimate object or abstract quality, for example speaking to the moon or to death

7. a reference to something from history, literature, or any other field that the writer assumes the reader will know

“A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”

AS virtuous men pass mildly away,	
And whisper to their souls to go,	
Whilst some of their sad friends do say,	
“Now his breath goes,” and some say, “No.”	
So let us melt, and make no noise,	5
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move ;	
‘Twere profanation of our joys	
To tell the laity our love.	
Moving of th’ earth brings harms and fears ;	
Men reckon what it did, and meant ;	10
But trepidation of the spheres,	
Though greater far, is innocent.	
Dull sublunary lovers’ love	
—Whose soul is sense—cannot admit	
Of absence, ‘cause it doth remove	15
The thing which elemented it.	
But we by a love so much refined,	
That ourselves know not what it is,	
Inter-assurèd of the mind,	
Care less, eyes, lips and hands to miss.	20
Our two souls therefore, which are one,	
Though I must go, endure not yet	
A breach, but an expansion,	
Like gold to aery thinness beat.	

If they be two, they are two so	25
As stiff twin compasses are two ;	
Thy soul, the fix'd foot, makes no show	
To move, but doth, if th' other do.	
And though it in the centre sit,	
Yet, when the other far doth roam,	30
It leans, and hearkens after it,	
And grows erect, as that comes home.	
Such wilt thou be to me, who must,	
Like th' other foot, obliquely run ;	
Thy firmness makes my circle just,	35
And makes me end where I begun.	

According to tradition, this poem has an autobiographical significance: that Donne wrote the poem to comfort his wife when he was planning to be away on a business trip for an extended time.

The word *valediction* means farewell. It shares the same Latin root as the term *valedictorian*, the person who traditionally gives a “farewell to high school” speech at graduation ceremonies. The title states that this is a farewell that forbids mourning—that the speaker does not want his beloved to mourn when he leaves.

The poem begins with a vivid image: a virtuous man dying so peacefully that the friends gathered around his bed aren’t sure when his breath ceases.

The entire poem is a series of images describing the lovers’ parting:

- In stanza two the lovers part as silently and gently as ice melts; the speaker states there will be no floods of tears or storms of sighing; the sanctity of their love is compared to religious devotion which “laity” (those who don’t have the same degree of sanctified love) do not understand.

- Stanza three pictures the fear caused by earthquakes. Then the speaker notes that the movement of the planets (“trepidation of the spheres”) is a far larger, more significant movement, but no one pays attention to the movement of the earth on its axis or around the sun. By implication, the speaker compares the significance of their parting to the movement of the planets but also wants their leave taking to be as calm.
- Stanza four compares the couple to “sublunary” lovers. *Sublunary* (sub-lunar) means beneath the moon, suggesting normal, everyday lovers rather than those like the speaker and his beloved who have an elevated, sanctified level of love. Sublunary love can’t withstand parting.
- In stanza five, the speaker claims that sublunary love depends on physical presence. His love, however, is not just a physical passion and therefore does not depend on “eyes, lips, and hands” to exist.
- Stanza six begins with a biblical allusion, a reference to the biblical statement that in marriage, two become one. Even though the speaker is leaving, the bond of their souls will not be broken; instead it will expand as gold can be stretched so thinly that it becomes translucent. Comparing their love to gold also suggests a high value, compressing more meaning into the stanza by using an image rather than a direct statement.
- The last three stanzas include one of the most famous of metaphysical conceits. The speaker compares the couple’s two souls to the two legs of a drafting compass. The speaker compares himself to the leg of the compass that moves to draw a circle and the wife to the stationary leg in the middle that brings the other leg back to the same spot where it began, thus suggesting that the speaker will return home.



*God as Architect medieval image
of a compass.*

Holy Sonnets

“Holy Sonnet V”

I am a little world made cunningly
Of elements, and an angelic sprite ;
But black sin hath betray'd to endless night
My world's both parts, and, O, both parts must die.
You which beyond that heaven which was most high
Have found new spheres, and of new land can write,
Pour new seas in mine eyes, that so I might
Drown my world with my weeping earnestly,
Or wash it if it must be drown'd no more.
But O, it must be burnt ; alas ! the fire
Of lust and envy burnt it heretofore,
And made it fouler ; let their flames retire,
And burn me, O Lord, with a fiery zeal
Of Thee and Thy house, which doth in eating heal.

In the first two lines, the speaker compares himself to a “little world” made of the physical (“elements”) and the spiritual (“sprite”). Both parts, however, have been

betrayed by sin, and the speaker will therefore die both physically and spiritually. In line 5, the speaker addresses God, asking him to pour “seas” of tears into his eyes that will drown or wash away his sin. In the last six lines, the speaker, addressing God, suggests an alternative to washing away his sin: to burn his sin away. The fires of lust and envy made his soul dirty, as smoke and flames leave stains, but paradoxically God’s fire will cleanse and heal his soul.

“Holy Sonnet VII”

At the round earth’s imagined corners blow
Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go ;
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o’erthrow,
All whom war, dea[r]th, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despair, law, chance hath slain, and you, whose eyes
Shall behold God, and never taste death’s woe.
But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space ;
For, if above all these my sins abound,
‘Tis late to ask abundance of Thy grace,
When we are there. Here on this lowly ground,
Teach me how to repent, for that’s as good
As if Thou hadst seal’d my pardon with Thy blood.

This sonnet begins with a biblical image, angels blowing their trumpets at the four corners of the world to announce the last judgment. The speaker pictures the souls of the dead throughout the ages rising and returning to their bodies. In the next four lines, the speaker recounts numerous ways in which these souls may have met

their death: flood, fire, war, dearth (famine), age, sickness, tyrants (executions by tyrants), despair (a word which in the 16th and 17th centuries suggested suicide), law (executions ordered by the legal courts), and chance (accidents). Line 7 addresses one last group of people who will hear the trumpets: those who are still alive, whose “eyes shall behold God” even though they have never experienced death. In the last six lines, the speaker asks God to let the dead sleep awhile longer. His reason for this request is that he needs time to repent.

“Holy Sonnet X”

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so ;
For those, whom thou think’st thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy picture[s] be,
Much pleasure, then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul’s delivery.
Thou’rt slave to Fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy, or charms can make us sleep as well,
And better than thy stroke ; why swell’st thou then ?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And Death shall be no more ; Death, thou shalt die.

Perhaps the most well-known of the *Holy Sonnets*, “Holy Sonnet X” begins with a statement to death personified, a forceful statement ordering death not to be proud. The speaker continues to address death, claiming that those death thinks it has conquered have not really died. Death, the speaker asserts, is subject to a list of

causes: fate, chance, kings, suicide, poison, war, and sickness. In the last two lines, the speaker makes his final statement of victory over death. In line 2—“for thou art not so”—and in the final sentence—“Death, thou shalt die” the use of one-syllable words emphasizes the power of the words with an accent on each word.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- John Donne is the chief figure of the Metaphysical Poets.
- Metaphysical poetry is characterized by dramatic openings, argumentative construction, self-analysis, metaphysical conceits, and literary devices such as paradox, apostrophe, and allusion.

EXERCISES

1. The titles of metaphysical poems are often important indications of the content and main idea of the poem. What is a valediction? What does the title reveal about the attitude the speaker has toward his leave-taking?
2. John Donne’s poem “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning,” like most metaphysical poems, is a series of comparisons (metaphysical conceits). The poem begins with an image—a comparison—as signaled by the word “As.” Assuming the biographical interpretation—that the speaker of the poem is addressing his wife—to what does the speaker compare their leave-taking?
3. Why, according to stanza 4, does physical absence destroy some people’s love? How is this different from the speaker’s love (stanza 5)? Which type of love do you think was portrayed in Sidney’s sonnets?
4. Unlike the usual Elizabethan sonnet sequences about human love, Donne’s *Holy Sonnets* trace his spiritual relationship with God. How would you describe the relationship in each of the sonnets discussed?
5. Identify each of the *Holy Sonnets* discussed as English or Italian. What characteristics of structure and content affect your classification?
6. Review the list of characteristics of metaphysical poetry. Identify characteristics in each of the sonnets discussed.

Resources

Biography

- [John Donne 1572–1631](#). Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.
- [“John Donne’s Marriage Letters.”](#) Folger Shakespeare Library.

Texts

- “[Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions](#).” *Project Gutenberg*.
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- “[John Donne Sermons](#).” Brigham Young University. Harold B. Lee Library.
- “[Selected Poetry of John Donne \(1572–1631\)](#).” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “[The Works of John Donne](#).” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.

Audio

- “[Death Be Not Proud](#).” *Project Gutenberg*.
- “[The Holy Sonnets](#).” *Books Should Be Free*.
- “[John Donne](#).” *LibriVox*.
- “[The Metaphysical Poets](#).” BBC Radio 4 Programmes. In Our Time. recording of panel of British university professors discussing metaphysical poetry.
- “[The Works of John Donne](#).” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*. audio of selected works.

Metaphysical Poetry

- “[1633 John Donne Poetry](#).” *English Language & Literature Timeline*. British Library.

Video

- “[John Donne](#).” Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College.

4.3 Andrew Marvell (1621–1678)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Analyze characteristics of metaphysical poetry in the works of Andrew Marvell.
2. Recognize the effects of the English Civil War on Marvell's production of literature.
3. Explain the *carpe diem* philosophy as seen in "To His Coy Mistress."

Biography

The son of a clergyman, Andrew Marvell was educated at Cambridge University. After working as a tutor and traveling extensively, Marvell served with John Milton in government posts and may have been instrumental in helping Milton avoid severe punishment, even a death sentence, after the Restoration. Marvell was, for a time, a supporter of King Charles I, but he then changed his allegiance to Oliver Cromwell and the commonwealth government. During the Interregnum, Marvell was elected as a Member of Parliament representing his hometown of Hull. He wrote several poems praising Oliver Cromwell and, after the Restoration, works critical of the court of Charles II even though his earlier work honored the reign of Charles I.

“To His Coy Mistress”

Andrew Marvell is considered one of the metaphysical poets. Like John Donne, he wrote poems that relied on metaphysical conceits, the witty, elaborate comparisons that characterize metaphysical poetry. Also like Donne, many of his poems debate spiritual issues and the transitory nature of life. Even the poem that is probably Marvell’s best known, “To His Coy Mistress,” soon turns from seduction to metaphysical speculation. The poem is a seduction poem and a statement of *carpe diem*⁸, a Latin phrase translated as “seize the day.” The *carpe diem* philosophy encourages living life to the fullest in the present moment—the “eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die” outlook on life.



Statue of Andrew Marvell in Trinity Square in Marvell’s hometown of Hull, England—Trinity Square is bordered on one side by Trinity Church where Marvell’s father was a clergyman and on another side by the 16th-century building where Marvell attended grammar school.

8. a Latin phrase translated as “seize the day”

“To His Coy Mistress”

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.	
My vegetable love should grow	
Vaster than empires, and more slow.	
An hundred years should go to praise	
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;	
Two hundred to adore each breast,	
But thirty thousand to the rest;	
An age at least to every part,	
And the last age should show your heart.	
For, lady, you deserve this state,	
Nor would I love at lower rate.	
But at my back I always hear	
Time's winged chariot hurrying near;	22
And yonder all before us lie	
Deserts of vast eternity.	
Thy beauty shall no more be found,	25
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound	

My echoing song; then worms shall try	
That long preserv'd virginity,	
And your quaint honour turn to dust,	29
And into ashes all my lust.	
The grave's a fine and private place,	
But none I think do there embrace.	
Now therefore, while the youthful hue	
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,	
And while thy willing soul transpires	
At every pore with instant fires,	36
Now let us sport us while we may;	
And now, like am'rous birds of prey,	
Rather at once our time devour,	
Than languish in his slow-chapp'd power.	
Let us roll all our strength, and all	
Our sweetness, up into one ball;	
And tear our pleasures with rough strife	
Thorough the iron gates of life.	
Thus, though we cannot make our sun	
Stand still, yet we will make him run.	



Marvell's poem urges a young woman to give in to love-making while she is young and desirable. The speaker of this poem begins his persuasive speech by telling her that her coyness would be acceptable if the couple had unlimited time. But he emphasizes the passing of time with the well-known image of "time's winged chariot hurrying near" (line 22). He pictures the young woman in her tomb where she will no longer be beautiful (line 25) and where her "quaint honor" will "turn to dust" (29). The third and last stanza begins with the word "now," emphasizing the need to enjoy life's physical pleasures before death steals them. Now, while she is beautiful and their youthful passions spring into "instant fires" (36), they should consume their time by making full use of it while they have time and youth. The speaker, in the final couplet, notes that while they cannot make time ("our sun") stand still, they can race against time by using their time to the utmost. Also suggested is the familiar idea that time flies when a person is enjoying him/herself, indicating that the sun will run quickly through the day if they are engaged in the pleasurable physical activity the speaker advocates.

William Holman Hunt *The Hireling Shepherd*.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Andrew Marvell is a metaphysical poet whose poetry displays the typical characteristics of metaphysical poetry.
- Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" exemplifies the *carpe diem* tradition.

EXERCISES

1. Review the list of characteristics of metaphysical poetry in the section on John Donne. What examples of those characteristics do you find in "To His Coy Mistress"?
2. This poem is a seduction poem, an attempt by the speaker to persuade a young woman to make love with him. What arguments does he use to try to persuade her?
3. How convincing do you consider his argument?

Resources

Biography

- “[Andrew Marvell \(1621–1678\)](#).” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.
- “[Andrew Marvell](#).” *Poets.org*. Academy of American Poets.
- “[Andrew Marvell](#).” rpt. from *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature in 18 Volumes (1907–21)*. Volume VII. Cavalier and Puritan. *Bartleby.com*.
- “[Andrew Marvell: Chronology of Important Dates](#).” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.

Text

- “[To His Coy Mistress](#).” Annotations by Dr. K. Wheeler. Carson-Newman College.
- “[To His Coy Mistress](#).” Commentary by Michael Weiser. Thomas Nelson Community College.
- “[To His Coy Mistress](#).” “Marvell, Andrew. Miscellaneous Poems.” *Electronic Text Center*. University of Virginia Library.
- “[To His Coy Mistress](#).” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “[The Works of Andrew Marvell](#).” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.

Audio

- “[To His Coy Mistress](#).” *Project Gutenberg*.
- “[To His Coy Mistress](#).” *LibriVox*.

4.4 Robert Herrick (1591–1674)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify Robert Herrick as a cavalier poet.
2. Recognize the *carpe diem* tradition in Herrick's "To the Virgins."

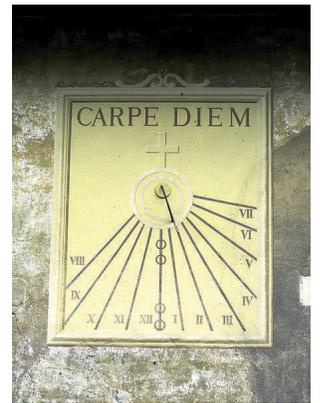
Biography

Robert Herrick is considered a cavalier poet, one of the followers of Charles I. In fact, coming from a middle class background, he enjoyed the patronage of several noblemen and was thus welcomed into court gatherings. As was common in England since the time of Chaucer, poets circulated their poetry in manuscript form for the amusement of the court. Poems written in honor of a specific nobleman or at the request of a nobleman as a memorial for a special occasion were often rewarded monetarily. Herrick's poetry not only provided him with needed income from his patrons, it also made him a part of the courtly social and literary circles. After becoming an Anglican clergyman, Herrick served as chaplain to a high-ranking courtier. Soon after, however, King Charles I appointed him vicar of a church in Exeter, far from the social and literary life Herrick loved in London. After the execution of Charles I, Herrick lost his position as vicar under Cromwell's rule and returned to London where he concentrated on publishing his poems. When Charles II was restored to the throne, Herrick's job was also restored, and he spent the rest of his life as a vicar in Exeter.

“To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time”



ROBERT HERRICK



Sundial on the side of a building
in Yvoire, Haute-Savoie, France.

aewolf from Denver. [Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license](#)

To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,

Old time is still a-flying :

And this same flower that smiles to-day

To-morrow will be dying.

The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,

The higher he's a-getting,

The sooner will his race be run,

And nearer he's to setting.

That age is best which is the first,

When youth and blood are warmer;

But being spent, the worse, and worst

Times still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time,

And while ye may go marry :

For having lost but once your prime

You may for ever tarry.

As is typical of the Cavalier Poets, Herrick expresses the *carpe diem*, seize the day, philosophy in this poem, the philosophy that life is to be lived for today because tomorrow is uncertain. Unlike Marvell's seduction poem, this poem specifically encourages young women to marry, not simply to engage in sexual activity for pleasure's sake.



John William Waterhouse
"Gather ye rose-buds, while ye may."

Herrick's poem begins with the well-known lines, "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may, / Old time is still a-flying." These lines embody the *carpe diem* philosophy: young women should make the most of their youth and loveliness because it won't last long. Herrick emphasizes the transitory nature of youth and beauty as he compares the young women to flowers which bloom one day and wilt the next (lines 3–4). Noting that youth is the best age (lines 9–10), Herrick in the final stanza again urges the virgins to marry while they are young and desirable.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Robert Herrick is an example of a cavalier poet.
- Herrick's "To the Virgins" exemplifies the *carpe diem* tradition.

EXERCISES

1. In the first stanza, the speaker directly addresses the young maidens, urging them to “gather [their] rosebuds” while they can and to be aware of time passing. The speaker is obviously referring to more than literally picking flowers. What does the admonition to gather rosebuds represent?
2. What does the flower of line 3 represent?
3. The second stanza pictures the sun racing across the sky to set at the end of the day. What does the passage of the day represent? How would you compare this use of sun imagery with that in Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress”?
4. The speaker claims that youth, the “first” part of a person’s life is the best because “youth and blood are warmer.” What does the speaker suggest with the reference to warm blood?
5. What does the word *coy* mean in the last stanza? How would you compare Herrick’s use of the word *coy* with Marvell’s use of the word in “To His Coy Mistress”? What is the significance, in both poems, of young women being referred to as *coy*?
6. What warning does the speaker have for the virgins in the last stanza?
7. Compare and contrast how this poem and Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress” depict the *carpe diem* philosophy.

Resources

Biography

- “[Life of Herrick](#).” rpt. from Robert Herrick. *The Works of Robert Herrick*. Vol. I. Alfred W. Pollard, Ed. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1891. xv–xxvi.
- “[Robert Herrick](#).” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.
- “[Robert Herrick](#).” *Poets.org*. Academy of American Poets.

Text

- “[To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time](#).” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.
- “[To Virgins, to Make Much of Time](#).” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “[To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time](#).” *A Selection from the Lyrical Poems of Robert Herrick*. Francis Turner Palgrave, editor.

Audio

- ["To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time."](#) *LoudLit.org*. Performer Argos MacCallum. Audio Engineer Warren Smith.
- ["To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time."](#) Short Poetry Collection 019. *LibriVox*.

4.5 John Milton (1608–1674)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recount how the Puritan Revolution affected Milton's literary career.
2. List the types of literature Milton wrote and provide examples.
3. Define epic and identify the characteristics and conventions of an epic.
4. Apply the definition of epic to Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

Biography

Born into a financially prosperous middle class family, John Milton was well educated, receiving degrees from Cambridge University. After completing his MA with honors, Milton moved to his father's home where he spent several years in private study and writing. He also, like most well-to-do young men, undertook an extended trip to the continent, returning to England when civil war seemed imminent.

Referred to as the great Puritan poet, Milton found his fortunes went up and down with the rise and fall of Cromwell's commonwealth. He accepted a government post as a translator under the commonwealth government, writing treatises supporting republicanism and Oliver Cromwell. During this period, Milton lost his vision and was forced to continue his writing by dictating to assistants, including poet Andrew Marvell. Following the Restoration, a warrant was issued for Milton's arrest because of his support of Cromwell and the commonwealth government. Milton was arrested and imprisoned for a time until friends, again including poet Andrew Marvell, intervened and won his release, possibly saving Milton from execution. Milton retired to a small cottage in Chalfont St. Giles, where he continued to write until his death in 1674.



Video Clip 2

John Milton

[\(click to see video\)](#)

In 2008, Christ's College, Cambridge created a [Milton website](#) as part of a celebration of Milton's 400th birthday. It includes an abundance of information about Milton as well as an interactive study resource on *Paradise Lost* titled [Darkness Visible](#).



Milton's Literature

Milton wrote several types of literature:

- poetry
 - lyric poems
 - sonnets
 - longer poems such as “L’Allegro” and “Il Penseroso”
 - his elegy *Lycidas*, written in memory of his friend Edward King
 - his most famous work, the epic poem *Paradise Lost*
- a **masque**⁹, a form of entertainment for the court involving singing and dancing as well as acting, usually with elaborate costumes and sets. The lords and ladies of the court sometimes took part in a masque as well as professional entertainers. Milton's [masque *Comus*](#), unlike the traditional masque, was not performed at court but in the castle of a nobleman. Its subject was the virtue of chastity rather than the more risqué subjects found in most masques.
- prose works on political and religious topics such as his Divorce Tracts and [Areopagitica](#), a pamphlet arguing for freedom of the press



Milton Dictates to His Daughters
Delacroix.

9. a form of entertainment for the court involving singing and dancing as well as acting, usually with elaborate costumes and sets

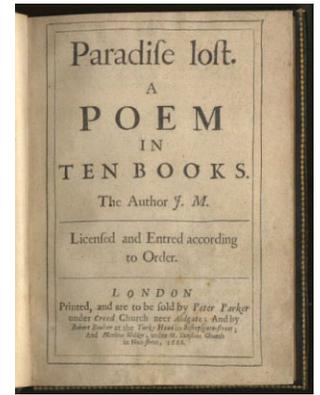
Texts

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- “[The John Milton Reading Room](#).” Thomas Luxon, Professor of English. Dartmouth College.
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***Paradise Lost* Text**

- [Paradise Lost](#). Project Gutenberg.
- [Paradise Lost](#). The 12-Book 1674 Edition. Michael E Bryson, Department of English. California State University, Northridge.
- [Paradise Lost](#). “[The John Milton Reading Room](#).” Thomas Luxon, Professor of English. Dartmouth College.
- [Paradise Lost \(1667\)](#). Judy Boss. *Renascence Editions*. text of 1667 edition with 10 books.



Paradise Lost

Milton had long contemplated writing an epic poem before he began *Paradise Lost*. He first thought of making the Arthurian legends its topic. Then he decided to write about the fall of man—“of man’s first disobedience.” *Paradise Lost* is considered the greatest epic written in the English language.

The Epic

An **epic**¹⁰ is a long narrative poem in elevated style depicting the heroic adventures of a valiant, superhuman individual.

Examples of epics include

- Homer’s the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*
- Virgil’s *Aeneid*
- *Beowulf*
- *The Song of Roland*
- Milton’s *Paradise Lost*

Epics share the following characteristics:

- an epic hero: an historical or legendary individual capable of great deeds that are important to his/her people

10. a long narrative poem in elevated style depicting the heroic adventures of a valiant, superhuman individual

- **setting:** a place of historical or legendary significance at a time crucial to the people of the story
- **action:** valiant feats requiring great courage and massive strength (physical or, sometimes, psychological)
- **supernatural forces:** mythological or supernatural figures that intervene in human events
- **style:** an imposing, formal style that includes the use of literary and metrical techniques to convey a sense of eloquence and gravity, such as the caesura in *Beowulf* and in *Paradise Lost*
 - **enjambment**¹¹—a sentence that continues from one line into another in a poem, continuing a thought over two or more lines rather than ending each sentence at the end of each line of poetry (end-stopped poetry)
 - **inversion**¹²—changing the normal word order of a sentence
 - **elision**¹³—omitting a letter or syllable of a word to maintain the meter of a line of poetry

In addition to these characteristics of epics, epics share a group of **conventions**¹⁴, traditional features that are usually employed in a particular genre:

11. a sentence that continues from one line into another in a poem, continuing a thought over two or more lines rather than ending each sentence at the end of each line of poetry (end-stopped poetry)
12. changing the normal word order of a sentence
13. omitting a letter or syllable of a word to maintain the meter of a line of poetry
14. traditional features that are usually employed in a particular genre
15. beginning a narrative in the middle of the action
16. a formal list of items such as battleships or warriors
17. similes several lines long and developed in great detail

- a statement of theme at the beginning of the poem
- the invocation of a muse to inspire and instruct the poet
- a narrative opening *in medias res*¹⁵ (beginning a narrative in the middle of the action)
- **catalogues**¹⁶ (formal lists of items such as battleships or warriors)
- extended formal speeches by the main characters
- **epic similes**¹⁷ (similes several lines long and developed in great detail)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Milton is known as the great Puritan poet.
- Milton wrote a variety of literature including lyric poetry, sonnets, long poems, a masque, an elegy, prose, and the great epic *Paradise Lost*.
- *Paradise Lost* displays the characteristics and conventions of the classical epic genre.

EXERCISES

Identify the characteristics and conventions you find in *Paradise Lost*:

1. **epic hero:** Literary scholars have not agreed on who the epic hero is in *Paradise Lost*—or if it has a hero. A clearly heroic figure such as Odysseus or Beowulf is not obvious in *Paradise Lost*. What reasons could you give for considering Satan, Christ, or Adam as the hero? What reasons would disqualify each character for that designation?
2. **setting:** In what locations do the scenes in *Paradise Lost* take place? In Book I, describe the scene in which the action begins.
3. **action:** What characters in *Paradise Lost* could be considered as taking heroic action? Some critics describe Satan as an anti-hero; why?
4. **supernatural forces:** What supernatural forces take part in the action of *Paradise Lost*?
5. **style:** Describe the style of *Paradise Lost*. Find examples of literary techniques that add to the elevated, formal style of *Paradise Lost* such as enjambment, inversion, and elision.
6. **theme:** Locate the introductory lines in which Milton states the theme of *Paradise Lost*.
7. **invocation to the muse:** What is a muse? What muse does Milton invoke?
8. ***in medias res*:** In the argument for Book I, Milton states that he plans to open *in medias res*. After the introductory lines, what is the scene when the action begins in *Paradise Lost*?
9. **catalogues:** A classical epic might provide a list of warriors in a great battle; what list of names does Milton provide in Book I of *Paradise Lost*?
10. **extended formal speeches:** Locate examples of formal speeches by Satan and Adam.
11. **epic similes:** Locate examples of epic similes.

Resources

Biography

- “[John Milton \(1608–74\)](#).” *John Milton 400th Anniversary Celebrations*. Christ’s College, Cambridge University.
- “[John Milton & Seventeenth-Century Culture](#).” From the collections of Thomas Cooper Library based on an exhibit by Patrick Scott. University Libraries Rare Books & Special Collections. University of South Carolina.
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Images

- [The Iconography of Paradise Lost.](#) George Klawitter. St. Edwards University. Austin, Texas.
- “[Milton in the Old Library: 400th Anniversary Exhibit.](#)” *John Milton 400th Anniversary Celebrations*. Christ’s College, Cambridge University. Images from a Cambridge University library exhibit, including images of first editions of Milton’s works and illustrations of *Paradise Lost*.
- [Paradise Lost Illustrated.](#) Don Ulin. University of Pittsburgh.

- “[The Paradise Lost of Milton with illustrations.](#)” Designed and engraved by John Martin, 2 vols, 1827. Online Gallery: The Writer in the Garden. The British Library.

Additional Information

- [Darkness Visible: A Resource for Studying Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.](#) *John Milton 400th Anniversary Celebrations.* Christ’s College, Cambridge University. an interactive source including information on *Paradise Lost*, Milton’s biography, Milton’s views on religion and politics, influences Milton has had on subsequent literature, illustrations of *Paradise Lost*, Milton’s language, and critical information.
- “[History of the Masque Genre.](#)” *John Milton’s A Maske or Comus.* Helen L. Hull, Meg F. Pearson, and Erin A. Sadlack. University of Maryland, College Park.
- “[John Milton’s Areopagitica.](#)” *Taking Liberties: The Struggle for Britain’s Freedoms and Rights.* The British Library.
- “[Milton’s Works.](#)” *John Milton 400th Anniversary Celebrations.* Christ’s College, Cambridge University. Lists of Milton’s works alphabetically and chronologically.
- [The Poetry of John Milton.](#) Dr. John Rogers, Yale. Open Yale video course. 24 video lectures. *Academic Earth.*

Chapter 5

The Restoration and Eighteenth Century

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

5.1 The Restoration and 18th Century

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the two key tragedies of 1665–1666 and their effects on the literature of the Restoration era.
2. Analyze features of the Enlightenment which distinguish the Age of Reason from preceding time periods and which affect neoclassical literature.
3. Characterize the developments of the English language during the 18th century.
4. Recognize key forms of literature produced in the Restoration and 18th century.

After the death of Oliver Cromwell, his son Richard Cromwell attempted to assume his father's leadership position but soon proved unequal to the task. Negotiations began between the English Parliament and the son of the executed King Charles I. In 1660 the monarchy was restored, and Charles II became king. Having escaped to France following his father's execution, Charles II had found refuge in the court of France, and when he returned to England brought with him a love of an extravagant, frivolous lifestyle that many, accustomed to the Puritan era, found offensive. Others delighted in the less repressive behaviors the new king encouraged.



Only five years after the **Restoration**¹, the reestablishment of the monarch in England after the Puritan Revolution, England suffered an outbreak of plague. Modern estimates suggest that around 100,000 people died in London alone. Then in 1666, the Great Fire of London devastated the city, destroying over 13,000 houses, significant structures such as St. Paul's Cathedral and the Royal Exchange, many warehouses full of goods, and businesses. The BBC History site allows viewers to see the same two engravings side by side in order to compare the before and after scenes in its "Great Fire of London Skyline Animation." Luminarium reproduces a painting of London on fire, an engraving of St. Paul's burning, and a map of the fire's progress.

Some considered these two tragedies acts of God, punishment, according to some, for destroying God's established order, the Great Chain of Being, by executing the divinely appointed King Charles I. According to others, the punishment was for abandoning the Puritan government and returning a licentious king to power.

Almost immediately suspicion of setting the fire fell upon the Roman Catholics. With memories of the Gunpowder Plot and the religious persecution present since the time of Henry VIII and the Reformation, many Protestants were quick to accuse Catholics of a plot to destroy London.

Great Fire of London by Lieve Pietersz. Verschuier.



The Monument—monument to the Great Fire of London 1666, designed by Christopher Wren.

1. the reestablishment of the monarch in England after the Puritan Revolution

Upon the death of Charles II, his brother James succeeded as **King James II**. Because James had earlier publicly converted to Roman Catholicism, the religious turmoil of the preceding century was renewed. As a result, Parliament forced James II to abdicate the throne and offered the crown to his daughter Mary and her husband, William of Orange. Her uncle King Charles II had arranged Mary's marriage to William of Orange, whose mother was a sister of Charles II and James II and who was a staunch Protestant. In what was known as the **Glorious Revolution**, a peaceful revolution, William and Mary replaced James II on the throne and ensured the dominance of the Protestant religion in England. William and Mary also agreed to a stronger role for Parliament in the governing of Great Britain. The age of the absolute monarch had ended.



Queen Mary II and King William III.

The Enlightenment

The 18th century was the age of the **Enlightenment**² or the Age of Reason. In part a reaction against the chaos that had characterized the preceding centuries, Enlightenment thought emphasized reason, rational thinking, and order. One facet of the **Enlightenment**, the **scientific revolution**, began at the close of the Middle Ages and marked a profound change in thinking of natural phenomena as events with rational explanations rather than supernatural causes. Empirical observation and the concept of an orderly world, set up by God and run according to His laws of nature, governed philosophical thought as well as the technological development that led to the Industrial Revolution. The British Museum provides an online tour of **London in 1753**, the year the museum opened, an indication of the interest in science and learning. The online tour includes pictures of early manufacturing in the Industrial Revolution.

The orderly nature of the world was no longer the medieval Great Chain of Being. Instead philosophers began to postulate that all men were created equal and with innate human rights, ideas which led to both the American and French Revolutions in the 18th century. This idea is evident in the English Parliament's insistence that William and Mary grant more authority to Parliament, the representatives of the English people.

In literature, the Enlightenment appears as **neoclassicism**³, which literally means *new classicism* and emphasizes order, symmetry, elegance, and structure in the arts, including literature. As apparent in the term **neoclassicism**, **neoclassical** writers, artists, and architects looked back to ancient Greece and Rome for classical forms

2. the Age of Reason which emphasized reason, rational thinking, and order

3. literally means *new classicism*; emphasizes order, symmetry, elegance, and structure in the arts, including literature

featuring symmetry and geometrical precision in everything from poems to buildings.

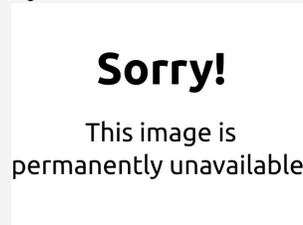


Sidebar 5.1.

St. Paul's Cathedral in London is an example of neoclassical architecture. After the Great Fire of London in 1666, Sir Christopher Wren was commissioned to rebuild many of the city's churches, including St. Paul's Cathedral. Note the symmetry of the building and the use of columns and the triangular tympanum, all features of classical Greek architecture.

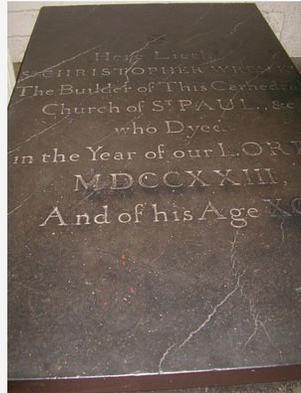
Christopher Wren also remodeled one part of Hampton Court Palace, built during the reign of Henry VIII, for William and Mary. Note the symmetry of Hampton Court Palace in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1



When he died in 1723, Wren was buried in the crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral. Although it might be expected that one of the world's most famous architects and the person who designed and personally supervised the building of the Cathedral would have a grand tomb, Wren requested a modest grave site and memorial plaque.

Figure 5.2



The black stone slab in [Figure 5.2](#), located in an inconspicuous corner, covers Wren's grave. The plaque pictured in [Figure 5.3](#) is located on the wall above the black slab and is engraved with the epitaph: "Reader, if you seek his monument, look around you," indicating that St. Paul's Cathedral itself is Wren's monument.

Figure 5.3



Language

The Restoration and 18th century was a time of standardization of the English language. During the Elizabethan Age, Shakespeare created new words and new expressions, and spelling was erratic. During the early 17th century, the metaphysical poets created elaborate, unusual metaphors. In the 18th century, writers favored a more common sense, prescriptive approach to language. Dr. Samuel Johnson created one of the early and most influential English dictionaries. One of the goals of Johnson's dictionary was to help create rules of grammar, usage, and spelling previously lacking in the English language, an idea in line with the preference for structure that characterized neoclassicism and with the scientific approach to all subjects typical of the Age of Reason. Although the feudal system

had long ago faded into the past, British society of the 18th century maintained a strict social class system reflected in the language.

Video Clip 1

Samuel Johnson's Dictionary

[\(click to see video\)](#)

Literature

Restoration Drama

With the Restoration of the monarchy came the restoration of the theater. After being shuttered during the Puritans' rule, theatres opened almost immediately. Charles II hired companies of actors to provide court entertainment, as his grandfather James I had been patron of Shakespeare's troop The King's Men. Plays from the Elizabethan Age were revived and new dramatists emerged although none produced work of the high caliber of Shakespeare's age. Among the new generation of playwrights were several women, most notably Aphra Behn. Another innovation in 18th-century theater was that women were allowed on stage.

During the 18th century, the **comedy of manners**⁴, a play which presents aristocratic characters, exaggerating their obsession with high society manners, social position, fashion, and wealth, flourished. These plays are noted for their witty dialogue and satiric manner. The plots generally involve amorous, usually scandalous, affairs and the characters' amoral reactions to them. Familiar stock characters were the fop or dandy, a vain young man obsessed with fashion, and the rake, a young man devoted to wine, women, and scandalous conduct. Richard Sheridan's "The Rivals" and "The School for Scandal" and Oliver Goldsmith's "She Stoops to Conquer" were among the more popular comedies of manners.

The Novel

The 18th century gave birth to the **novel**⁵, an extended fictional prose narrative, as a form of literature. Daniel DeFoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* are considered the first novels. DeFoe's works were followed by Samuel Richardson's **epistolary novel**⁶ (a novel written in the form of a series of letters) *Pamela*, and Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. The novel continued to develop into a major literary form of the 19th century.

4. a play which presents aristocratic characters, exaggerating their obsession with high society manners, social position, fashion, and wealth

5. an extended fictional prose narrative

6. a novel written in the form of a series of letters

Diarists

Just as many people in the 21st century record the details of their daily lives on Facebook or Twitter, people in the 18th century recorded their lives in diaries, works which now provide information and insight into the events of that time period. Some of the more well-known diarists were Samuel Pepys, John Evelyn, Daniel DeFoe, and Celia Fiennes.

Pepys provides detailed descriptions of London during the plague and the fire as well as daily life in the Restoration era.

Covering a much longer period of time, John Evelyn writes a more formal diary from the perspective of a conservative supporter of the monarchy and of the Church of England.

Although actually a fictional account of the plague, Daniel DeFoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* parallels Pepys's accounts of the plague while giving even more detail. DeFoe's *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* describes several journeys DeFoe made early in his life, providing a comprehensive picture of pre-Industrial Revolution England.

In a similar fashion but a much more daring endeavor, Celia Fiennes, the daughter and granddaughter of Puritan supporters, wrote what is perhaps the most unusual and interesting of the 18th century diaries. Not published until 1888, her journals document trips she made through every county in England as well as into parts of Scotland and Wales. Riding side saddle, Fiennes traveled most of the time with only one or two servants as companions. For a woman to travel without a father or husband as escort was extraordinary in this time period and dangerous as well. Fiennes records encounters with highwaymen and falls from her horse as she forded rivers and traveled England's rough roads. Ostensibly traveling for her health, Fiennes observed local industries and described the landscape, both natural and manmade. Her family's Puritan views are apparent in her comments about the churches, clergymen, and local religious conventions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Great Fire of London in 1666 and another outbreak of the plague affected the literature produced in the Restoration and 18th century.
- Neoclassicism, a facet of the Enlightenment era, produced highly structured, formal literature modeled on classical Greek and Roman literature.
- During the 18th century, the English language became more standardized and prescriptive.
- The first English dictionaries, particularly Dr. Samuel Johnson's dictionary, were produced during the 18th century.
- The Restoration brought about the re-opening of the theatres and the development of new drama, including the comedy of manners.
- The novel had its origins in the 18th century.
- Journals and diaries were an important form of literature in the Restoration and 18th century.

Resources

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The Monarchy

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- "[The Forgotten Tricentennial: England's Glorious Revolution.](#)" Donald E. Wilkes, Jr., Professor of Law, University of Georgia School of Law. Feb. 14, 1989.
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- "[The Great Plague of 1665.](#)" Alok Yadav. George Mason University.
- "[The Great Plague of 1665–6.](#)" Education. *The National Archives*.

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- [“The Plague Book.”](#) Historical Collections at the Claude Moore Health Sciences Library. University of Virginia. digital images of a 16th-century plague book.

The Great Fire of London

- [“The Great Fire of London, 1666.”](#) Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.
- [“Great Fire of London: Skyline Animation.”](#) BBC History. BBC.
- [“London’s Burning: The Great Fire of London 1666.”](#) Museum of London.

The Enlightenment

British Museum Series of Online Tours on the Enlightenment

- [“Enlightenment: Ancient Scripts“](#)
- [“Enlightenment: Art and Civilization“](#)
- [“Enlightenment: Classifying the World“](#)
- [“Enlightenment: Religion and Ritual“](#)
- [“Enlightenment: The Birth of Archaeology“](#)
- [“Enlightenment: The Natural World“](#)
- [“Enlightenment: Trade and Discovery“](#)

The Enlightenment

- [“Age of the Enlightenment.”](#) Gerhard Rempel. Western New England College.
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- [“The European Enlightenment: The Eighteenth Century.”](#) Richard Hooker. 1996. *World Civilizations: An Internet Classroom and Anthology*. Washington State University.
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Restoration Drama

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- “[The History of the Novel](#).” Dr. Agatha Taormina. Northern Virginia Community College.
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John Evelyn

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Celia Fiennes

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5.2 Jonathan Swift (1667–1745)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define satire and apply the definition to Swift’s “A Modest Proposal.”
2. Trace the historical events that led to the writing of “A Modest Proposal.”
3. Evaluate Swift’s use of satire in “A Modest Proposal.”

Biography

Jonathan Swift was born in Ireland of an Irish father and an English mother and felt the pull between the two countries all his life. He went to England to live for short periods on several occasions. After he became a clergyman he hoped to obtain a position in the Church of England. However, he was appointed to St. Patrick’s Cathedral in Dublin, Ireland, a position with which he was deeply disappointed, even after becoming the Dean of St. Patrick’s.

Swift maintained friendships with other 18th-century writers such as Alexander Pope, William Congreve, John Gay, and John Arbuthnot. In fact, Pope was instrumental in helping Swift publish what is probably his most well-known work, *Gulliver’s Travels*.





St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, Ireland.



Commemorative plaque to Swift in the cathedral.

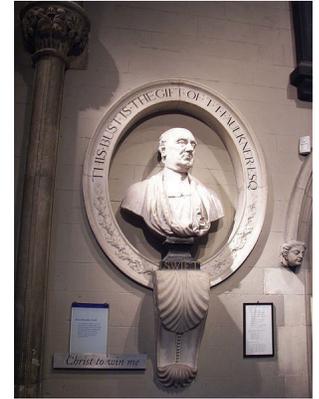


Swift's gravesite in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin.

Satire

Satire⁷ is a literary manner, used in any genre, that blends criticism of a person, event, or situation with witty humor for the purpose of improving the object of the satire. Writers such as Swift and Pope found much in their society that needed improvement, and satire was their weapon of choice.

Through witty, mocking making fun of problems in society, satirists hoped to draw attention to their targets so that the situations will be corrected. Some satire, such as that of Pope’s “The Rape of the Lock,” is gentle and humorous (Horatian satire); other satirical works, such as Swift’s “A Modest Proposal,” are harsh and vindictive (Juvenalian satire).



Bust of Swift in the cathedral.

“A Modest Proposal”

As Dean of St. Patrick’s Cathedral in Dublin, Ireland, Jonathan Swift observed the poverty and oppression of the Irish people and proposed remedies for the problems. He wrote many pamphlets outlining serious solutions to the problems of wide-spread poverty in Ireland, problems that were beyond the control of the poor lower classes. Crop failures resulted in very little available food, and what was available was extremely expensive. The British government imposed impossibly high taxes specifically to force small farmers to sell their land and work as tenant farmers for the wealthy Irish landowners who kept them in poverty. There were well-known instances of corruption in the governing of Ireland. In one example, government officials took bribes to allow certain people to print coins until the economy was flooded with money. Those of you who know anything about economics know that the result was rampant inflation.

Swift tried hard to help the Irish poor by proposing and pushing for reforms. For his efforts he was considered an enemy of the British government and of the Irish aristocracy, and warrants were issued for his arrest. On several occasions, the poor Irish, who knew he was trying to help them, hid him from soldiers sent to arrest him.

After writing a number of proposals which were ignored, Swift turned to satire in an effort to shock his audience into paying attention to the problem he addressed. He was so disgusted with the ruling upper classes who refused to consider any of his serious proposals that he wrote his “Modest Proposal,” a work designed to be so

7. a literary manner, used in any genre, that blends criticism of a person, event, or situation with witty humor for the purpose of improving the object of the satire

outrageous that it would shock his audience into action. Swift, in essence, is saying, “What you’re doing to the Irish is just as cruel as if you were to eat the children,” the implication of his line that they have already “devoured” the parents so they might as well eat the children.

In writing “A Modest Proposal,” Swift drew on his suspicious attitude about modern science to couch his proposal in terms of a “scientific” study. Writing in the Age of Reason, when science and rational thought dominated sentimental feeling, Swift creates a fictional persona, the projector, who is the “speaker”/writer of “A Modest Proposal.” The projector is a logistician, the kind of scientifically minded person who might belong to the recently formed Royal Society, a prestigious organization dedicated to the conducting of and writing about empirical study.

Swift achieves two purposes in creating the projector persona. First, science becomes an object of satire. The projector’s “modest proposal” proves to be so outrageous that no rational, enlightened person could possibly consider it. Second, following the publication of his Drapier’s letters, pamphlets urging political solutions to the problems that had resulted in extreme poverty among Ireland’s poor, the British government issued a warrant for Swift’s arrest. Although the essay was published anonymously, its writer’s identity was widely known. Still, the use of the projector as the writer of the piece provided a modicum of protection for its author.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Jonathan Swift’s “A Modest Proposal” exemplifies Juvenalian satire.
- Swift turned to satire after serious proposals failed to effect any changes in the Irish economic situation.
- “A Modest Proposal” evinces tenets of neoclassicism in its use of Juvenalian satire and in its Aristotelian persuasive structure.

EXERCISES

1. Why is the title “A Modest Proposal” ironic?
2. Read paragraph 12 of “A Modest Proposal”: “I grant this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for landlords, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children.” At this point, as well as in other similar passages, Swift drops the mask of satire and speaks with invective (abusive, insulting language that is characteristic of Juvenalian satire). What he proposes is simply making this figurative sentence literal. In what sense have the landlords “devoured” the parents?
3. In paragraph 4, Swift uses the phrase “a child just dropped from its dam” and the word “breeders” to refer to the women who bear children. What purpose does this diction serve?

(Note: “Dropped from its dam” is diction used in reference to livestock, particularly horses. A foal is said to be “dropped from its dam,” the dam being the mare.)

4. Swift’s “A Modest Proposal” is often anthologized as an example of a persuasive essay. Analyze the essay’s classical argumentative structure.
 - How and why does the projector use emotional appeal in his opening paragraph?
 - In what paragraph does the projector present his thesis? Why does he use a delayed thesis structure rather than giving the thesis in the opening paragraph?
 - What logical appeal does the projector offer to support his thesis? How does he use statistics?
 - Later in the essay, the projector presents a list of logical reasons to convince his audience to accept his proposal. List the reasons. Are they convincing?
 - The projector addresses possible objections—what possible counter-arguments does he anticipate?
 - Who is the intended audience for the projector’s proposal?

Resources

Biography

- “[Jonathan Swift: A Brief Biography](#).” David Cody. Hartwick College. *The Victorian Web*.
- “[The Life of Jonathan Swift \(1667–1745\)](#).” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*.

Text of “A Modest Proposal”

- “[A Modest Proposal](#).” *Project Gutenberg*.
- “[A Modest Proposal](#).” *The Victorian Web*.
- “[Jonathan Swift: A Modest Proposal. \(1729\)](#).” *Renascence Editions*. University of Oregon.

Audio

- “[A Modest Proposal](#).” *LibriVox*.
- “[A Modest Proposal](#).” *Project Gutenberg*.
- “[Swift’s A Modest Proposal](#).” *In Our Time*. *BBC Radio 4*. audio of discussion of “A Modest Proposal.”

Scriblerus Club

- “[Scriblerus Club](#).” Valerie Rumbold. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.
- “[The Scriblerus Club](#).” *In Our Time*. *BBC Radio 4*. audio of discussion of the Scriblerus Club.

Swift and Science

- “[Swift’s Attitude Toward Science and Technology](#).” David Cody. Hartwick College. *The Victorian Web*.
- “[History](#).” *The Royal Society*.
- “[Women and Science](#).” Folger Shakespeare Library. video.

Satire

- “[Satire](#).” George P. Landow, Brown University and David Cody, Hartwick College. *The Victorian Web*.
- “[Satire](#).” *Literary Terms and Definitions*. Dr. L. Kip Wheeler. Carson-Newman College.

Chapter 5 The Restoration and Eighteenth Century

- “Satire.” *The UVic Writer’s Guide*. The Department of English. University of Victoria.

5.3 Alexander Pope (1688–1744)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define satire and apply the definition to Pope’s “The Rape of the Lock.”
2. Trace the historical events that led to the writing of “The Rape of the Lock.”
3. Evaluate Pope’s use of satire in “The Rape of the Lock.”

After the Great Fire of London aroused anti-Catholic feeling that had simmered since the reign of James II, Parliament passed the first of two Test Acts, laws that banned Roman Catholics and nonconformists (Protestants not members of the Church of England, such as Puritans) from holding public office, serving in the military, attending universities, or essentially having any part in public life. Born into a Roman Catholic family, Alexander Pope’s education was limited to occasional tutoring from priests and his own regimen of study. Pope suffered from what many experts now believe to be tuberculosis of the bone, resulting in a deformity in his back and stunted growth. Both his religion and his physical disabilities barred him from the kind of participation in court life that resulted in patronage that other poets enjoyed. With his family’s financial security from his father’s business, Pope was able to devote enough time to his writing, translating, and editing to begin earning a comfortable living. He soon established himself as one of the prominent neoclassic writers.

Text

- “[The Rape of the Lock](#).” *Electronic Classics Series*. Jim Manis, Senior Faculty Editor. Pennsylvania State University.
- “[The Rape of the Lock](#).” S. Constantine. University of Massachusetts. with annotations.
- “[The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems by Alexander Pope](#).” *Project Gutenberg*.
- “[The Rape of the Lock by Alexander Pope](#).” Edited by Jack Lynch. Rutgers University.
- “[Selected Poetry of Alexander Pope](#).” *Representative Poetry Online*. University of Toronto.



Portrait by Jean-Baptiste van Loo.

“The Rape of the Lock”

Like Swift, Alexander Pope chose satire as his method for addressing and possibly correcting a difficult situation. Unlike Swift, Pope addresses a personal situation.

Within the society of aristocratic Roman Catholic families, a young gentleman, Lord Petre, furtively cut a lock of hair from a beautiful young woman he was courting, Arabella Fermor. Arabella and her family were incensed at the “assault” and refused to associate with Lord Petre and his family, causing a rift within the social circle of Catholic families. A mutual friend John Caryll suggested that Pope write a humorous poem that might encourage the families to take the situation less seriously and to reconcile.

Heroic Couplet

A **heroic couplet**⁸ is two lines of poetry in iambic pentameter that rhyme. Neoclassical writers favored this structured, symmetrical verse form. Pope uses the highly complex **closed heroic couplet**⁹, a rigidly structured verse form consisting of two lines, each iambic pentameter, which rhyme and which form a complete thought.

8. two lines of poetry in iambic pentameter that rhyme

9. a rigidly structured verse form consisting of two lines, each iambic pentameter, which rhyme and which form a complete thought

These two lines in [Figure 5.4](#) are from Canto 3, lines 13–14. Note that each line is iambic pentameter, the two lines rhyme, and the semi-colon (end punctuation) indicates a complete thought.

Figure 5.4

One speaks the glo-ry of the Bri-tish Queen,
 And one des-cribes a charm-ing In-dian screen;

Mock Epic

“The Rape of the Lock” is a **mock epic**¹⁰, a poem which uses the characteristics and conventions of an epic but for a humorous and satirical purpose rather than a serious purpose. Even the title ironically suggests a serious crime when the offense is actually cutting a lock of hair.

- An epic states the *theme* at the beginning of the poem. The first two lines of Canto 1 follow the convention: “What dire offense from amorous causes springs, / What mighty contests rise from trivial things, / I sing...” The word *trivial* epitomizes the theme, and the theme in turn leads to the choice of form, the mock epic which treats a trivial subject as if it were of epic importance. In contrast to the epic *Paradise Lost*, in which the theme is nothing less than the creation and fall of the human race, Pope’s mock epic highlights human superficiality and vanity.
- An epic invokes a *muse*: Pope’s muse is not a Greek god or the Holy Spirit, Milton’s muse; his muse is another human, John Caryl who asked him to write the poem.
- The *supernatural forces* are not God, angels, and demons of *Paradise Lost* but the sylphs whose duties are to guard Belinda’s hair and jewelry.
- The *epic battles* are reduced to card games. The preparation for battle takes place at Belinda’s dressing table and is presented in diction suggestive of religious rites (see Canto 1 lines 121–148). The Baron also prepares for battle by praying at his altar to love (see Canto 2 lines 35–46).
- The valiant *feats of courage* become clipping a lock of hair, threatening the Baron with a hairpin, and making him sneeze with a pinch of snuff.

Another technique Pope employs to convey his satirical point is the literary device called **zeugma**¹¹, the use of a word to apply to two disparate situations. For example, Canto 2, lines 105–110 present serious tragedies the sylphs fear might happen to Belinda juxtaposed with trivial possibilities:

10. a poem which uses the characteristics and conventions of an epic but for a humorous and satirical purpose rather than a serious purpose

11. the use of a word to apply to two disparate situations

Sidebar 5.2.

Whether the nymph shall break Diana's law,
Or some frail china jar receive a flaw,
Or stain her honor, or her new brocade
Forget her prayers, or miss a masquerade....

Belinda's losing her virtue becomes the equivalent of an ornamental jar being cracked. Staining her honor becomes the equivalent of staining her dress. The effect is to emphasize the triviality of aristocratic values, a world in which marring one's appearance by losing a single lock of hair is considered as consequential as a rape.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock" exemplifies Horatian satire.
- "The Rape of the Lock" is a mock epic.
- "The Rape of the Lock" is written in closed heroic couplets, a verse form that embodies the structure and symmetry admired by neoclassicists.

EXERCISES

1. Review the list of epic characteristics and conventions in the information about Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In addition to the examples given, identify instances in "The Rape of the Lock" in which Pope trivializes epic conventions to create a mock epic.
2. Describe Belinda and the Baron in Pope's "The Rape of the Lock."
3. What are the objects of satire in "The Rape of the Lock"?
4. In what ways could Pope's work be characterized as Horatian satire in contrast with Swift's Juvenalian satire?
5. What parallels do you find in Milton's epic *Paradise Lost* and Pope's mock epic?
6. Pope writes about aristocratic society in "The Rape of the Lock." How would you compare/contrast the families involved in this situation with the aristocratic British and Irish people Swift alludes to in "A Modest Proposal"?

Resources

Biography

- "[Alexander Pope \(1688–1744\)](#)." Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*. rpt from *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th Ed., Vol. XXII. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910. 87.
- "[Alexander Pope](#)." Academy of American Poets. *Poets.org*.
- "[Alexander Pope](#)." The Twickenham Museum.

Text

- "[The Rape of the Lock](#)." *Electronic Classics Series*. Jim Manis, Senior Faculty Editor. Pennsylvania State University.
- "[The Rape of the Lock](#)." S. Constantine. University of Massachusetts. with annotations.
- "[The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems by Alexander Pope](#)." *Project Gutenberg*.
- "[The Rape of the Lock by Alexander Pope](#)." Edited by Jack Lynch. Rutgers University.
- "[Selected Poetry of Alexander Pope](#)." *Representative Poetry Online*. University of Toronto.

Background Information

- “[Alexander Pope’s Rape of the Lock: An Introduction.](#)” David Cody. Hartwick College. The Victorian Web.
- “[The Story Behind the Poem.](#)” *The Rape of the Lock Homepage*. S. Constantine. University of Massachusetts.

Heroic Couplet

- “[The Heroic Couplet: Its Rhyme and Reason.](#)” J. Paul Hunter. University of Chicago. Lecture presented at the [National Humanities Center](#).
- “[Heroic Couplet.](#)” *The UVic Writer’s Guide*. Department of English. University of Victoria.
- “[Heroic Couplets.](#)” Jack Lynch. *Glossary of Literary and Rhetorical Terms*. Rutgers University.
- “[Heroic Couplets.](#)” Erik Simpson. *Connections: A Hypertext Resource for Literature*. Grinnell College.

Mock Epic

- “[High Burlesque: Mock Epic \(Mock Heroic\); Parody.](#)” *The UVic Writer’s Guide*. Department of English. University of Victoria.
- “[Zeugma.](#)” *The UVic Writer’s Guide*. Department of English. University of Victoria.
- “[Zeugma.](#)” *Literary Terms and Definitions*. Dr. L. Kip Wheeler. Carson-Newman College.

5.4 Frances Burney [Madame D'Arblay] (1752–1840)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize how Frances Burney's social status affected her opportunities to develop literary talents.
2. Evaluate the literary merits of journals and diaries as well as their role in revealing life in previous time periods.

Biography

Early 20th-century writer Virginia Woolf referred to Frances (often known as Fanny) Burney as the “Mother of English Fiction.” Born into a family of musicians, Burney had little formal education but learned and loved to read and write. Like many early women writers, Burney published her first novel *Evelina* anonymously, and it met with great success.

From her youth, Burney kept a diary and her name figures prominently among the other great diarists of the 18th century such as Pepys, DeFoe, and Fiennes. One of the most chilling passages of any of the diaries is Burney's account of undergoing a mastectomy without anesthesia in her home. Amazingly, she recovered from the surgery, but she could not bring herself to write about the agonizing ordeal until nine years later when she described it in a letter to her sister.

Text

The following excerpt from an early letter to her father describes her first scheduled meeting with Queen Charlotte, wife of King George III, after Burney, through the influence of a friend, had been appointed to the position of Second Keeper of the Robes.



Portrait by Edward Francesco Burney.

Sidebar 5.3.

“I do beg of you,” said dear Mrs. Delany, “When the queen or the king speak to you, not to answer with mere monosyllables. The queen often complains to me of the difficulty with which she can get any conversation, as she not only always has to start the subjects, but, commonly, entirely to support them: and she says there is nothing she so much loves as conversation, and nothing she finds so hard to get. She is always best pleased to have the answers that are made her lead on to further discourse. Now, as I know she wishes to be acquainted with you, and converse with you, I do really entreat you not to draw back from her, nor to stop conversation with only answering ‘Yes,’ or ‘No.’”

This was a most tremendous injunction; however, I could not but promise her I would do the best I could.

To this, nevertheless, she readily agreed, that if upon entering the room, they should take no notice of me, I might quietly retire. And that, believe me, will not be very slowly! They cannot find me in this house without knowing who I am, and therefore they can be at no loss whether to speak to me or not, from incertitude.

A PANIC.

In the midst of all this, the queen came!

I heard the thunder at the door, and, panic struck, away flew all my resolutions and agreements, and away after them flew I!

Don't be angry, my dear father—I would have stayed if I could, and I meant to stay—but, when the moment came, neither my preparations nor intentions availed, and I arrived at my own room, ere I well knew I had left the drawing-room, and quite breathless between the race I ran with Miss Port and the joy of escaping,

from *The Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay—Volume 1*



Queen Charlotte, Consort of King George III by Benjamin West.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Frances Burney exemplifies and records the life of an aristocratic woman in the 18th century.
- Burney is one of several notable diarists from the 18th century.

EXERCISES

1. How would you describe the young woman Frances Burney based only on this excerpt?
2. What does this excerpt reveal about the system of social classes in late 18th-century Britain?
3. Why does Burney react the way she does?
4. Why does Burney feel the need to apologize to her father for her behavior?

Resources

Texts

- *The Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay—Volume 1* by Fanny Burney. Project Gutenberg.
- *The Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay—Volume 2* by Fanny Burney. Project Gutenberg.

- *The Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay—Volume 3* by Fanny Burney. Project Gutenberg.
- *Evelina: Or The History of A Young Lady's Entrance into the World*. London: T. Lowndes, 1778; Reprinted New York: W. W. Norton & Company (Norton Library Edition), 1965. rpt. in *A Celebration of Women Writers*. University of Pennsylvania Libraries.
- *Evelina, Or, the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* by Fanny Burney. Project Gutenberg.

Biography

- “[Engines of Our Ingenuity: Fanny Burney](#).” John H. Lienhard. University of Houston. text and audio.
- “[Frances Burney \(1752–1840\)](#).” Valerie Patten. Library and Early Women's Writing: Women Writers. Chawton House Library.

Audio

- *Evelina*. Internet Archive. LibriVox.
- *Evelina*. Books Should Be Free.

5.5 Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the various literary roles and the prominent place Samuel Johnson held in 18th-century literary society.
2. Interpret Johnson’s “The Vanity of Human Wishes” as a criticism of 18th-century society.

Biography

Primarily known during his lifetime as a lexicographer and a journalist, Samuel Johnson was also a poet and a leading figure in late 18th-century literary circles. The son of a bookseller, Johnson lacked the funds to complete his degree at Oxford. However, he read voraciously at home and began his college career at Oxford by impressing his teachers and fellow students with his knowledge. After establishing himself as a journalist, Johnson was hired to compile a dictionary which became one of the most well-known of English dictionaries.

“The Vanity of Human Wishes”

Text

- *Dr. Johnson’s Works: Life, Poems, and Tales, Volume 1 by Samuel Johnson. Project Gutenberg.*
- “The Vanity of Human Wishes.” Facsimile of the 1749 edition by Jack Lynch. Rutgers University.
- “The Vanity of Human Wishes.” *Renascence Editions.* R. S. Bear. University of Oregon.
- “The Vanity of Human Wishes.” *Representative Poetry Online.* Ian Lancashire. Department of English. University of Toronto.



Portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds.

Johnson’s “The Vanity of Human Wishes” employs many of the characteristics of neoclassical poetry: it is patterned after the classical Latin works of Juvenal; it uses the formal, highly structured **closed heroic couplet**; it exalts reason; it uses **personification**¹² [giving human characteristics to inanimate objects or abstract qualities].

The first stanza presents the main idea of the poem: that life is like a maze which each individual stumbles through without a guide. The poem is then developed like an essay: each “vain wish” serves as a topic sentence developing the thesis. Each topic sentence is, in turn, developed with specific examples. This poem is often difficult for modern readers because many of the examples are allusions to people, places, and events familiar to the 18th century audience but not to a current audience. However, the main ideas—the vain wishes—are equally relevant.

The copy of the poem from *Representative Poetry Online* provides notes which explain many of the unfamiliar references.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A key figure in the 18th-century literary world, Samuel Johnson was a lexicographer, journalist, poet, diarist, essayist, dramatist, and writer of short fiction.
- Johnson’s work exemplifies the characteristics of neoclassicism.

Resources

General Resources

- “[Samuel Johnson: A Tricentennial of Johnson’s Birth](#).” Clark Library. University of California, Los Angeles.
- “[Samuel Johnson’s “The Vanity of Human Wishes.”](#)” *The Victorian Web*. George P. Landow. Brown University.

Biography

- “[Samuel Johnson \(1709–1784\)](#).” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*. rpt. from *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th Ed., Vol. XV. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910. 471–2.
- “[Samuel Johnson \(1709–1784\)](#).” Historic Figures. *BBC History*.
- “[Samuel Johnson: An Introduction](#).” *The Victorian Web*. David Cody. Hartwick College.

12. giving human characteristics to inanimate objects or abstract qualities

Text “The Vanity of Human Wishes”

- *Dr. Johnson’s Works: Life, Poems, and Tales, Volume 1 by Samuel Johnson. Project Gutenberg.*
- “The Vanity of Human Wishes.” Facsimile of the 1749 edition by Jack Lynch. Rutgers University.
- “The Vanity of Human Wishes.” *Renascence Editions.* R. S. Bear. University of Oregon.
- “The Vanity of Human Wishes.” *Representative Poetry Online.* Ian Lancashire. Department of English. University of Toronto.

Audio

- “The Vanity of Human Wishes.” The PennSound Anthology of Restoration and 18th-Century Verse. edited and performed by John Richetti. *PennSound Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing.*

Daisy

- “The Vanity of Human Wishes.” *Internet Archive.*

5.6 Thomas Gray (1716–1771)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Assess the characteristics of Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” that anticipate the Romantic movement.

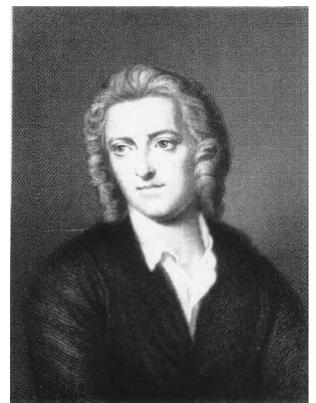
Biography

Although Thomas Gray had a troubled and less than prosperous childhood—his mother, a milliner, left his father because of abuse—Gray obtained an excellent education at Eton and at Cambridge, largely because of his uncle who was an assistant master at Eton. While at Eton he made friends with young men who were sons of prominent families and who would become prominent themselves. Financed possibly by his father and possibly by his wealthy friends and their families, Gray toured continental Europe and then returned to continue studying independently at Cambridge. Gray lived for a time with his mother in the village of Stoke Poges, and it is believed that he wrote his “Elegy” in the parish churchyard there. He is buried next to the small church with his mother and aunt. At the churchyard in Stoke Poges, a monument has been erected to Gray, whose tomb is also there.

Video Clip 2

Thomas Gray’s Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.wmv

[\(click to see video\)](#)



“Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard”

Although Gray was not a prolific poet, his “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” is one of the most well-known and popular poems in the English language. An **elegy**¹³ is a lament for the dead, usually a specific person as in Milton’s elegy *Lycidas* written to mourn his friend Edward King. Gray’s “Elegy” is more a lament for an entire group of people—the common people of a typical village in England who live simple lives away from the public eye.



Gray's monument near the Stoke Poges churchyard.

Gray is considered part of a group of poets from the late 18th century known as the **graveyard school**¹⁴, poets who wrote melancholy, meditative poetry about death. As part of the graveyard school, Gray writes a melancholy lament for the ordinary people who lie buried in this tiny, obscure location. Stanzas 8, 9, and 14 are well-known stanzas that convey this theme.

Gray’s “Elegy” also is an example of **topographical poetry**¹⁵—poetry inspired by a geographical setting. British churchyards were typically graveyards, Christians at that time believing they should be buried in hallowed ground. The poem begins with a description of the location, the narrator noting specific details that allow the reader to imagine the scene and at the same time establishing the melancholy mood.

Because of these characteristics, Gray’s “Elegy” is important as a precursor of the Romantic movement which began in the late 18th century. Neoclassical poetry emphasized symmetry, reason, and rational thought—the life of the mind. Gray’s poem marks the beginning of a trend to emphasize organic form, sentiment, and emotion—the life of the heart. The Elegy’s description of nature, its sensitivity to emotion rather than emphasis on reason, and its elevation of common people all intimate important characteristics of 19th century Romanticism.

13. a lament for the dead

14. poets who wrote melancholy, meditative poetry about death

15. poetry inspired by a geographical setting

Text

Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,

The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,

The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,

And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,

And all the air a solemn stillness holds,

Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,

And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds:

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tower

The moping owl does to the moon complain

Of such as, wandering near her secret bower,

Molest her ancient solitary reign.

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,

Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,

Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,

The rude Forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,
The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.
For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
Or busy housewife ply her evening care:
No children run to lisp their sire's return,
Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share,
Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;
How jocund did they drive their team afield!
How bow'd the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!
Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the Poor.
The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,

And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike th' inevitable hour:—
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.
Nor you, ye Proud, impute to these the fault
If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise,
Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault
The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.
Can storied urn or animated bust
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of Death?
Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands, that the rod of empire might have sway'd,
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre:
But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page,
Rich with the spoils of time, did ne'er unroll;

Chill Penury repress'd their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of the soul.
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.
Some village-Hampden, that with dauntless breast
The little tyrant of his fields withstood,
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell, guiltless of his country's blood.
Th' applause of list'ning senates to command,
The threats of pain and ruin to despise,
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,
And read their history in a nation's eyes,
Their lot forbad: nor circumscribed alone
Their growing virtues, but their crimes confined;
Forbad to wade through slaughter to a throne,

And shut the gates of mercy on mankind,
The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,
To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame,
Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride
With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.
Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;
Along the cool sequester'd vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenour of their way.
Yet e'en these bones from insult to protect
Some frail memorial still erected nigh,
With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd,
Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.
Their name, their years, spelt by th' unletter'd Muse,
The place of fame and elegy supply:
And many a holy text around she strews,
That teach the rustic moralist to die.

For who, to dumb forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd,
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast one longing lingering look behind?
On some fond breast the parting soul relies,
Some pious drops the closing eye requires;
E'en from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,
E'en in our ashes live their wonted fires.
For thee, who, mindful of th' unhonour'd dead,
Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;
If chance, by lonely contemplation led,
Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate,—
Haply some hoary-headed swain may say,
Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn
Brushing with hasty steps the dews away,
To meet the sun upon the upland lawn;
'There at the foot of yonder nodding beech

That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high.
His listless length at noontide would he stretch,
And pore upon the brook that babbles by.
'Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,
Muttering his wayward fancies he would rove;
Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,
Or crazed with care, or cross'd in hopeless love.
'One morn I miss'd him on the custom'd hill,
Along the heath, and near his favourite tree;
Another came; nor yet beside the rill,
Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he;
'The next with dirges due in sad array
Slow through the church-way path we saw him borne,—
Approach and read (for thou canst read) the lay
Graved on the stone beneath yon aged thorn.'

The Epitaph

Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth

A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown.

Fair Science frowned not on his humble birth,

And Melacholy marked him for her own.

Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,

Heaven did a recompense as largely send:

He gave to Misery all he had, a tear,

He gained from Heaven ('twas all he wish'd) a friend.

No farther seek his merits to disclose,

Or draw his frailties from their dread abode

(There they alike in trembling hope repose),

The bosom of his Father and his God.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" is one of the more well-known and popular poems in British literature.
- Features of "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" such as description of nature, its sensitivity to emotion rather than emphasis on reason, and its elevation of common people make the poem a bridge between neoclassical and Romantic poetry.

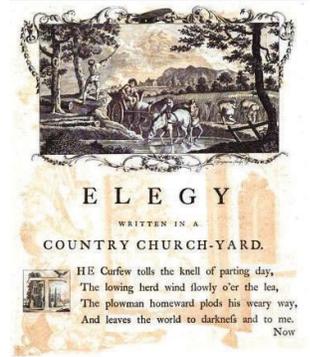
EXERCISES

1. In the first line, what connotations do the words *curfew*, *toll*, and *knell* convey?
2. In the first four stanzas, what descriptions of the natural world add to the melancholy mood of the poem?
3. In stanza 4, to whom does the phrase "the rude forefathers" refer?
4. In stanzas 5, 6, and 7, the narrator ponders the simple pleasures that the "rude forefathers" no longer enjoy. What pleasures does he name? How do these stanzas relate to the poem's theme?
5. Paraphrase stanzas 8, 9, and 10. To whom does the narrator address these stanzas?
6. The next section of the poem explains that the people born into this obscure village may have had the same natural intelligence, talent, and ability of people who became famous. What prevented the villagers from achieving fame? What advantages came from their failure to achieve prominence?
7. In the last 6 stanzas before The Epitaph, what does the narrator imagine happening?
8. Many critics have conjectured about the purpose of The Epitaph. What is an epitaph? What do you think is the purpose of this epitaph?

Resources

General Information

- [The Thomas Gray Archive: A Collaborative Digital Collection](#). University of Oxford. primary text, criticism, biography, bibliography, glossary, concordance, images.



Biography

- “[Biography](#).” *The Thomas Gray Archive: A Collaborative Digital Collection*. University of Oxford.
- “[Thomas Gray](#).” *Stoke Poges Parish Council*.
- “[Thomas Gray \(1716–1771\)](#).” Anniina Jokinen. *Luminarium*. rpt. from *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th Ed., Vol. XII. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910. 395.

Designs by Mr. R. Bentley for Six Poems by Mr. T. Gray. London: R Dodsley, 1775.

Text

- “[Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard](#).” *The Thomas Gray Archive: A Collaborative Digital Collection*. University of Oxford. annotated text of the poem.
- “[Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard](#).” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English. University of Toronto.
- [Select Poems of Thomas Gray by Thomas Gray](#). *Project Gutenberg*.

Audio

- “[Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard](#).” The PennSound Anthology of Restoration and 18th-Century Verse. edited and performed by John Richetti. *PennSound Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing*.
- “[Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard](#).” *LibriVox*.

Video

- [Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard”](#). Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College.

Chapter 6

The Romantic Period

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

6.1 The Romantic Period (1798–1832)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Trace the political and philosophical roots of Romanticism.
2. Compare and contrast neoclassicism and Romanticism.
3. List and define characteristics of Romanticism.
4. Explain the significance of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*, and outline the major tenets of Wordsworth's 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.
5. List, define, and give examples of typical forms of Romantic literature.

The Roots of Romanticism



Tintern Abbey and the River Wye in Tintern, Wales.

Often the term *Romantic* literature, particularly poetry, evokes the connotation of nature poetry. Although nature is an important component in much Romantic literature, Romanticism is much more than recording the beauties of the natural world. And Romanticism is certainly not what modern readers usually think of when we hear the words *romance* and *romantic*; Romanticism does not refer to romantic love.

Romanticism grew from a profound change in the way people in the Western world perceived their place and purpose in life. Events such as the American Revolution in 1776, the French Revolution in 1789, and the Industrial Revolution restructured society and the way individuals viewed themselves and their relationship to each other and to the social order.

Democracy

In the late 18th and early 19th century, concepts such as the Great Chain of Being, which had long represented the way humans thought of themselves and their roles in society, crumbled in the wake of new ideas about democracy. Rather than placing themselves above or below other individuals in a hierarchy, people began to believe that all men are created equal. Although it took more time to be accepted, the idea that women and people of color are also created equal germinated in the fertile environment of democratic ideals.

Nature and Spirit

European philosophers such as Rousseau and Spinoza maintain that innocence and the potential for human goodness are found in nature; human institutions, such as governments, produce pride, greed, and inequality. Thus nature, and people close to nature, becomes the ideal for Romantic writers.

Nature takes on additional significance with the ideas of philosophers such as Schelling who posits an identity of mind and nature: “Nature is visible spirit....” For poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, nature is a source of divine revelation, a visible veil through which God may be discerned. For others such as Shelley, nature is the means to tapping into the collective power of the human mind, what American writer Ralph Waldo Emerson refers to as the Over-Soul. Nature is the source of human innocence and goodness because nature is a manifestation of the Divine.

For Romantic writers, then, the source of poetry is not a conscious crafting of lines of a certain number of syllables in a certain metrical pattern and rhyme scheme, like the 18th-century heroic couplet. Instead, the source of literature is the

inspiration that comes from connecting, through nature, with the divine or the transcendental properties of the human mind. Romantic writers use the term *Imagination* to refer to this connection. The power of God to create nature is parallel to the poet’s power to create through the Imagination. In his *A Defence of Poetry*, Percy Bysshe Shelley states that the Imagination “strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit of its forms.” In his “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey,” Wordsworth writes of “A motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things...” that he finds in nature. In his “The Eolian Harp,” Coleridge pictures all of nature, including humans, as harps creating music when touched by the breeze of Imagination, the “One life” that is “in us and abroad.”

Sturm und Drang

One facet of Romanticism also recognizes the dark side of the human mind. Originating in Germany, the *Sturm und Drang* (usually translated “storm and stress”) movement pictures an anti-hero, a character dark in appearance, mood, and thought, in rebellion against the restrictions of society. Ann Radcliffe and others wrote **Gothic novels**¹ that typically feature picturesque yet haunted medieval castles and ruins, supernatural elements, death, madness, and terror. Gothic elements appear in many Romantic works: Heathcliff and the ghost of Catherine in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, the mad wife in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* delightfully parodies the Gothic novel. In poetry, Byron’s narrative poems feature dark, brooding anti-heroes called Byronic heroes, a role Byron played himself in his personal life. The Tate Britain provides an online tour through a previous exhibit of paintings that illustrate Romantic Gothic art.

Romanticism and Neoclassicism

Romanticism is a reaction against many facets of Neoclassicism. The following chart lists contrasting views of Neoclassicism and Romanticism.

Neoclassicism	Romanticism
use and imitation of literary traditions from ancient Greece and Rome	use and imitation of literary traditions from the Middle Ages (including the medieval romance)
beauty in structure and order	beauty in organic, natural forms
art from applying order to nature	art from inspiration
heroic couplets	lyric poetry

1. Novels that typically feature picturesque yet haunted medieval castles and ruins, supernatural elements, death, madness, and terror.

Neoclassicism	Romanticism
focus on external people and events	focus on self-expression of the artist
Great Chain of Being	democracy
reason	mysticism
Reason leads to spiritual revelation	Nature leads to spiritual revelation
urban (glorifies civilization and technological progress)	rural (sees the evils of civilization and technological progress)
values wit and sophistication	values primitive, simple people
Human nature needs artificial restraints of society	Restraints of society result in tyranny and oppression
the head	the heart

Characteristics of Romantic Literature

- **medievalism**²—Rather than looking for forms and subject matter from classical literature, Romantic-era writers prefer nostalgic views of the Middle Ages as a simple, less complicated time not troubled by the complexities and divisive issues of industrialization and urbanization. Often a Romantic medieval vision is not realistic, ignoring the violence and harshness of the Middle Ages with its religious persecution, political wars, poverty among the lower classes in favor of a fairy tale view of knights in shining armor rescuing beautiful damsels in distress. Or, from another perspective, the castles and mysterious aura of the so-called Dark Ages provide an ideal setting for Gothic literature.
- **mysticism**³—Romantic mysticism is the belief that the physical world of nature is a revelation of a spiritual or transcendental presence in the universe. Mysticism is not pantheism (worshipping nature). Romantic writers would worship not the tree, but the spiritual, sublime element manifested by the tree. Romantic literature, particularly poetry, is often characterized as nature poetry; mysticism explains the evident love of nature. Romantic writers love nature not only for its beauty but primarily because it is an expression of spirituality and the Imagination.
- **sensibility**⁴—When Jane Austen titled her novel *Sense and Sensibility*, she set up the dichotomy between rationalism and the emotional enthusiasm that was a reaction, often an exaggerated reaction, to the reason and logic prized in neoclassicism. In his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth defined poetry as the “spontaneous overflow of powerful

2.

3. The belief that the physical world of nature is a revelation of a spiritual or transcendental presence in the universe.

4. The emotional enthusiasm that was a reaction, often an exaggerated reaction, to the reason and logic prized in neoclassicism.

feelings.” The overwhelming emotional reaction to nature seen in Wordsworth’s poetry, the emotional sensitivity to other individuals and their circumstances, particularly those from the lower socio-economic classes, and the supernatural evocation of terror in Gothic literature all are expressions of sensibility.

- **primitivism and individualism**⁵—Arising from two sources, philosophical theories that posit innocence is found in nature and the ideals of democracy, Romanticism values the primitive individual, the person who does not have the artificial manners of high society, the cultivated façade of the aristocracy. Individuals who are closer to nature are better able to recognize and exemplify goodness and spiritual discernment. Wordsworth espouses the common man and incidents from ordinary life as the appropriate subject for poetry. Romanticism places the individual in the center of life and experience.

Lyrical Ballads

*Lyrical Ballads*⁶ is a collection of poems written and jointly published by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1798. The volume is of such importance that its 1798 publication date is often considered the beginning of the Romantic Period. The poetry in *Lyrical Ballads* marks a distinct change in both subject matter and style from the poetry of the 18th century.

William Wordsworth’s Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*

In the 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth includes a Preface⁷, an introductory explanation, to *Lyrical Ballads* to explain his theory of how poetry should be written.

The following points from the Preface delineate the characteristics that make these poems markedly different from poetry of the preceding century:

5. Interest in the person who does not have the artificial manners of high society, the cultivated façade of the aristocracy.

6. A collection of poems written and jointly published by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1798.

7. An introductory explanation.

- *The language of poetry should be real language spoken by common people.*

During the 18th century, many poets used what Wordsworth called “poetic diction,” flowery or ornate words for ordinary things such as feathery flock instead of birds or finny tribe instead of fish.

Wordsworth protests that people don’t use such expressions; therefore poetry shouldn’t either. Notice also that much of Wordsworth’s poetry rejects the uniform stanzas and line lengths that were popular in the 18th century. Much of his poetry is free in form—lines and stanzas of

varying lengths in the same poem, more like the “selection of language really used by men.”

- *The subject of poetry should be events from the real lives of common people.*

Wordsworth believes that common, ordinary situations are worthy topics for poems, events such as farmers plowing their fields. He further believes that through the Imagination he could make his audience more aware of the significance of common scenes that they might otherwise take for granted.

- “All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” and “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.” Thus Wordsworth identifies sensibility rather than reason as the source of poetry.
- *A poet is a “man speaking to men” but an individual who is extraordinarily perceptive.* Wordsworth believes that the power of the Imagination enables poets to perceive the spiritual dimension found in the ordinary, in, as Coleridge says, all of animate nature. Sensibility allows the poet to understand and to convey the inner being of man and nature.

Forms of Literature

- Novel

A **novel**⁸, as famously defined in the Holman/Harmon *Handbook to Literature*, is an “extended fictional prose narrative.” The novel flourished in the Romantic Period, encompassing novels previously listed by Anne Brontë, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Brontë, Mary Shelley, and Ann Radcliffe; Sir Walter Scott’s historical novels, known as the Waverly Novels, set in medieval times and glorifying Scottish nationalism; and Jane Austen’s novels of manners, portraying the genteel country life of the Regency era.

- Lyric Poetry

A **lyric**⁹ is a brief poem, expressing emotion, imagination, and meditative thought, usually stanzaic in form.

- Romantic Ode

As used in the Romantic Period, the **ode**¹⁰ is a lyric poem longer than usual lyrics, often on a more serious topic, usually meditative and philosophic in tone and subject.

- Ballad

8. As famously defined in the Holman/Harmon *Handbook to Literature*, an “extended fictional prose narrative.”

9. A brief poem, expressing emotion, imagination, and meditative thought, usually stanzaic in form.

10. A lyric poem longer than usual lyrics, often on a more serious topic, usually meditative and philosophic in tone and subject.

A **ballad**¹¹ is a narrative poem or song. Ballads originated as songs that were part of an oral culture, usually simple and regular in rhythm and rhyme. The typical ballad stanza is 4 lines rhyming abab. Because of their simplicity and their role as part of folk culture, ballads were popular with many Romantic writers.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Romanticism grew from a political and philosophical milieu which promoted democracy, equated nature and spirit, and valued sensibility over reason.
- *Lyrical Ballads*, published in 1798, is often considered the beginning of the Romantic period because Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poetry marks a distinct change in form and subject matter from neoclassical poetry.
- In his Preface to the 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth delineates the principles that define Romanticism and distinguish Romantic poetry from neoclassical poetry.
- Important forms of Romantic literature are the novel, lyric poetry, odes, and ballads.

Resources

General Information

- [British Women Romantic Poets 1789–1832](#). University of California, Davis. an electronic collection of texts.
- [“Nineteenth-Century Literature.”](#) *Literary History.com*. Jan Pridmore.
- [Romantic Circles](#). Neil Fraistat and Steven E. Jones, editors. University of Maryland.
- [“Romanticism.”](#) *I Hear America Singing*. Profiles: Artists, Movements, Ideas. Thomas Hampson. PBS.
- [“Romanticism.”](#) Lilia Melani. English Department. Brooklyn College. City University of New York.
- [Women Poets of the Romantic Period 1770–1839](#). Special Collections. University Libraries. University of Colorado at Boulder.

11. A narrative poem or song, usually simple and regular in rhythm and rhyme. The typical ballad stanza is 4 lines rhyming abab.

French Revolution

- [“The French Revolution.”](#) *The National Archives*.

Industrial Revolution

- “1770s.” English Language and Literature Timeline. British Library.
- “The British Industrial Revolution.” Pamela E. Mack. Clemson University.
- “Child Labor.” *The Victorian Web*. David Cody. Hartwick College.
- “The Life of the Industrial Worker in Nineteenth-Century England.” *The Victorian Web*. Laura Del Col. West Virginia University.

Gothic Novels

- “Ann Radcliffe: An Evaluation.” *The Victorian Web*. David Cody. Hartwick College.
- “Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake, and the Romantic Imagination.” Tate Britain. images of paintings in the Tate Britain museum displayed for an exhibit on Romantic Gothic art.
- Mary Shelley’s Hand-Written Draft of Frankenstein. *Shelley’s Ghost: Reshaping the Image of a Literary Family*. Bodleian Libraries. Oxford University Exhibit in partnership with the New York Public Library. virtual book with turnable pages and slideshow.
- “Sublime Anxiety: The Gothic Family and The Outsider.” University of Virginia Library.

Lyrical Ballads

- “Lyrical Ballads.” Dove Cottage and the Wordsworth Museum. Wordsworth Trust.

Forms of Literature

- “Lyric.” *Literary Terms and Definitions*. Dr. L. Kip Wheeler. Carson-Newman College.
- “Lyric.” *The UVic Writer’s Guide*. The Department of English. University of Victoria.
- “The Meditative Romantic Ode.” Lilia Melani. English Department. Brooklyn College. City University of New York.
- “Novel.” *The UVic Writer’s Guide*. The Department of English. University of Victoria.
- “Ode.” *Literary Terms and Definitions*. Dr. L. Kip Wheeler. Carson-Newman College.
- “Ode.” *The UVic Writer’s Guide*. The Department of English. University of Victoria.

6.2 Charlotte Turner Smith (1749–1806)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify characteristics of Romanticism in Charlotte Turner Smith's work.
2. Describe Smith's work as topographical poetry.

Biography

Early in her childhood, Charlotte Turner Smith lived in the Sussex downs that figure prominently in her writing. Years after the death of her mother, Smith's father remarried, promising his new wife that the teenaged Charlotte would not remain in the household. Her father arranged her marriage to a man who proved to be irresponsible, promiscuous, and abusive. While in debtor's prison with her husband and children, Smith earned enough money from her writing to obtain their release. After leaving her husband, she turned to writing in an attempt to support herself and their children.

Many of the hardships Smith faced in life—the death of her mother, her step-mother's dislike of her, the death of several of her children, her husband's abuse—found their way into her novels, poetry, and plays.



*Portrait of Charlotte Turner Smith (1749–1806, frontispiece to an 1827 publication of her *Elegiac Sonnets*).*

Video Clip 1

Charlotte Turner Smith

[\(click to see video\)](#)

View a video mini-lecture on Charlotte Turner Smith.

Romanticism

Now recognized as the first woman Romantic writer, perhaps even the first Romantic writer, Charlotte Smith's work was recognized by and an influence on Romantic poets such as Southey, Wordsworth, and Austen.

Her attention to nature and nature's association with the supernatural is one of the characteristics that her work shares with other Romantic writers.

Smith is also noted for her use of the sonnet and for initiating a new interest in the sonnet among later Romantic writers such as Wordsworth and Keats. The sonnet form, which had flourished during the Elizabethan Age, was little used during the Age of Enlightenment. Sonnet sequences such as Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* emphasize the emotional ups and downs of a love affair. During the Age of Reason, such blatant sentimentalism was abandoned in favor of reason and rational thought, but with Romanticism came a new interest in literature of sensibility.

Texts

- "Beachy Head with Other Poems." *British Women Romantic Poets, 1789–1832*. An Electronic Collection of Texts from the University of California at Davis. Ophilia Yim.
- "Beachy Head: With Other Poems." *Google Books*.
- "Charlotte Turner Smith." *The Works of Charlotte Smith—An Electronic Edition*. Stephen C. Behrendt. Electronic Text Center, UNL Libraries. University of Nebraska, Lincoln.
- "Elegiac Sonnets." *British Women Romantic Poets, 1789–1832*. An Electronic Collection of Texts from the University of California at Davis. Charlotte Payne.
- "Elegiac Sonnets: by Charlotte Smith With Additional Sonnets and Other Poems." *Google Books*.

“Sonnet V. To the South Downs”

Ah, hills below’d! where once, an happy child,

Your beechen shades, “your turf, your flowers among,”

I wove your blue-bells into garlands wild,

And woke your echoes with my artless song.

Ah, hills below’d! your turf, your flowers remain;

But can they peace to this sad breast restore,

For one poor moment soothe the sense of pain,

And teach a breaking heart to throb no more?

And you, Aruna! in the vale below,

As to the sea your limpid waves you bear,

Can you one kind Lethean cup bestow,

To drink a long oblivion to my care?

Ah, no!—when all, e’en hope’s last ray is gone,

There’s no oblivion—but in death alone!

Like many of Smith’s sonnets, “Sonnet V. To the South Downs” begins with a description of nature intricately tied to memories of her childhood, a pattern later found in much of William Wordsworth’s poetry. The poem’s content soon turns from natural description and the joy of childhood it elicits to the current sense of

the speaker's pain. Lines 6–8 and lines 11 and 12 ask questions which serve as transition to the topic of the speaker's heartbreak, asking if even the current beauty and the remembrance of past joy can mitigate the speaker's emotional suffering in the present or the future. The couplet provides the answer: only death can provide the oblivion that will ease the speaker's pain.

Smith's volume of sonnets was first published in 1784. In the preface to the first edition, Smith notes that in these poems she records "melancholy moments" by "expressing in verse the sensations those moments brought," an explanation echoed in Wordsworth's "emotion recollected in tranquility."

**“Sonnet XLIV. Written in the Church-yard at Middleton,
in Sussex.”**

Press'd by the moon, mute arbitress of tides,
While the loud equinox its power combines,
The sea no more its swelling surge confines,
But o'er the shrinking land sublimely rides.
The wild blast, rising from the western cave,
Drives the huge billows from their heaving bed;
Tears from their grassy tombs the village dead,
And breaks the silent sabbath of the grave!
With shells and sea-weed mingled, on the shore,
Lo! their bones whiten in the frequent wave;
But vain to them the winds and waters rave;
They hear the warring elements no more:
While I am doom'd-by life's long storm oppress,
To gaze with envy on their gloomy rest.

All along the southern coast of England, the chalk cliffs continuously erode into the sea. Famous for its South Down walks, the cliff area prominently displays frequent signs warning walkers not to approach the edges. Cliffs often collapse onto the

beach far below, taking with them any objects or persons standing on the crumbling ground.

In the small village of Middleton-on-Sea, a church stood near the edge of the cliffs until centuries of erosion caused most of the building to tumble into the sea. As is common in English parish churches, the village graveyard surrounded the church building, allowing the dead to be buried in hallowed ground. During Smith's lifetime, an unusually high tide swept away part of the ruins of the church as well as land containing graves. Exposed bones were found on the beaches afterwards.

In Sonnet 44, the speaker again describes the physical scene, the focus on the bones left exposed on the shore by the destructive tide. As frequently occurs in these sonnets, the final couplet turns to the speaker's emotional state.

“Beachy Head”

The last poem written by Charlotte Smith, published posthumously, “Beachy Head” exemplifies many of the characteristics that have come to define Romantic poetry.

Perhaps most obvious is Smith's focus on the natural world. However, as is typical of Romanticism, nature is valued not just for its beauty but because of *mysticism*: the sense of a divine presence in nature. Note words with religious connotations in the poem.

The speaker's references to the hind (the rustic country-dweller) who makes an honest living and to the shepherd who is involved in smuggling both typify *primitivism*, the interest in the lower social classes, people who live close to nature.

Also, the poem reveals *sensibility*, the valuing of human emotion over reason.

At the same time, the poem exhibits traits of poetry from the Enlightenment. Note the *personification* of attributes such as Hope, Fancy, Luxury, and Memory.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Charlotte Turner Smith is considered the first woman Romantic writer, perhaps even the first Romantic writer.
- Smith’s work exemplifies characteristics of Romantic poetry such as mysticism, primitivism, and sensibility.
- Smith’s work may be categorized as topographical poetry.

EXERCISES

1. In Sonnet 44, the speaker describes the storm, the “wild blast,” that tears the graves from the cliff. In the final couplet, what does the speaker compare to the storm?
2. List some of the nature descriptions in both Sonnet 5 and Sonnet 44. How would you compare/contrast the details in the two poems.
3. In Sonnet 44, how does the speaker compare herself to the dead on the beach?
4. “Beachy Head” features many of the characteristics considered representative of Romantic poetry. Identify examples of these characteristics.
5. List examples of Smith’s identification of nature with supernatural or divine forces.
6. In line 4 of “Beachy Head” and in other instances throughout the poem, the speaker refers to *Fancy*. Until Samuel Taylor Coleridge distinguished between *fancy* and *imagination* in his 1817 *Biographia Literaria*, the term *fancy* was considered to mean essentially the same creative function as *imagination*. Coleridge, however, defined *fancy* as a lower order skill: simply recalling events, reordering and arranging memories and impressions but not creating new meaning. *Imagination* he considered a much higher order skill involving creativity. Consider Smith’s use of the term *Fancy*. Which definition do you think she intends?
7. After describing the natural scene, Smith writes that natural objects are “the toys of Nature” that have little value “in Reason’s eye.” How does this comment relate to the 18th-century Enlightenment view of Reason? Do you find an implied criticism of the veneration of Reason in this poem?
8. In “Beachy Head,” Smith describes “Heaven’s pure air” blowing through nature to produce the music of nature. Compare this image to the principal image in Coleridge’s “The Eolian Harp.”

Resources

General Information

- [*British Women Romantic Poets 1789–1832*](#). An Electronic Collection of Texts from the University of California at Davis.

Biography

- [“Charlotte Smith.”](#) *Romantic Natural History*. Ashton Nichols. Dickinson College.
- [“Charlotte \(Turner\) Smith \(1749–1806\).”](#) Women Writers. *Library and Early Women’s Writing*. Chawton House Library.
- [“Introduction.”](#) *The Works of Charlotte Smith—An Electronic Edition*. Stephen C. Behrendt. Electronic Text Center, UNL Libraries. University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

Texts

- [“Beachy Head with Other Poems.”](#) *British Women Romantic Poets, 1789–1832*. An Electronic Collection of Texts from the University of California at Davis. Ophelia Yim.
- [“Beachy Head: With Other Poems.”](#) *Google Books*.
- [“Charlotte Turner Smith.”](#) *The Works of Charlotte Smith—An Electronic Edition*. Stephen C. Behrendt. Electronic Text Center, UNL Libraries. University of Nebraska, Lincoln.
- [“Elegiac Sonnets.”](#) *British Women Romantic Poets, 1789–1832*. An Electronic Collection of Texts from the University of California at Davis. Charlotte Payne.
- [“Elegiac Sonnets: by Charlotte Smith With Additional Sonnets and Other Poems.”](#) *Google Books*.

Audio

- [“Charlotte Smith.”](#) *Eighteenth-Century Audio: A Collection of Aural Poetry*.
- [“Elegiac Sonnets and Other Poems.”](#) *LibriVox*.

6.3 William Blake (1757–1827)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize William Blake as both artist and writer, and assess the integration of his writing with his art.
2. Interpret Blake's title *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, and differentiate the state of innocence and the state of experience in the correlating pairs of poems.
3. Evaluate *Songs of Innocence and Experience* as examples of Romantic poetry.

Biography

William Blake's memorial plaque in St. Paul's Cathedral, London, identifies him as an "artist, poet, mystic." Born in London, where he spent most of his life, Blake was educated largely at home. From his childhood he claimed to experience visions of and even conversations with angels and with the Virgin Mary. His visionary experiences appear in many of his poetic works, such as *The Book of Urizen* and *The Book of Los*.

For a short time, Blake attended art school and then was apprenticed to an engraver. He made his living primarily from his artwork. His poetry, such as *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, was written as an integral part of his engravings.

William Blake Memorial Plaque



William Blake's memorial plaque in St. Paul's Cathedral, London including the first stanza of Blake's "Auguries of Innocence."

William Blake

1757–1827

Artist + Poet + Mystic

“To see a world in a grain of sand

And a heaven in a wild flower,

Hold infinity in the palm of your hand

And eternity in an hour.”

The British Library includes [Blake's Notebook](#) in its Virtual Books collection. On pages 29 and 30, you can see a draft copy of "The Tyger" and on page 3, sketches of tigers. The [William Blake Archive](#) provides digital images of *Songs of Innocence and Experience* and of Blake's other poetic works that allow you to read the works as Blake intended, with the accompanying engravings.

Texts

- [The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake](#). Blake Digital Text Project. David V. Erdman, ed. Nelson Hilton. University of Georgia, Athens.
- [Selected Poetry of William Blake](#). *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English. University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- [Songs of Innocence and Experience by William Blake](#). *Project Gutenberg*.

Illustrated Text

- "[Songs of Innocence 1789](#)." *The William Blake Archive*. Editors: Morris Eaves, University of Rochester; Robert Essick, University of California, Riverside; Joseph Viscomi, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Library of Congress.
- "[Songs of Innocence and Experience](#)." *The William Blake Archive*. Editors: Morris Eaves, University of Rochester; Robert Essick, University of California, Riverside; Joseph Viscomi, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Library of Congress.
- "[William Blake Online](#)." Tate Britain.

Songs of Innocence and Experience

Although Blake is considered a pre-Romantic poet, his poetry exhibits many of the characteristics of Romantic poetry.

Like many late 18th-century and 19th-century writers, Blake abhorred the effects the Industrial Revolution had on the physical environment and, more importantly, on the people caught in a time of radical change in the ways of living and making a living their families had pursued for generations. [Child labor](#) issues figure prominently in Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. *The Victorian Web's* section on child labor includes testimony from 1819 Parliamentary hearings on the [Chimney Sweepers' Regulation Bill](#). With his Romantic sensibility, Blake puts a human face on the debate, encouraging the reader to think of the situation in terms of individuals—Tom, Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack—innocent children living lives of inhumane hardship.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- William Blake created his poetry as an integral part of his artwork.
- Blake's title pinpoints the dichotomy between the states of innocence and of experience that, according to the work's subtitle, characterize the human soul.
- Although often considered a pre-Romantic poet, Blake's work exemplifies many characteristics of Romantic poetry.

EXERCISES

1. Blake titles his collection of poems *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. His subtitle explains that the poems are “Shewing [showing] the Two Contrary [opposite] States of the Human Soul.” Both “innocence” and “experience” are part of each human soul.
 - What do you think he means when he uses the terms “innocence” and “experience”?
 - Do “innocence” and “experience” belong to certain ages of a person’s life, or to one’s attitude about life, or to the experiences that happen to a person in life, or other circumstances?

2. After reading all of the *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*, re-read the following pairs of poems as companion poems:

- “The Lamb” and “The Tyger”
- “The Chimney Sweeper” and “The Chimney Sweeper”
- “Holy Thursday” and “Holy Thursday”
- “Nurse’s Song” and “Nurse’s Song”

Why does the first poem of each pair belong in the innocence category and the second in the experience category?

3. While “The Lamb” is a question and answer poem, its companion “The Tyger” is only a question poem. Why?
4. In “The Lamb,” who does the speaker refer to in the following lines?

He is called by thy name,

For he calls himself a Lamb:

He is meek & he is mild,

He became a little child:

5. In the *Innocence* “The Chimney Sweeper,” why does Tom dream of being locked in “coffins of black”? Note how the young boys imagine Heaven;

how does this add to the pathos of the poem? Explain the final line of the poem: “So if all do their duty they need not fear harm”; to whom does the speaker refer with the word “all”?

6. In the *Experience* “The Chimney Sweeper,” who does the boy seem to blame for his situation?
7. In the *Innocence* “Holy Thursday,” the poem describes an apparently beautiful sight: the poor children of London cleaned up and dressed in their best clothing being marched to a church service to sing praises. In the *Experience* “Holy Thursday,” the poem begins with a question:

Is this a holy thing to see

In a rich and fruitful land,

Babes reduced to misery,

Fed with cold and usurous hand?

What is the relationship of the two poems?

8. What characteristics of Romanticism do you find in *Songs of Innocence and Experience*?

Resources

General Information

- *The William Blake Archive*. Editors: Morris Eaves, University of Rochester; Robert Essick, University of California, Riverside; Joseph Viscomi, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Library of Congress.

Biography

- “[About Blake](#).” The Blake Society.
- “[Chronology](#).” *The William Blake Archive*. Editors: Morris Eaves, University of Rochester; Robert Essick, University of California, Riverside; Joseph Viscomi, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Library of Congress.
- [William Blake \(1757–1827\)](#). The British Museum.

- “[William Blake \(1757–1827\)](#).” Denise Vultee. *The William Blake Archive*. Editors: Morris Eaves, University of Rochester; Robert Essick, University of California, Riverside; Joseph Viscomi, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Library of Congress.

Songs of Innocence and Experience

- [Blake, Songs of Innocence and Experience, 1794](#). British Library.

Texts

- [The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake](#). *Blake Digital Text Project*. David V. Erdman, ed. Nelson Hilton, University of Georgia, Athens.
- [Selected Poetry of William Blake](#). *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English. University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- [Songs of Innocence and Experience by William Blake](#). *Project Gutenberg*.

Illustrated Texts

- “[Songs of Innocence 1789](#).” *The William Blake Archive*. Editors: Morris Eaves, University of Rochester; Robert Essick, University of California, Riverside; Joseph Viscomi, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Library of Congress.
- “[Songs of Innocence and Experience](#).” *The William Blake Archive*. Editors: Morris Eaves, University of Rochester; Robert Essick, University of California, Riverside; Joseph Viscomi, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Library of Congress.
- “[William Blake Online](#).” Tate Britain.

Audio

- [Allen Ginsberg Performing William Blake](#). Naropa University Archive Project. *Internet Archive*.
- [Songs of Innocence and Experience](#). *LibriVox*.
- [Songs of Innocence and Experience by Blake](#). *Project Gutenberg*.
- “[Stefanie Wortman Reads ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ \[from Songs of Experience\] by William Blake](#).” *Poets on Poets*. Ed. Tilar Mazzeo. *Romantic Circles*. General Editors: Neil Fraistat and Steven E. Jones. Technical Editor: Laura Mandell. University of Maryland. audio and text.
- “[William Blake](#).” *The Romantics*. BBC. selected poems.

Art Information

- “[Blake’s Notebooks](#).” Virtual Books. British Library.
- “[Illuminated Printing](#).” *The William Blake Archive*. Editors: Morris Eaves, University of Rochester; Robert Essick, University of California, Riverside; Joseph Viscomi, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Library of Congress.
- “[William Blake and the Illuminated Book](#).” *The Electronic Labyrinth*. Christopher Keep, Tim McLaughlin, Robin Parmar. Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities. University of Virginia.

Concordance

- [Concordance to *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*](#). *Blake Digital Text Project*. Nelson Hilton, University of Georgia, Athens.
- “[William Blake Songs of Innocence and Experience Web Concordance](#).” *The Web Concordances*.

6.4 Robert Burns (1759–1796)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand Robert Burns's position as the national poet of Scotland and his appeal to Romantic-era audiences as a natural poet, an example of primitivism.
2. Identify characteristics of Romanticism in Burns's poetry.

Robert Burns is the national poet of Scotland. Although his poems are somewhat difficult to read because of the Scottish dialect, that dialect is one of the reasons Burns is a central pre-Romantic figure. Long before the popularity of 20th-century multi-culturalism, Burns preserved in his poetry the Scottish language, culture, and heritage. Burns embodies the concept of Romantic primitivism, and his poetry exemplifies the glorification of the common man, the individual educated by life and nature.



Duyckinick, Evert A. *Portrait Gallery of Eminent Men and Women in Europe and America*.

New York: Johnson, Wilson & Company, 1873.

Biography

The son of a Scottish farmer, Robert Burns was born in this farmhouse in Alloway, Scotland in 1759. One end of the building housed the animals; the other, the family.

Video Clip 2

Robert Burns

[\(click to see video\)](#)

View a video mini-lecture on Robert Burns.

Burns attended the local school, had occasional tutors, and read voraciously. Because he lacked formal education, he was viewed as a natural poet, the exemplification of a Romantic ideal: a primitive plowman, close to nature, as capable of writing perceptive poetry as the university-educated aristocrat. After the publication of his Kilmarnock volume of poetry, Burns's fame soared, and he was in demand in the highest social circles in Scotland.



Known as the National Poet of Scotland, Robbie Burns celebrated the folk legends, the history, and the language of Scotland. His poetry also glorified nature, the common individual, and rural Scottish life.

A stained glass window in St. Giles Church in Edinburgh, Scotland honors Burns, as do numerous monuments in Edinburgh, Alloway, and Dumfries where Burns lived.

Texts

- [Books by Robert Burns](#). *Project Gutenberg*.
- [Complete Works](#). *Burns Country*. includes glossary for Scottish words.
- [Selected Poetry of Robert Burns](#). *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.



Audio

In addition to reading Burns's poetry, listen to recordings in the Scottish dialect.

- "[Kevin McFadden Reads 'To a Mouse' by Robert Burns](#)." *Poets on Poets*. Tilar Mazzeo, ed. *Romantic Circles*.
- "[Robert Burns 250th Anniversary Collection](#)." *LibriVox*.

“To a Mouse” and “To a Louse”

Both “To a Mouse” and “To a Louse” have a moral to the story.

In “To a Mouse,” a farmer plowing his field turns up a mouse’s nest, and the poem reports his speech to the mouse. Sympathetic, the farmer recognizes what was a popular idea among Romantic poets, the idea of man and nature in a “social union.” In Burns’s frequently quoted lines, the farmer states that even the most careful plans may “go astray” because of unforeseen circumstances:

The best-laid schemes o’ mice an’ men

Gang aft agley,

An’ lea’e us nought but grief an’ pain,

For promis’d joy!

In the final stanza, the farmer notes, despite this realization that neither man nor mouse can plan the future with any certainty, the mouse is still more blessed than the man. The present only affects the mouse; people, however, look back at the past and worry about the future.



*The Poetic Genius of my Country
found me at the plough and
threw her inspiring mantle over
me. She bade me sing the loves,
the joys, the rural scenes and
rural pleasures of my native soil,
in my native tongue; I tuned my
wild, artless notes, as she
inspired*

...—quotation from a letter by
Robert Burns.



Auld Kirk in Alloway, setting of Tam O'Shanter's ghostly encounter.

In “To a Louse,” the moral is in lines 43–44 as Burns laments that people might behave differently if only we could see ourselves in the same way that others see us. The method he chooses to convey this message is by relating the story of Jeany, a young woman sitting in a church service, aware that people are staring at her. Thinking they are admiring her bonnet and her beauty, Jeany is unaware that they really are watching a louse making its way across her bonnet. The narrator believes that lice belong on poor beggars, not on fine ladies. The louse, however, by its presence on Jeany makes the point that nature is indifferent to social status.

“Tam O’Shanter”

Robert Burns sets his folktale “Tam O’Shanter” in his hometown of Alloway. The story tells of a foolish, drunken man who, to his detriment, ignores the good advice of his wife, stays out late drinking too much, and suffers, as does his brave horse Meg, a supernatural encounter.

Video Clip 3

Robert Burns Tam O'Shanter

[\(click to see video\)](#)

View a video mini-lecture on “Tam O'Shanter.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Robert Burns is the National Poet of Scotland because he celebrated his country’s language, folklore, and rural life.
- Burns’s reputation as a natural poet epitomized the Romantic-era ideal of primitivism.

EXERCISES

1. What characteristics of Romantic poetry do you find in “To a Mouse” and “To a Louse”?
2. How would you describe the character Tam O’Shanter?
3. Who is Maggie (also referred to as Meg)? What did Maggie lose in her flight to save Tam O’Shanter?
4. What alerted the witches to Tam’s presence?
5. Whom would you describe as the hero of “Tam O’Shanter”?
6. What is the “moral” of “Tam O’Shanter”?
7. How does Burns’s telling of “Tam O’Shanter” correspond with Romantic ideas about poetry and poets?

Resources

General Information

- [The Burns Encyclopedia](#). *Burns Country*. Maurice Lindsey.
- [“Robert Burns and Radicalism.”](#) The Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution. BBC History.

Biography

- [“Burns Timeline.”](#) *Robert Burns Birthplace Museum*. National Trust for Scotland.
- [Robert Burns 1759–1796](#). National Library of Scotland Digital Gallery.
- [Robert Burns, 1759–1796](#). University of South Carolina Libraries. Rare Books and Special Collections. Biographical information with images of manuscripts.
- [Robert Burns Biography](#). BBC Scotland.

Texts

- [Books by Robert Burns](#). *Project Gutenberg*.
- [Complete Works](#). *Burns Country*. includes glossary of Scottish words.
- [Selected Poetry of Robert Burns](#). *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.

Audio

- “[Kevin McFadden Reads ‘To a Mouse’ by Robert Burns.](#)” *Poets on Poets*. Ed. Tilar Mazzeo. *Romantic Circles*. General Editors: Neil Fraistat and Steven E. Jones. Technical Editor: Laura Mandell. University of Maryland.
- “[Robert Burns 250th Anniversary Collection.](#)” *LibriVox*.

Video

- “[Robert Burns.](#)” Dr. Carol Lowe, McLennan Community College.
- “[Robert Burns, ‘Tam O’Shanter.’](#)” Dr. Carol Lowe, McLennan Community College.

6.5 Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize the unconventional nature of Mary Wollstonecraft's beliefs, as expressed in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* for her time period.
2. Correlate the opinions expressed in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* with the characteristics of Romanticism.

The same philosophy that led to the American Revolution and the French Revolution, the impetus for equality that was a focusing tenet of Romanticism, led many to believe that women should be included in the granting of political and social rights. Although Mary Wollstonecraft wrote novels, she is best remembered for her political treatises such as *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

Biography

Wollstonecraft's personal experiences mirror the state of women's rights in the late 18th/early 19th centuries. As the second child, Mary Wollstonecraft from early childhood resented her elder brother's education and inheritance. Denied the formal education her brother enjoyed, Wollstonecraft, through her reading, obtained an education equal to or perhaps better than many women of her time period and social class. Because of her father's declining financial situation, Wollstonecraft earned her own living, working in the only jobs available to women, such as a lady's companion and a governess, which she found particularly distasteful. Later in her life she attempted to establish schools for girls.



James Heath (1757–1834),
engraved from the painting of
John Opie (1761–1807).

In her personal life as well as her professional life, Wollstonecraft was unconventional and attracted the disdain of traditional society. She gave birth to an

illegitimate daughter, allowing people to believe she was married to the child's father.

Wollstonecraft's two suicide attempts testify to her dissatisfaction with life in a world which disagreed so adamantly with her ideas of radical freedom in moral and social behavior. Later when she became pregnant with William Godwin's child, they married, even though both advocated free love without marriage. The couple's marriage revealed that Wollstonecraft's first marriage was a pretense, and she again found herself publicly ostracized. Wollstonecraft died from complications of childbirth a month after her daughter with Godwin was born. Their daughter, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, grew up to marry the poet Shelley and to write the novel *Frankenstein*.



Portrait by John Opie.

Text of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

- 1792 A Vindication of the Rights of Women by Mary Wollstonecraft. *Great Voyages: The History of Western Philosophy from 1492 to 1776.* Bill Uzgalis, Oregon State University. searchable text.
- “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects.” *Bartleby.com.* rpt. from Boston: Peter Edes, 1792.
- “Modern History Sourcebook: Mary Woolstonecraft [sic]: A Vindication of the Right of Women.” *Internet Modern History Sourcebook.* Paul Halsall, Fordham University.
- Vindication of the Rights of Woman by Mary Wollstonecraft. *Project Gutenberg.*
- “Wollstonecraft, Mary, 1759–1797 . A Vindication of the Rights of Woman / by Mary Wollstonecraft.” *Electronic Text Center.* University of Virginia Library.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman

Excerpt from the Introduction

After considering the historic page, and viewing the living world with anxious solicitude, the most melancholy motions of sorrowful indignation have depressed my spirits, and I have sighed when obliged to confess, that either nature has made a great difference between man and man, or that the civilization, which has hitherto taken place in the world, has been very partial. I have turned over various books written on the subject of education, and patiently observed the conduct of parents and the management of schools; but what has been the result? a profound conviction, that the neglected education of my fellow creatures is the grand source of the misery I deplore; and that women in particular, are rendered weak and wretched by a variety of concurring causes, originating from one hasty conclusion. The conduct and manners of women, in fact, evidently prove, that their minds are not in a healthy state; for, like the flowers that are planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty; and the flaunting leaves, after having pleased a fastidious eye, fade, disregarded on the stalk, long before the season when they ought to have arrived at maturity. One cause of this barren blooming I attribute to a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject by men, who, considering females rather as women than human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than rational wives; and the understanding of the sex has been so bubbled by this specious homage, that the civilized women of the present century, with a few exceptions, are only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by their abilities and virtues exact respect.

In a treatise, therefore, on female rights and manners, the works which have been particularly written for their improvement must not be overlooked; especially when it is asserted, in direct terms, that the minds of women are enfeebled by false refinement; that the books of instruction, written by men of genius, have had the same tendency as more frivolous productions; and that, in the true style of Mahometanism, they are only considered as females, and not as a part of the human species, when improvable reason is allowed to be the dignified distinction, which raises men above the brute creation, and puts a natural sceptre in a feeble hand.

Yet, because I am a woman, I would not lead my readers to suppose, that I mean violently to agitate the contested question respecting the equality and inferiority of the sex; but as the subject lies in my way, and I cannot pass it over without subjecting the main tendency of my reasoning to misconstruction, I shall stop a moment to deliver, in a few words, my opinion. In the government of the physical world, it is observable that the female, in general, is inferior to the male. The male pursues, the female yields—this is the law of nature; and it does not appear to be suspended or abrogated in favour of woman. This physical superiority cannot be denied—and it is a noble prerogative! But not content with this natural pre-eminence, men endeavour to sink us still lower, merely to render us alluring objects for a moment; and women, intoxicated by the adoration which men, under the influence of their senses, pay them, do not seek to obtain a durable interest in their hearts, or to become the friends of the fellow creatures who find amusement in their society.

I am aware of an obvious inference: from every quarter have I heard exclamations against masculine women; but where are they to be found? If, by this appellation, men mean to inveigh against their ardour in hunting, shooting, and gaming, I shall most cordially join in the cry; but if it be, against the imitation of manly virtues, or, more properly speaking, the attainment of those talents and virtues, the exercise of which ennobles the human character, and which raise females in the scale of animal being, when they are comprehensively termed mankind—all those who view them with a philosophical eye must, I should think, wish with me, that they may every day grow more and more masculine.

This discussion naturally divides the subject. I shall first consider women in the grand light of human creatures, who, in common with men, are placed on this earth to unfold their faculties; and afterwards I shall more particularly point out their peculiar designation.

I wish also to steer clear of an error, which many respectable writers have fallen into; for the instruction which has hitherto been addressed to women, has rather been applicable to LADIES, if the little indirect advice, that is scattered through Sandford and Merton, be excepted; but, addressing my sex in a firmer tone, I pay particular attention to those in the middle class, because they appear to be in the most natural state. Perhaps the seeds of false refinement, immorality, and vanity have ever been shed by the great. Weak, artificial beings raised above the common wants and affections of their race, in a premature unnatural manner, undermine the very foundation of virtue, and

spread corruption through the whole mass of society! As a class of mankind they have the strongest claim to pity! the education of the rich tends to render them vain and helpless, and the unfolding mind is not strengthened by the practice of those duties which dignify the human character. They only live to amuse themselves, and by the same law which in nature invariably produces certain effects, they soon only afford barren amusement.

But as I purpose taking a separate view of the different ranks of society, and of the moral character of women, in each, this hint is, for the present, sufficient; and I have only alluded to the subject, because it appears to me to be the very essence of an introduction to give a cursory account of the contents of the work it introduces.

My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their FASCINATING graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone. I earnestly wish to point out in what true dignity and human happiness consists—I wish to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them, that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart,

delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness, and that those beings who are only the objects of pity and that kind of love, which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt.

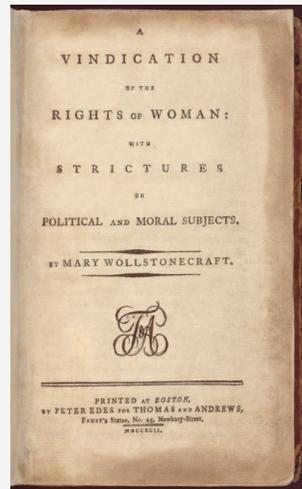
Dismissing then those pretty feminine phrases, which the men condescendingly use to soften our slavish dependence, and despising that weak elegance of mind, exquisite sensibility, and sweet docility of manners, supposed to be the sexual characteristics of the weaker vessel, I wish to show that elegance is inferior to virtue, that the first object of laudable ambition is to obtain a character as a human being, regardless of the distinction of sex; and that secondary views should be brought to this simple touchstone.

This is a rough sketch of my plan; and should I express my conviction with the energetic emotions that I feel whenever I think of the subject, the dictates of experience and reflection will be felt by some of my readers. Animated by this important object, I shall disdain to cull my phrases or polish my style—I aim at being useful, and sincerity will render me unaffected; for wishing rather to persuade by the force of my arguments, than dazzle by the elegance of my

language, I shall not waste my time in rounding periods, nor in fabricating the turgid bombast of artificial feelings, which, coming from the head, never reach the heart. I shall be employed about things, not words! and, anxious to render my sex more respectable members of society, I shall try to avoid that flowery diction which has slid from essays into novels, and from novels into familiar letters and conversation.

These pretty nothings, these caricatures of the real beauty of sensibility, dropping glibly from the tongue, vitiate the taste, and create a kind of sickly delicacy that turns away from simple unadorned truth; and a deluge of false sentiments and over-stretched feelings, stifling the natural emotions of the heart, render the domestic pleasures insipid, that ought to sweeten the exercise of those severe duties, which educate a rational and immortal being for a nobler field of action.

The education of women has, of late, been more attended to than formerly; yet they are still reckoned a frivolous sex, and ridiculed or pitied by the writers who endeavour by satire or instruction to improve them. It is acknowledged that they spend many of the first years of their lives in acquiring a smattering of accomplishments: meanwhile, strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves, the only way women can rise in the world—by marriage. And this desire making mere animals of them, when they marry, they act as such children may be expected to act: they dress; they paint, and nickname God's creatures. Surely these weak beings are only fit for the seraglio! Can they govern a family, or take care of the poor babes whom they bring into the world?



Title page from the first American edition 1792.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Because of the strictures of her society, Mary Wollstonecraft was largely self-educated and forced to work in traditional women's jobs which she disliked.
- Wollstonecraft evinces the Romantic characteristics of primitivism and individualism as well as exemplifying tenets from Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* such as the use of common language and writing for and about common people.

EXERCISES

1. In the first paragraph of *A Vindication*, Wollstonecraft uses an analogy to illustrate the thesis of her essay: she compares women as they are treated by society to flowers. What is the purpose of this analogy?
2. This analogy leads her to the thesis of her essay. Identify her thesis.
3. In paragraph six, Wollstonecraft specifies her audience. To what group of women is she writing? Why does she choose that group of women?
4. How, in paragraph 8, does Wollstonecraft say women usually are treated, and how does she plan to be different?
5. What type of language does Wollstonecraft intend to use in her essay? Compare her choice of language to that advocated by Wordsworth in his 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.
6. Wollstonecraft argues that because women are not educated they have only one means to “rise in the world.” What is that means?

Resources

General Information

- “[Wollstonecraft’s Rights of Woman](#).” *Taking Liberties: The Struggle for Britain’s Freedoms and Rights*. British Library.

Biography

- “[Mary Wollstonecraft](#).” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Sylvana Tomaselli, Stanford University.
- “[Mary Wollstonecraft \(1759–1797\)](#).” *Shelley’s Ghost: Reshaping the Image of a Literary Family*. Bodleian Libraries. Oxford University Exhibit in partnership with the New York Public Library.
- “[Mary Wollstonecraft, 1759–1797](#).” *The History Guide*. Steven Kreis. Lectures on Modern European Intellectual History.
- “[Mary Wollstonecraft \(1759–1797\)](#).” *Chawton House Library*. Valerie Patten. Library and Early Women’s Writing. Women Writers.
- “[Mary Wollstonecraft: A ‘Speculative and Dissenting Spirit’](#).” Janet Todd, University of Glasgow. British History. BBC History. BBC.
- “[Wollstonecraft Time Line](#).” *Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797)*. Bill Uzgalis, Oregon State University.

Text

- 1792 A Vindication of the Rights of Women by Mary Wollstonecraft. *Great Voyages: The History of Western Philosophy from 1492 to 1776.* Bill Uzgalis, Oregon State University. searchable text.
- “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects.” *Bartleby.com.* rpt. from Boston: Peter Edes, 1792.
- “Modern History Sourcebook: Mary Woolstonecraft [sic]: A Vindication of the Rights of Women.” *Internet Modern History Sourcebook.* Paul Halsall, Fordham University.
- Vindication of the Rights of Woman by Mary Wollstonecraft. *Project Gutenberg.*
- “Wollstonecraft, Mary, 1759–1797 . A Vindication of the Rights of Woman / by Mary Wollstonecraft.” *Electronic Text Center.* University of Virginia Library.

Audio

- Mary Wollstonecraft’s Last Three Notes to Godwin. *Shelley’s Ghost: Reshaping the Image of a Literary Family.* Bodleian Libraries. Oxford University Exhibit in partnership with the New York Public Library. podcast read by Oxford University students.
- Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication. *Shelley’s Ghost: Reshaping the Image of a Literary Family.* Bodleian Libraries. Oxford University Exhibit in partnership with the New York Public Library. podcast read by Oxford University students.
- A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. *LibriVox.*
- A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. *Shelley’s Ghost: Reshaping the Image of a Literary Family.* Bodleian Libraries. Oxford University Exhibit in partnership with the New York Public Library. podcast read by Oxford University students.
- A Vindication of the Rights of Woman by Mary Wollstonecraft. *Project Gutenberg.*
- “Wollstonecraft and Women’s Rights.” *Taking Liberties: The Struggle for Britain’s Freedoms and Rights.* Barbara Taylor. British Library. lecture on Wollstonecraft’s influence on British political rights for women.

Women’s Rights

- Introduction. Abby Wolf, Harvard University. 19th Century Women Writers. PBS.

- “Women’s Lives in Eighteenth Century England.” Miami University, Oxford, Ohio.
- “Wollstonecraft and Women’s Rights.” Taking Liberties: The Struggle for Britain’s Freedoms and Rights. Barbara Taylor. British Library. lecture on Wollstonecraft’s influence on British political rights for women.

6.6 William Wordsworth (1770–1850)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

Charlotte Smith, William Blake, and Robert Burns are sometimes referred to as pre-Romantic writers. Although their works display the characteristics of Romantic poetry, they pre-date Wordsworth and Coleridge, whose work is considered the beginning of British Romantic literature.

Biography

View the presentation on Wordsworth’s biography. Also view video mini-lectures [Romanticism and Wordsworth](#) and [William Wordsworth](#).

Texts

- [Books by William Wordsworth](#). *Project Gutenberg*.
- [The Complete Poetical Works](#). William Wordsworth. rpt. from London: Macmillan, 1888. *Bartleby.com*.
- [Lyrical Ballads: An Electronic Scholarly Edition](#). *Romantic Circles*. General Editors: Neil Fraistat, Steven E. Jones. Technical Editor: Laura Mandell. University of Maryland.
- [“William Wordsworth.” Dove Cottage and the Wordsworth Museum](#). The Wordsworth Trust. selected poems with commentary.
- [Wordsworth Variorum Archive](#). James M. Garrett, California State University at Los Angeles. texts from published first editions and concordance.

“Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey”

With the passage of the 1534 Act of Supremacy, King Henry VIII ordered that selected monasteries and abbeys in England be closed and the occupants dispersed. Like many others, [Tintern Abbey](#) stood vacant and gradually fell into decay. Over two hundred years later, Wordsworth came upon the ruins of Tintern Abbey while on a hiking trip. In the opening lines of the poem, the speaker states that after five years he has returned to Tintern Abbey.

Video Clip 4

Wordsworth's Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey

[\(click to see video\)](#)

View a video mini-lecture on "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey."

"Lines" is an example of a pattern found in much Romantic poetry: an observation of nature followed by a meditation inspired by that observation.



The following are excerpts from "Lines," not the entire poem.

Stanza 1 (lines 1–22): the speaker describes the beautiful scene. Note the descriptive details. This stanza is the observation of nature.



Five years have past; five summers, with the length	
Of five long winters! and again I hear	
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs	
With a soft inland murmur.—Once again	
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,	5
That on a wild secluded scene impress	
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect	
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.	
The day is come when I again repose	
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view	10
These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,	
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,	
Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves	
‘Mid groves and copses. Once again I see	
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines	15
Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,	
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke	
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!	
With some uncertain notice, as might seem	
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,	20
Or of some Hermit’s cave, where by his fire	
The Hermit sits alone.	

Stanza 2 (lines 22–49): This stanza begins the meditation—a philosophical strain of thought inspired by the natural scene. The speaker realizes that although he hasn’t seen Tintern Abbey for five years, he has remembered the beautiful scene even when he’s back in the busy, noisy city enduring the stress of daily life. When he remembers the beauty of nature, he feels again the calmness, the “tranquil restoration,” of being in nature. This idea that nature, even the memory of nature, can cause us to feel tranquil is a central concept of Romanticism.

These beautiful forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man’s eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and ‘mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,



Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration:—feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man’s life,
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love.

Stanza 4 (lines 58–111): The speaker reiterates the same concept in lines 64–67. He realizes that while he stands looking at the beauty of Tintern Abbey he is receiving

two types of pleasure: first, the “present pleasure” of simply enjoying the beauty at the moment; and second, the pleasure of storing up mental “life and food for future years” when he returns to the city and calls up the scene in his memory.

While here I stand, not only with the sense	
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts	65
That in this moment there is life and food	
For future years.	



Later in stanza 4, the speaker explains why remembering the beauties of nature can cause him to feel tranquil. First, in lines 90–93, he acknowledges that nature brings to mind “the still, sad music of humanity.” Nature is important because it turns his thoughts to humanity. Second, he informs the reader why nature draws his attention to the needs of humanity. In lines 107–111, he states that in nature he recognizes a divine presence, what he calls “the guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul of all my moral being.” Nature is a means of perceiving a spiritual presence in the world. This passage encapsulates the concept of Romantic mysticism.

For I have learned	90
To look on nature, not as in the hour	
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes	
The still, sad music of humanity,	
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power	
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt	95
A presence that disturbs me with the joy	
Of elevated thoughts: a sense sublime	
Of something far more deeply interfused,	
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,	
And the round ocean and the living air,	100
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:	
A motion and a spirit, that impels	
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,	
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still	
A lover of the meadows and the woods,	105
And mountains; and of all that we behold	
From this green earth; of all the mighty world	
Of eye and ear,—both what they half create,	
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise	
In nature and the language of the sense,	110
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,	
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul	
Of all my moral being.	



Stanza 5: The speaker directly addresses his sister (presumably Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy), hoping that she also will recognize both the beauty and the spiritual presence in nature. The benefit of being close to nature is that we are also close to God, and therefore the trials of daily life will not “disturb our cheerful faith.” Note the evils that beset individuals the speaker lists in lines 131–134. The speaker trusts his sister will find in nature the same tranquil restoration he has.

My dear, dear Sister! and this prayer I make	
Knowing that Nature never did betray	125
The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege	
Through all the years of this our life, to lead	
From joy to joy: for she can so inform	
The mind that is within us, so impress	
With quietness and beauty, and so feed	130
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,	
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,	
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all	
The dreary intercourse of daily life,	
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb	135
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold	
Is full of blessings.	



“Michael”

Video Clip 5

William Wordsworth's Michael A Pastoral Poem

[\(click to see video\)](#)

View a video mini-lecture on “Michael.”

“Michael” is a **narrative poem**¹², a poem that tells a story, about the misfortune of a simple common man and his family. Wordsworth subtitles the poem “A Pastoral Poem.” The term **pastoral**¹³ refers to poetry about shepherds, sheep, and the simple pleasures of rural life. In this poem, Wordsworth not only writes about one individual’s tragedy but also about an entire class of people whose lives are disrupted by the Industrial Revolution. For centuries, many families like Michael’s had made their living from their land and their flocks of sheep. The men tended the sheep and the women spun wool and wove cloth to sell. With the coming of machinery, spinning and weaving could be accomplished much more quickly and cheaply in factories. Many young people, no longer able to make a living in the country, went to work in the cities.

A convention of the pastoral mode is the portrayal of life in the city, or in the court as in Marlowe’s poem “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love,” as evil and corrupt—the view of the courtier caught up in and tired of the intrigue and subterfuge of the court, longing to escape into the beautiful, peaceful countryside, totally unaware of the realities of the hard lives of shepherds.

Wordsworth draws on this convention when he pictures the son Luke having to go to the city where he falls into evil and is unable to come home to the pure life of the countryside.

Note the beginning lines of the poem. Wordsworth describes the scene and then focuses our attention on a specific object: “a straggling heap of unhewn stones.” This specific object then, this stack of rough stones, prompts him to remember and to tell us the story of Michael, the shepherd.



The beginning of the trail which leads to Greenhead Gill[Ghyll], the pathway Wordsworth walked where he saw the “heap of unhewn stone” and was reminded of the story of Michael the shepherd.

12. A poem that tells a story.

13. Poetry about shepherds, sheep, and the simple pleasures of rural life.



“I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”

This poem is a lyric poem. Like “Lines,” “I Wandered” follows the pattern of an observation of nature leading to a meditation.

*The valley between these hills
leads to Greenhead Ghyll.*

I wandered lonely as a cloud	
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,	
When all at once I saw a crowd,	
A host, of golden daffodils;	
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,	
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.	
Continuous as the stars that shine	
And twinkle on the milky way,	
They stretched in never-ending line	
Along the margin of a bay:	10
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,	
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.	
The waves beside them danced; but they	
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:	
A poet could not but be gay,	
In such a jocund company:	
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought	
What wealth the show to me had brought:	
For oft, when on my couch I lie	
In vacant or in pensive mood,	20
They flash upon that inward eye	
Which is the bliss of solitude;	
And then my heart with pleasure fills,	
And dances with the daffodils.	

In stanzas 1–3, note the descriptive details. Stanza 4 is the meditation, the part of the poem that is philosophical and thoughtful. In this last stanza, the speaker realizes that when he is at home, lying on his couch, he remembers the sight of the

daffodils and he feels the same happy emotions he felt when he originally saw them, an example of “emotion recollected in tranquility” which Wordsworth describes in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The work of Wordsworth and Coleridge is considered the beginning of the Romantic Period in British literature.
- The landscape of the Lake District influenced Wordsworth’s poetry.
- The pattern of an observation of nature that leads into a meditation is a typical pattern in Romantic poetry.
- “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey,” first published in *Lyrical Ballads*, exemplifies the tenets of Romanticism Wordsworth outlined in the 1802 Preface and provides an explanation of Romantic mysticism.
- “Michael” addresses the consequences of the Industrial Revolution on the English countryside and its inhabitants.

EXERCISES

1. What does the poem’s narrator see that reminds him of the story of Michael?
2. In what ways is “Michael” a pastoral poem?
3. Describe Michael’s relationship with Luke.
4. Why does Luke go to the city?
5. Why does Michael have Luke begin laying stones for the sheepfold before he leaves? Identify biblical allusions in this section of the poem. What purpose do these allusions serve?
6. What happens to Luke in the city? What happens to Michael and Isabel at the end of the story? What happens to the land Michael tried to save?
7. In your opinion, did Michael make the right decision in sending Luke to the city? Why or why not?
8. Compare stanza 4 of “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” with lines 62–65 of “Tintern Abbey.” What similar experience do these two poems describe?
9. Identify characteristics of Romanticism in each of these three poems.
10. What other Romantic poems follow the pattern of an observation of nature leading into a meditation?

Resources

General Information

- [From Goslar to Grasmere. William Wordsworth: Electronic Manuscripts.](#) Dr. Sally Bushell, Lancaster University and Jeff Cowton, Curator, The Wordsworth Trust. Arts and Humanities Research Council. manuscripts, maps, texts, films portraying scenes from the poetry, brief analyses of rhetorical devices.

Biography

- [William Wordsworth \(1770–1850\).](#) *Dove Cottage and the Wordsworth Museum.* The Wordsworth Trust.
- [William Wordsworth \(1770–1850\).](#) Historic Figures. BBC.
- [“William Wordsworth: Biography.”](#) *The Victorian Web.* Glenn Everett, University of Tennessee at Martin.
- [“The Wordsworths and the Cult of Nature.”](#) Pamela Woof, University of Newcastle upon Tyne. British History. BBC.

Texts

- [Books by William Wordsworth.](#) *Project Gutenberg.*
- [The Complete Poetical Works.](#) William Wordsworth. rpt. from London: Macmillan, 1888. *Bartleby.com.*
- [Lyrical Ballads: An Electronic Scholarly Edition.](#) *Romantic Circles.* General Editors: Neil Fraistat, Steven E. Jones. Technical Editor: Laura Mandell. University of Maryland.
- [“William Wordsworth.”](#) *Dove Cottage and the Wordsworth Museum.* The Wordsworth Trust. selected poems with commentary.
- [Wordsworth Variorum Archive.](#) James M. Garrett, California State University at Los Angeles. texts from published first editions and concordance.

Audio

- [“John Casteen Reads ‘Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey’ by William Wordsworth.”](#) *Poets on Poets.* Ed. Tilar Mazzeo. *Romantic Circles.* General Editors: Neil Fraistat and Steven E. Jones. Technical Editor: Laura Mandell. University of Maryland. text and audio.
- [“Poems by William Wordsworth.”](#) The Romantics. BBC. “The Female Vagrants (extracts), “The Last of the Flock,” “Tintern Abbey.”
- [“William Wordsworth.”](#) *LibriVox.* selected poems.

Concordance

- [Wordsworth and Coleridge *Lyrical Ballads* Web Concordance](#). *Web Concordances*.
- [Wordsworth Variorum Archive](#). James M. Garrett. California State University at Los Angeles. texts from published first editions and concordance.

Images

- [William Wordsworth Collection, 1799–1847](#). Princeton University Library. Manuscripts Division. manuscript image.
- [“William Wordsworth’s Lake District.”](#) Literary Landscapes. Online Exhibitions. British Library.

Videos

- [“Romanticism and Wordsworth.”](#) Dr. Carol Lowe, McLennan Community College.
- [“William Wordsworth’s ‘Michael: A Pastoral Poem.’”](#) Dr. Carol Lowe, McLennan Community College.
- [“William Wordsworth.”](#) Dr. Carol Lowe, McLennan Community College.
- [“Wordsworth’s ‘Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey.’”](#) Dr. Carol Lowe, McLennan Community College.

6.7 Dorothy Wordsworth (1771–1855)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify tenets of Romanticism in Wordsworth's journal entries.
2. Recognize Dorothy Wordsworth's contributions to William Wordsworth's poetry as well as her literary accomplishments in her own right.

Biography

Dorothy Wordsworth was the middle child of five, with two older brothers including William Wordsworth and two younger brothers. Her mother died when she was six, her father when she was twelve. Separated from her brothers, Wordsworth lived in the care of relatives, then worked caring for their children when she was older. After years of seeing her brothers only on holidays, when in her early twenties Wordsworth moved to Alfoxden with William. Here she kept a journal of their activities, including their frequent meetings with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, then living with his wife and child at nearby Nether Stowey.

As an unmarried woman, Wordsworth was dependent upon her brother and lived with him even after he married and had his own family. In later life, she became ill, both physically and mentally, and probably addicted to laudanum.

Texts Journals

- "Dorothy's Grasmere Journal." *Dove Cottage and the Wordsworth Museum*. The Wordsworth Trust. excerpts from the Grasmere journal including the daffodil passage.



- “The Falls of the Clyde.” *About Scotland*. Scottish Landscapes, Gardens and Waterfalls.
- Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*. Ed. William Knight. London. Macmillan. 1897.
- “Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth Vol. I (1904).” *Internet Archive*. Macmillan And Co. Limited. Universal Digital Library.
- Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland. A.D. 1803. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*. Ed. J.C. Shairp. Edinburgh. Edmonston and Douglas. 1874.
- Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland A.D. 1803 by Dorothy Wordsworth. *Project Gutenberg*.

Poetry

- “Dorothy Wordsworth, ‘Irregular Verses’ (begun c. 1827).” *Historicizing Romantic Sexuality*. A Praxis Volume edited by Richard C. Sha. Praxis Series. Ed. Orrin N.C. Wang. *Romantic Circles*. rpt. from Susan M. Levin. *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism*. Rutgers. 1987. 201–204.
- Selected Poetry. *The Poetry Foundation*.
- “A Winter’s Ramble in Grasmere Vale.” *Dove Cottage and the Wordsworth Museum*. The Wordsworth Trust.



Journals

Alfoxden Journal

April 15, 1798

Set forward after breakfast to Crookham, and returned to dinner at three o'clock. A fine cloudy morning. Walked about the squire's grounds. Quaint waterfalls about, about which Nature was very successfully striving to make beautiful what art had deformed—ruins, hermitages, etc. etc. In spite of all these things, the dell romantic and beautiful, though everywhere planted with unnaturalised trees. Happily we cannot shape the huge hills, or carve out the valleys according to our fancy.

Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth ed. William Knight. London. Macmillan. 1897. Hathi Trust Digital Library.

In 1798, while William Wordsworth and Coleridge prepared to publish *Lyrical Ballads*, the volume that would herald the Romantic age in British literature, Dorothy Wordsworth began her Alfoxden journal. Although many of her entries contain only simple notes about daily activities—having dinner, hanging linen—some passages include vivid natural description and commentary on the essence of nature that mirrors Romantic philosophy. Her entry for April 15, for example, voices the anti-neoclassical idea that organic nature is superior to nature transformed by human hands. This April passage was written months before *Lyrical Ballads* was published, probably in the fall of 1798.

Alfoxden Journal

February 24, 1798

Went to the hill-top. Sat a considerable time overlooking the country towards the sea. The air blew pleasantly round us. The landscape mildly interesting. The Welsh hills capped by a huge range of tumultuous white clouds. The sea, spotted with white, of a bluish grey in general, and streaked with darker lines. The near shores clear; scattered farm houses, half-concealed by green mossy orchards, fresh straw lying at the doors; hay-stacks in the fields. Brown fallows, the springing wheat, like a shade of green over the brown earth, and the choice meadow plots, full of sheep and lambs, of a soft and vivid green; a few wreaths of blue smoke, spreading along the ground; the oaks and beeches in the hedges retaining their yellow leaves; the distant prospect on the land side, islanded with sunshine; the sea, like a basin full to the margin; the dark fresh-ploughed fields; the turnips of a lively rough green. Returned through the wood.

Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth ed. William Knight. London. Macmillan. 1897.
Hathi Trust Digital Library.

Alfoxden Journal

February 26, 1798

Coleridge came in the morning, and Mr. and Mrs. Cruikshank; walked with Coleridge nearly to Stowey after dinner. A very clear afternoon. We lay sidelong upon the turf, and gazed on the landscape till it melted into more than natural loveliness. The sea very uniform, of a pale greyish blue, only one distant bay, bright and blue as a sky; had there been a vessel sailing up it, a perfect image of delight. Walked to the top of a high hill to see a fortification. Again sat down to feed upon the prospect; a magnificent scene, curiously spread out for even minute inspection, though so extensive that the mind is afraid to calculate its bounds. A winter prospect shows every cottage, every farm, and the forms of distant trees, such as in summer have no distinguishing mark. On our return, Jupiter and Venus before us. While the twilight still over-powered the light of the moon, we were reminded that she was shining bright above our heads, by our faint shadows going before us. We had seen her on the tops of the hills, melting into the blue sky. Poole called while we were absent.

Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth Vol. 1. ed. William Knight. London. Macmillan. 1897, 1904. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*.

These two passages evince Wordsworth's descriptive powers. Note the passage in which she describes gazing at nature until it dissolves into a scene of "more than natural loveliness," a beauty that she describes as beyond naturalness, a view that is supernatural. Also note her use of the word "feed" to characterize her absorption of the view, an image that her brother William would use five months later in "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" to convey the experience of storing a natural image to recall in moments of "tranquil restoration."

Grasmere Journals

April 15, 1802

It was a threatening, misty morning, but mild. We set off after dinner from Eusemere. Mrs. Clarkson went a short way with us, but turned back. The wind was furious, and we thought we must have returned. We first rested in the large boathouse, then under a furze bush opposite Mr. Clarkson's. Saw the plough going in the field. The wind seized our breath. The lake was rough. There was a boat by itself floating in the middle of the bay below Water Millock. We rested again in the Water Millock Lane. The hawthorns are black and green, the birches here and there greenish, but there is yet more of purple to be seen on the twigs. We got over into a field to avoid some cows—people working. A few primroses by the roadside—woodsorrel flower, the anemone, scentless violets, strawberries, and that starry, yellow flower which Mrs. C. calls pile wort. When we were in the woods beyond Gowbarrow Park we saw a few daffodils close to the water-side. We fancied that the sea had floated the seeds ashore, and that the little colony had so sprung up. But as we went along there were more and yet more; and at last, under the boughs of the trees, we saw that there was a long belt of them along the shore, about the breadth of a country turnpike road. I never saw daffodils so beautiful. They grew among the mossy stones about and above them; some rested their heads upon these stones, as on a pillow, for weariness; and the rest tossed and reeled and danced, and seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind, that blew upon them over the lake; they looked so gay, ever glancing, ever changing. This wind blew directly over the lake to them. There was here and there a little knot, and a few stragglers higher up; but they were so few as not to disturb the simplicity, unity, and life of that one busy highway. We rested again and again. The bays were stormy, and we heard the waves at different distances, and in the middle of the water, like the sea....All was cheerless and gloomy, so we faced the storm. At Dobson's I was very kindly treated by a young woman. The landlady looked sour, but it is her way....William was sitting by a good fire when I came downstairs. He soon made his way to the library, piled up in a corner of the window. He brought out a volume of Enfield's Speaker, another miscellany, and an odd volume of Congreve's plays. We had a glass of warm rum and water. We enjoyed ourselves, and wished for Mary. It rained and blew, when we went to bed.

Wordsworth began writing her Grasmere Journals when she and William moved to Grasmere to live in Dove Cottage. This passage from the 1802 journal is undoubtedly one of the most well known as critics delight in pointing out that William

Wordsworth's famous description of daffodils in his poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," probably composed in 1804, owes much to Dorothy Wordsworth's earlier description.

Wordsworth's *Journals* were not published until long after her death. With the late 20th century interest in women's writing, her work began to receive the attention it deserves.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Dorothy Wordsworth contributed to William Wordsworth's poetry through her detailed records of their activities in nature, sometimes including specific wording from her journals.
- Although she protested that she had no wish to become a writer herself, Dorothy Wordsworth's works are now acknowledged as having literary merit of their own.

EXERCISES

1. Dorothy Wordsworth once claimed that she would hate being a published poet like her brother William. What societal and cultural factors do you think might have contributed to that opinion? Had Dorothy Wordsworth desired to become a published poet, how receptive do you think publishers and the public would have been to poetry written by a woman?
2. In the Feb. 26, 1798 passage, Wordsworth describes lying on the grass and gazing on the natural scene "till it melted into more than natural loveliness." How would you interpret this experience?
3. Compare the [daffodil passage](#) from Dorothy Wordsworth's journal with William's poem "[I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud](#)."

Resources

General Information

- "[The Wordsworths and the Cult of Nature](#)." Pamela Woof, University of Newcastle upon Tyne. British History. BBC.



- [“The Lake Poets: Romantic Wanderings Along the Water’s Edge.”](#) Jonathan Thompson. *The Independent UK* 6 Nov. 2005.

Biography

- [“Dorothy Wordsworth.”](#) *Dove Cottage and the Wordsworth Museum*. The Wordsworth Trust.
- [“William Wordsworth Shares the Limelight with Dorothy.”](#) BBC Cumbria. BBC. includes manuscript image of daffodil journal entry and audio information about journals.

Text Journals

- [“Dorothy’s Grasmere Journal.”](#) *Dove Cottage and the Wordsworth Museum*. The Wordsworth Trust. excerpts from the Grasmere journal including the daffodil passage.
- [“The Falls of the Clyde.”](#) *About Scotland*. Scottish Landscapes, Gardens and Waterfalls.
- [Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth.](#) *Hathi Trust Digital Library*. Ed. William Knight. London. Macmillan. 1897.
- [“Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth Vol. I \(1904\).”](#) *Internet Archive*. Macmillan And Co. Limited. Universal Digital Library.
- [Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland. A.D. 1803.](#) *Hathi Trust Digital Library*. Ed. J.C. Shairp. Edinburgh. Edmonston and Douglas. 1874.
- [Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland A.D. 1803 by Dorothy Wordsworth.](#) *Project Gutenberg*.

Poetry

- [“Dorothy Wordsworth, ‘Irregular Verses’ \(begun c. 1827\).”](#) *Historicizing Romantic Sexuality*. A Praxis Volume edited by Richard C. Sha. Praxis Series. Ed. Orrin N.C. Wang. *Romantic Circles*. rpt. from Susan M. Levin. *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism*. Rutgers. 1987. 201–204.
- [Selected Poetry.](#) *The Poetry Foundation*.
- [“A Winter’s Ramble in Grasmere Vale.”](#) *Dove Cottage and the Wordsworth Museum*. The Wordsworth Trust.

6.8 Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explain the Romantic characteristic of mysticism and Coleridge's theory of the Imagination as they function in "The Eolian Harp."
2. Understand how Coleridge's presentation of mysticism in "The Eolian Harp" plays out in narrative form in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."
3. Assess the gothic elements in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."
4. Recognize and explain the pattern of observation of nature leading to a meditation in "The Eolian Harp" and "This Lime-tree Bower, My Prison."

Biography

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born in a small village in southwestern England. The son of a clergyman/school teacher, Coleridge attended his father's school. He learned to read very early and remained a voracious reader. After his father's death, Coleridge was sent to school in London where he met Charles Lamb, the friend to whom he wrote "This Lime-tree Bower My Prison." An excellent scholar, Coleridge attended Cambridge University but never finished a degree. He did, however, become enthralled with radical ideas such as communal living and with fellow poet Robert Southey planned to move to America to establish a utopian community called Pantisocracy, literally meaning equal government by all. The scheme required the participants to be married couples, so Coleridge married Sara Fricker, the sister of Southey's fiancée. Having married more for convenience than love, Coleridge was unhappy in his marriage, as presumably was his wife, and the two eventually separated.

Coleridge and his wife Sara lived for a short time in Nether Stowey, a village near the Bristol Channel. Coleridge had met William Wordsworth who lived nearby at Alfoxden with his sister Dorothy Wordsworth. While living here, Coleridge produced some of his finest poetry, including “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and “This Lime-tree Bower My Prison.”



Throughout his life Coleridge suffered from poor health and probably from poor mental health as well. By the early 1800's he had become addicted to opium. His addiction became so severe that he moved in with a doctor in London who helped him keep his drug use under control.

In his later years, Coleridge delivered a highly successful series of lectures on Shakespeare, wrote respected works of literary theory and criticism, and developed a reputation as an intellectual.

Texts

- *Biographia Literaria*. Project Gutenberg.
- The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Project Gutenberg.
- “The Eolian Harp.” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire, Department of English. University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “This Lime-tree Bower my Prison.” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire, Department of English. University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (text of 1834).” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire, Department of English. University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison.” RCHS Hypertext Reader.
- *The Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Prose and Verse*. Hathi Trust Digital Library. Philadelphia. Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co. 1840.

“The Eolian Harp”

This poem follows the pattern of observation of nature leading to a meditation. Notice the descriptive details of the cot [cottage] and its peaceful natural

surroundings. Coleridge uses images of sound and smell as well as sight to help his audience imagine the scene he describes.

The Eolian Harp

(Composed at Clevedon, Somersetshire)

My pensive Sara! thy soft cheek reclined	
Thus on mine arm, most soothing sweet it is	
To sit beside our Cot, our Cot o'ergrown	
With white-flower'd Jasmin, and the broad-leav'd Myrtle,	
(Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love!)	5
And watch the clouds, that late were rich with light,	
Slow saddening round, and mark the star of eve	
Serenely brilliant (such should Wisdom be)	
Shine opposite! How exquisite the scents	
Snatch'd from yon bean-field! and the world so hushed!	10
The stilly murmur of the distant Sea	
Tells us of silence.	
And that simplest Lute,	
Placed length-ways in the clasping casement, hark!	
How by the desultory breeze caress'd,	15
Like some coy maid half yielding to her lover,	
It pours such sweet upbraiding, as must needs	
Tempt to repeat the wrong! And now, its strings	
Boldlier swept, the long sequacious notes	
Over delicious surges sink and rise,	20
Such a soft floating witchery of sound	
As twilight Elfin's make, when they at eve	
Voyage on gentle gales from Fairy-Land,	
Where Melodies round honey-dripping flowers,	

Footless and wild, like birds of Paradise,	25
Nor pause, nor perch, hovering on untam'd wing!	
O! the one Life within us and abroad,	
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,	
A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,	
Rhythm in all thought, and joyance every where—	30
Methinks, it should have been impossible	
Not to love all things in a world so fill'd;	
Where the breeze warbles, and the mute still air	
Is Music slumbering on her instrument.	
And thus, my Love! as on the midway slope	35
Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon,	
Whilst through my half-clos'd eye-lids I behold	
The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main.	
And tranquil muse upon tranquillity;	
Full many a thought uncall'd and undetain'd,	40
And many idle flitting phantasies,	
Traverse my indolent and passive brain,	
As wild and various as the random gales	
That swell and flutter on this subject Lute!	
And what if all of animated nature	45
Be but organic Harps diversely fram'd,	
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps	
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,	
At once the Soul of each, and God of all?	
But thy more serious eye a mild reproof	50
Darts, O belovéd Woman! nor such thoughts	
Dim and unhallow'd dost thou not reject,	

And biddest me walk humbly with my God.	
Meek Daughter in the family of Christ!	
Well hast thou said and holily disprais'd	55
These shapings of the unregenerate mind;	
Bubbles that glitter as they rise and break	
On vain Philosophy's aye-babbling spring.	
For never guiltless may I speak of him,	
The Incomprehensible! save when with awe	60
I praise him, and with Faith that inly feels;	
Who with his saving mercies healéd me,	
A sinful and most miserable man,	
Wilder'd and dark, and gave me to possess	
Peace, and this Cot, and thee, heart-honour'd Maid!	

At the beginning of stanza 2 (line 13), Coleridge focuses attention on the lute (another word for the eolian harp—also sometimes spelled “aeolian”) that sits in the window.

In stanza 2 Coleridge writes a fundamental statement of Romantic mysticism. The speaker exclaims, “O! the one Life within us and abroad.” Here he recognizes, as Wordsworth did in “Tintern Abbey,” the spiritual presence (the “one Life”) that is “within us” (inside human beings) and “abroad” (in the things around us—in nature).

In stanza 4 Coleridge creates one of the central images of Romantic poetry. His speaker asks, “What if all of animated [living] nature be but organic Harps....” All of living nature, including people, is compared to harps. He notes that the harps are “diversely framed”; people don’t look alike just as all harps do not look alike. As the wind blows over the harp and enlivens the strings to create music, the spiritual presence that is in the world moves over people and enlivens their Imaginations. See lines 47 and 48.

Rather than ending the poem with the meditation section of stanzas 2–4, Coleridge adds a concluding stanza that takes the audience back to the cottage setting, thus

framing the poem. After indulging in his intellectual, philosophical musings, his wife Sara brings him back down to earth. The last stanza specifically refers to God and to Christ, revealing of Christian religious beliefs. In this poem, Coleridge identifies the spiritual presence of Romantic mysticism as God.

“The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”

Coleridge’s long narrative poem in ballad style, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” proved to be one of the more popular works in *Lyrical Ballads*. In this poem Coleridge takes an idea he proposes in theoretical form in “The Eolian Harp” and plays out the idea in a story. Having described the world of nature infused with a spiritual presence, the “one Life within us and abroad,” Coleridge states in “The Eolian Harp” lines 31 and 32:

Methinks, it should have been impossible

Not to love all things in a world so fill’d;

In the story of the Ancient Mariner we learn what happens to a person, the Mariner, who does not “love all things in a world” filled with a divine presence.

From one perspective, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is an adventure story with gothic elements: supernatural events, the spirits, reanimated bodies, the Mariner’s mystical abilities. From another perspective, it’s the story of a man who had to learn to respect the spiritual presence in nature, the “one Life within us and abroad.”

“This Lime-tree Bower My Prison”

Video Clip 6

Samuel Taylor Coleridge *This Lime Tree Bower, My Prison.wmv*

[\(click to see video\)](#)

View a video mini-lecture on “*This Lime-tree Bower My Prison.*”



Coleridge’s cottage at Nether Stowey.



Modern statue of the Ancient Mariner with the albatross around his neck.

In the autobiographical and intimate “This Lime-tree Bower My Prison,” Coleridge writes about the experience of sitting, unwillingly, beneath a tree’s overspreading branches, feeling as if the branches form a room, a bower. Because he didn’t want to be there, he characterizes the bower as a prison. Coleridge’s wife had accidentally spilled boiling milk on his foot, and because of his injury he was unable to accompany his friends, including Charles Lamb, on a hike. Coleridge particularly wanted his friend Lamb, who lived in London, to experience nature. The complaining, grumbling tone comes through in the first two lines of the poem:

Well, they are gone, and here must I remain,

This lime-tree bower my prison!

Well, they are gone, and here must I remain,

This lime-tree bower my prison!

Well, they are gone, and here must I remain,

This lime-tree bower my prison!

Well, they are gone, and here must I remain,

This lime-tree bower my prison!

In lines 2–5, Coleridge explains why he is so upset about missing the hike:

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!

This idea is very similar to Wordsworth’s explanation of gathering “life and food for future years” in “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey.”

Although Coleridge complains about missing the walk, in stanza 3 he finds a consolation: he's found nature in his "bower." He realizes he can see the beauty of nature where he sits. He learns that "nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure." Again he echoes a line from Wordsworth's "Lines": "Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- "The Eolian Harp" and "This Lime-tree Bower, My Prison" use the typical Romantic structure of an observation of nature leading to a meditation.
- Coleridge fashions a key image of Romantic mysticism in "The Eolian Harp."
- "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" illustrates the theoretical statements of "The Eolian Harp" by narrating what happens to one individual who fails to recognize and appreciate the spiritual presence in nature.
- "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," one of the most popular poems in *Lyrical Ballads*, exhibits gothic elements.
- Similar to Wordsworth's desire to share the spiritual blessings of nature with his sister expressed in "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," Coleridge wishes to share the experience with his friend and fellow writer Charles Lamb.

EXERCISES

1. In his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge explains his theory of the Imagination:

The Imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I Am. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation.

For Coleridge, Imagination is a creative process that mirrors the creation of the universe. He compares the wind (blowing across the harp to create music) with an act of Imagination.

The word *inspire* literally means to breathe into. How does the word *inspire* relate to Coleridge's description of the eolian harp and to Coleridge's idea of the Imagination?

2. Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is written in seven parts. Write a brief (2 or 3 sentence) plot summary of each part.
3. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" was published in the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*. Working jointly on the volume, Wordsworth and Coleridge collaborated closely on some parts of this poem. Part of Coleridge's "assignment" in producing the volume was to write poems that included supernatural elements, and "Ancient Mariner" abounds with supernatural elements. List several.
4. The Ancient Mariner himself has supernatural abilities; he holds the wedding guest with his "glittering eye" (line 13). The Ancient Mariner uses this magical ability to force someone to stay and listen to his story with some people, but not others. How does he determine to whom to tell his story? See Part 7.
5. Why did the Ancient Mariner shoot the albatross, and why was his shooting the bird such a heinous act? Think about Romantic mysticism in answering this question.
6. The last four stanzas of Part 4 are the climactic moment in the story. What change in attitude does the Ancient Mariner experience that finally allows his punishment out on the sea to end?

7. When the spirits leave the bodies of the Mariner's shipmates, to what does Coleridge compare the sound? Why does he choose this particular simile?
8. The Ancient Mariner's punishment, of course, is not completely over. What penance does he have to pay for the rest of his life?

Resources

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- *Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner": A Consumer's Guide*. Dr. George Soule, Carleton College.

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- "[Samuel Taylor Coleridge](#)." Dove Cottage and the Wordsworth Museum. The Wordsworth Trust.
- "[Samuel Taylor Coleridge](#)." History of the College. Jesus College, University of Cambridge.
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- *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge by Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. *Project Gutenberg*.
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- [The Aeolian Harp](#). Charles Rzepka. Boston University. explanation and images of aeolian harps.
- ["Aeolian Vibration."](#) John H. Lienhard. University of Houston. *Engines of Our Ingenuity*. audio and text.

Concordances

- [S. T. Coleridge The Ancyent Marinere Web Concordance](#). The Web Concordances. R.J.C. Watt, University of Dundee.

6.9 Jane Austen (1775–1817)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

In her novels, Jane Austen fashions the quintessential picture of Regency England, the period from 1811–1820 in which Prince George served as Prince Regent to his father King George III. Bouts of insanity, now believed to have been caused by an illness and made worse by physicians and virtual imprisonment, made George III incapable of ruling, leading to the regency of his son and heir apparent, George, later to become King George IV on his father's death. This era, dominated by the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, and the Industrial Revolution, juxtaposed world-changing political events and technological innovations with the ostentatious, consciously fashionable world of the Prince Regent and the aristocracy bound by strict rules of social behavior. The aristocracy viewed manners, living according to society's strictures, as indicative of belonging to the coterie in a time when being ostracized by society was considered a fate worse than death. The title of Jane Austen's first published novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, suggests an age influenced by 18th-century rationalism and 19th-century Romanticism.

Biography

Jane Austen spent her childhood in the village of Steventon, where her father was the rector and her family active in village social life. The seventh of eight children, Jane was particularly close to her only sister Cassandra throughout her life. Although she began writing in childhood, her first novel was not published until 1811. Austen apparently fell in love with a young man, Tom LeFroy, who visited the neighborhood for a time, but whose family sent for him to return home to Ireland when they became aware of his interest in Austen, the daughter of a poor, low-ranking clergyman. Her sister Cassandra was engaged to a man who died while on business in the Caribbean, and neither sister ever married.



After her father's retirement, Austen moved with her family to Bath, a setting used in her novels. When her father died, the Austen sisters and their mother were financially dependent on Austen's brothers. They lived for a time in Southampton with her brother Frank, a naval officer, and his wife and spent a good bit of their time traveling from relative to relative, a situation not uncommon for widows and spinsters in the early 19th century. Finally another brother, Edward, offered his mother and sisters the use of a house on his estate in Chawton. While living here Austen published four novels:

- *Sense and Sensibility* 1811
- *Pride and Prejudice* 1813
- *Mansfield Park* 1814
- *Emma* 1816

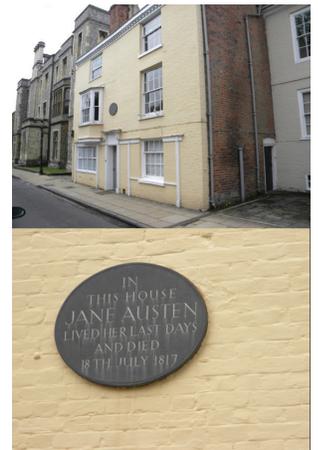
Two novels were published posthumously:

- *Northanger Abbey* 1818
- *Persuasion* 1818

When Austen's health began to fail, Cassandra moved with her to nearby Winchester, a larger city where medical help would be available. Austen died soon after the move and was buried in Winchester Cathedral.



Jane Austen's home in Chawton.



Video Clip 7

Jane Austen

[\(click to see video\)](#)



View a video mini-lecture about Jane Austen.

Texts

- [The Complete Project Gutenberg Works of Jane Austen](#). Project Gutenberg.
- [Emma](#). Project Gutenberg.
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- [Persuasion](#). Project Gutenberg.
- [Pride and Prejudice](#). Project Gutenberg.
- [Sense and Sensibility](#). Project Gutenberg.

Pride and Prejudice

Jane Austen's works are **novels of manners**¹⁴, novels that portray and assess the values, customs, and behavior of a particular social stratum at a specific time in history. Indeed, one of the typical criticisms of Austen's work is that her focus is an especially small segment of Regency society, the lower rung of landed gentry to which her own family belonged.

The Title

An early version of *Pride and Prejudice* was titled *First Impressions*, referring to the first impressions Elizabeth Bennett and Fitzwilliam Darcy have of each other. Although the same concept applies in the published title, the first impressions are named and set the tone for the novel.

The Characters

Although the Bennets, on the surface, seem ruled by the mores of their society, the story proves that most of the family ill fit the expectations society would have for them. Mr. Bennet cares too little for society and too much for scholarly pursuits, preferring to simply withdraw from the societal pressures that are his wife's obsession. Although he is an immensely likable character, he lacks the leadership

14. Novels that portray and assess the values, customs, and behavior of a particular social stratum at a specific time in history.

that might have averted some of the family's difficulties. Mrs. Bennet, on the other hand, is so concerned with appearances and making what society would deem appropriate arrangements for her daughters' futures that she becomes almost a caricature of a society mother. Yet she apparently is much more aware of the reality of the family's financial situation than Mr. Bennet.

Lady Catherine de Bourgh shares Mrs. Bennet's esteem for society's rules, but their characters are quite different, Lady Catherine a stereotype of the society matron and Mrs. Bennet of the foolish, pushy woman unable to see her own inappropriate behavior. Elizabeth and Lydia, too, could be seen as similar in their disregard for society's conventions and yet with opposite results. Even Wickham cannot be seen as a totally evil character as his childhood circumstances may give him a sympathetic slant, especially to modern readers.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel of manners focused on the life of lower ranking gentry in a small English village.
- *Pride and Prejudice* portrays characters caught between the expectations of their society and their personal desires.
- Some characters in *Pride and Prejudice* appear to deal with realistic dilemmas while others seem to be stereotypes of Regency society; none, however, are one dimensional as all characters realistically possess virtues and flaws.

EXERCISES

1. How would the women of the Bennet family fit into Mary Wollstonecraft's description of women in the late 18th, early 19th centuries?
2. What expectations of society color the initial relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy? Do these expectations become more or less important as their relationship progresses? Explain how the title applies to their relationship at the beginning and throughout the novel.
3. Compare and contrast the match of Jane and Bingley and that of Elizabeth and Darcy. Is one match more appropriate than the other? Why or why not?
4. Elizabeth and Lydia both, in different ways, flaunt the expectations of society in their behavior and make marriages that society would deem inappropriate, yet readers (and most of the other characters) thoroughly approve of one and disapprove of the other. Why?
5. How would you describe Elizabeth's reaction to and feelings about Charlotte's marriage to Mr. Collins?
6. Analyze each of the major characters in the novel, making a list of assets and flaws.
7. How accurate would you consider Austen's portrayal of this segment of society?
8. What circumstances in Jane Austen's life might be seen as parallel with life in the novel?

Resources

General Information and Biography

- [Biography: Life \(1775–1817\) and Family](#). *A Celebration of Women Writers*. Mary Mark Ockerbloom, Editor.
- [Jane Austen](#). Harold Child. rpt. from *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature in 18 Volumes (1907–21)*. Volume XII. *The Romantic Revival*. *Bartleby.com*.
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Video

- [Jane Austen](#). Dr. Carol Lowe, McLennan Community College.

6.10 George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788–1924)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define and provide examples of the character type known as the Byronic hero.
2. Appraise the characteristics of Romanticism apparent in Byron's poetry, and compare and contrast their use in the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge.
3. Recognize and interpret the theme of the aspiring spirit in Byron's poetry.

Biography

“Mad, bad, and dangerous to know” is the infamous assessment of Lord Byron by Lady Caroline Lamb, herself a scandalous figure among the elite circles of early 19th-century aristocratic society.

Byron inherited the rank of Baron after his father and his uncle died. Unfortunately, they had squandered the family fortune. Byron enjoyed noble rank but lacked the wealth necessary to maintain the lifestyle he believed should accompany it. He also inherited Newstead Abbey, the family estate, in disrepair, and could not afford to repair or even heat it.



Portrait of Byron at Newstead Abbey.

Byron suffered from a malformed foot which caused him to limp badly, a source of embarrassment and indignity to him both in his childhood and as an adult. He formed close friendships with other young noblemen at Trinity College, Cambridge. While at Cambridge, Byron began to accumulate the gambling debts that would plague him all his life, eventually causing him to sell Newstead Abbey, the estate granted to his family six generations earlier by King Henry VIII. He also cultivated the reputation for perverted sexual promiscuity that characterized his public persona for the rest of his life, deserved according to some biographers, undeserved according to others. While at Cambridge, Byron published his first books of poetry.



Newstead Abbey, Byron's ancestral home.

The ruins of the original abbey granted to Byron's ancestors by Henry VIII.

Traditionally young men of Byron's station undertook a Grand Tour of Europe after their graduation from college. Accompanied by a friend, Byron borrowed money to travel to Portugal, Albania, Turkey, Greece, and Italy. During this trip, Byron wrote the first two Cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Their publication brought him overnight fame, the kind of adulation that has been compared to that of a modern rock star.

Childe Harold was a character closely identified with Byron himself, the **Byronic hero**¹⁵, a dark, brooding figure, jaded and cynical, bored with and contemptuous of conventional society. Byron continued to write long narrative poems featuring this type of character (*The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, *Manfred*) and at the same time continued to cultivate his own public anti-hero persona.

One of his most notorious escapades involved a love affair with the married Lady Caroline Lamb, a prominent member of the aristocracy who continued to pursue Byron publicly even after he tried to end the affair.

As an adult, Byron met and became close to his half-sister Augusta Leigh. Some biographers believe that he had an incestuous affair with her and that her daughter was Byron's child.

15. A dark, brooding figure, jaded and cynical, bored with and contemptuous of conventional society.

Byron married Annabella Milbanke, a conventional young woman from a wealthy family. She lived with Byron until their daughter was born and then left him, unable to contend with his increasingly bizarre behavior. Some of Byron's associates feared that he was insane when he fired his pistols in his house, abused

his wife, and continued his scandalous sexual escapades. His wife left him, taking their daughter, obtained a divorce (virtually unheard of at that time), and returned to her family.

Realizing that the public was no longer fascinated but revolted by his behavior, Byron left England, never to return. Traveling first to Switzerland, Byron lived for a time near the poet Shelley and his then-companion, later wife Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin and her sister Claire Clairmont with whom Byron had another daughter. Moving to Italy, Byron had a long-standing affair with a married Italian noblewoman. During these travels he wrote Cantos 3 and 4 of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and began what would be considered his greatest work, the satiric *Don Juan*.



Memorial outside Byron's burial place in Hucknall Church.

Moving to Greece, Byron, even though he had no military expertise, became involved in the Greek fight for independence from the Ottoman Empire. While with the Greek forces, Byron contracted a fever and died. His body was returned to England but refused burial in Westminster Abbey because of his reputed immorality. He eventually was buried in a small church near his family's former estate Newstead Abbey. Not until 1969 was a plaque honoring Byron placed in Westminster Abbey's Poet's Corner.

Video Clip 8

George Gordon, Lord Byron

[\(click to see video\)](#)

View a video mini-lecture on Byron.

Texts

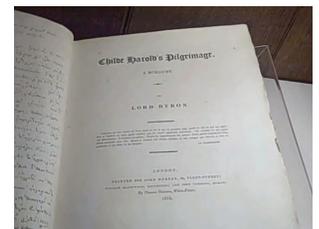
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Childe Harold's Pilgrimage

After the publication of the first two Cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron declared that he awoke one morning to find himself famous.

The term **childe**¹⁶ is a medieval expression referring to a young man in training to become a knight. Canto 1 begins with a description of a young man, Childe Harold, in England (“Albion’s isle”) who is living a riotous, shameful life. He discovers he is satiated with his dissipated ways and sets out on a pilgrimage to discover some meaning in life.



First edition of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage in the library of Newstead Abbey.

The poem, and Childe Harold, reach a pivotal moment in the Canto 3 stanzas about Lake Lemán in Switzerland. Although Byron writes about nature in this section, his poetry generally displays little of the preoccupation with nature seen in other Romantic writers.

His focus instead is man’s aspiring spirit. Nature is beautiful and peaceful compared with a world inhabited by humans driven by their aspiring spirits and indomitable wills.

16. A medieval expression referring to a young man in training to become a knight.

Canto 3 from “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage”

Stanza 85

Clear, placid Leman! thy contrasted lake,

With the wild world I dwelt in, is a thing

Which warns me, with its stillness, to forsake

Earth’s troubled waters for a purer spring.

This quiet sail is as a noiseless wing

To waft me from distraction; once I loved

Torn Ocean’s roar, but thy soft murmuring

Sounds sweet as if a Sister’s voice reprov’d,

That I with stern delights should e’er have been so mov’d.

Stanza 88

Ye Stars! which are the poetry of Heaven!

If in your bright leaves we would read the fate

Of men and empires,—’tis to be forgiven,

That in our aspirations to be great,

Our destinies o'erleap their mortal state,
And claim a kindred with you; for ye are
A Beauty and a Mystery, and create
In us such love and reverence from afar,
That Fortune,—Fame,—Power,—Life, have named themselves a Star.

Following a description of an overnight storm in which the speaker's spirit soars and longs to express its "Soul, heart, mind, passions, feelings" (Stanza 97) as strongly and vividly as nature expresses itself in the storm, morning arrives with suggestions of the human spirit calm and refreshed after the storm of struggle.

Canto 3 from “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage”

Stanza 98

The Morn is up again, the dewy Morn,

With breath all incense, and with cheek all bloom—

Laughing the clouds away with playful scorn,

And living as if earth contained no tomb,—

And glowing into day: we may resume

The march of our existence: and thus I,

Still on thy shores, fair Lemn! may find room

And food for meditation, nor pass by

Much, that may give us pause, if pondered fittingly.

Although line 8 of stanza 98 seems to echo Wordsworth’s claim that nature provides “life and food for future years,” Byron provides no hints of Wordsworth’s view of nature as divine revelation or a veil discreetly disclosing a spiritual presence. Nonetheless, nature is a source of wisdom and meditation.

“She Walks in Beauty Like the Night” and “When We Two Parted”

She Walks in Beauty

She walks in beauty—like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies,
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes;
Thus mellowed to the tender light
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.
One shade the more, one ray the less,
Had half impaired the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress
Or softly lightens o'er her face—
Where thoughts serenely sweet express
How pure, how dear their dwelling place.
And on that cheek and o'er that brow
So soft, so calm yet eloquent,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow
But tell of days in goodness spent

A mind at peace with all below,

A heart whose love is innocent.

This simple, eloquent lyric is said to have been written when Byron met a cousin who was wearing a black mourning dress covered in spangles. The speaker describes the woman in tender phrases which combine images of darkness and light.

When We Two Parted

When we two parted

In silence and tears,

Half broken-hearted

To sever for years,

Pale grew thy cheek and cold,

Colder thy kiss;

Truly that hour foretold

Sorrow to this.

The dew of the morning

Sunk chill on my brow—

It felt like the warning

Of what I feel now.

Thy vows are all broken,

And light is thy fame:

I hear thy name spoken,

And share in its shame.

They name thee before me,
A knell to mine ear;
A shudder comes o'er me—
Why wert thou so dear?
They know not I knew thee,
Who knew thee too well:
Long, long shall I rue thee,
Too deeply to tell.
In secret we met—
In silence I grieve,
That thy heart could forget,
Thy spirit deceive.
If I should meet thee
After long years,
How should I greet thee?
With silence and tears.

Like “She Walks in Beauty,” this lyric expresses deep emotion in simple and eloquent terms.

“The Prisoner of Chillon”

While staying with Shelley in Switzerland, Byron toured the Castle of Chillon on Lake Geneva (Lake Lemán), including the dungeon he describes in this narrative poem. Byron’s name can still be seen carved on one of the pillars in the dungeon.

One of the characteristics of Romanticism is an interest in the medieval past, and Byron loosely bases his story on the life of Francois Bonivard from the early 16th century. He imbues his story with one of his recurrent themes—the indomitable will of the human spirit.



Portrait of Byron and his favorite dog in the library of Newstead Abbey.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- George Gordon, Lord Byron created the Byronic hero, a dark, brooding figure, jaded and cynical, bored with and contemptuous of conventional society
- Although in a different context than the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge, nature plays a significant role in Byron’s poetry.
- Other characteristics of Romanticism are apparent in Byron’s poetry.
- The aspiring spirit is a key theme in Byron’s poetry.

EXERCISES

1. Stanzas 85 through 98 in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* are considered a climactic point in the poem. After reading these stanzas answer the following questions:
 - What might Lake Lemana represent in the speaker's life?
 - How does the speaker compare the natural world and the world inhabited by people?
 - What do the stars represent in stanza 88?
 - In stanza 90, what does the speaker mean when he says we are "least alone" in solitude?
 - What does the storm symbolize? Refer to specific descriptions.
 - How would you compare the use of nature in these stanzas with the use of nature in other Romantic poetry you have read?
 - How would you compare the ideas in the last two lines of stanza 98 with ideas from Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" and Coleridge's "This Lime-tree Bower My Prison"?
2. In "She Walks in Beauty" how does the speaker equate physical beauty with beauty of character?
3. What has happened in "When We Two Parted"?
4. In the last stanza of "When We Two Parted" it's clear that the speaker still remembers his lost love, but does the woman remember him? How do we know? Describe the speaker's reaction when the two meet years later.
5. Describe the narrator of "The Prisoner of Chillon."
6. What happens in stanza 10 of "The Prisoner of Chillon" and how does it change the narrator?
7. How would you compare the use of nature in "The Prisoner of Chillon" with nature in the work of other Romantic writers?
8. Describe the narrator's reaction to being liberated at the end of the story.

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- [“When We Two Parted.”](#) *Bartleby.com*. rpt. from *English Poetry II: From Collins to Fitzgerald*. The Harvard Classics. 1909–14.
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Video

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6.11 Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

“Life, like a dome of many coloured glass / Stains the white radiance of eternity.”

- from Adonais

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify in “Mont Blanc” and “To a Skylark” the typical pattern found in Romantic poetry: observation of nature leading to a meditation.
2. Compare Romantic mysticism in Shelley’s poetry with mysticism in the works of other Romantic writers.
3. Analyze the role of nature in Shelley’s poetry.
4. Recognize and explain the use of other characteristics of Romanticism in Shelley’s poetry.
5. Trace the political events that led Shelley to write “Song to the Men of England.”

Biography

Percy Bysshe Shelley, the son of a Member of Parliament, enjoyed a happy childhood in the countryside of southern England. The rest of his life, however, proved to be less happy.

While a student at Oxford, Shelley published his first poetry. He also published a pamphlet titled “The Necessity of Atheism“ which resulted in his expulsion from Oxford University. Shelley’s refusal to recant his objectionable religious views, a condition for his re-admittance to Oxford, caused a rift with his family.



Portrait of Percy Bysshe Shelley by Curran, 1819.

On his own with no income and no employment, Shelley married 16-year-old Harriet Westbrook, who would commit suicide only five years later after Shelley abandoned her and their children. Shelley and Westbrook lived for a short time in the Lake District where Shelley met and was influenced by Wordsworth. Shelley soon fell in love with Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, the daughter of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, and moved to Switzerland with her and her step-sister Claire Clairmont (who would later have a child with Byron). Shelley invited his wife Harriet to live with the trio in the role of a sister, an invitation she declined. When he received the news that Harriet, abandoned and pregnant by another man, had drowned herself in the Serpentine in Hyde Park, Shelley married Mary Godwin. During this turbulent period of his life, Shelley was poor and in debt. However, he continued to write, encouraged by his meeting and developing friendships with Byron and John Keats. One of Shelly’s major works, Adonais, is an elegy to Keats.

Shelley’s financial situation eventually improved on receipt of an inheritance from his grandfather; his personal life, in contrast, worsened. He lost custody of his children with Harriet on the grounds of his immoral lifestyle and his atheism. He, Mary, and Claire Clairmont then moved to Italy where his two young children with Mary Shelley died. The couple had a third son who survived his father. While sailing off the coast of Italy, Shelley was caught in a sudden storm and drowned. He was not yet thirty years old. His body was cremated on the beach after washing up on the shore and his ashes buried in the Protestant cemetery in Rome. A story claims that Edward Trelawny, a friend of both Shelley and Byron present when the body was cremated, reached into the fire to preserve Shelley’s heart.



Shelley's ashes are buried in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome. His grave marker bears the inscription "Cor Cordium," meaning "heart of hearts." It's said that Mary Shelley kept Shelley's heart, pulled from the cremation flames by Trelawny, and that it eventually was buried with their only surviving child.

After Shelley's death, his friend Edward Trelawny returned to England and lived to age 88. As Shelley's work became more popular in the later 19th century, Trelawny was considered an expert on Shelley. When he died, he was buried next to Shelley in Rome.

Although Shelley's poetry was not well received or widely read during his lifetime (his radical views, particularly his professed atheism, and his unconventional lifestyle were distasteful to many early 19th-century readers), it became an important influence on later 19th- and early 20th-century writers.

Text

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- “[To a Skylark](#).” The Academy of American Poets. *Poets.org*.
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“Mont Blanc”

Although more abstract in its construction, Shelley’s “Mont Blanc” follows the typical Romantic pattern of an observation of nature leading to a meditation. While observing Mont Blanc, the highest mountain in the Alps, Shelley considers the relation between the physical universe—the world of nature—and the individual mind. This relationship is Shelley’s expression of Romantic mysticism.

I

The everlasting universe of things

Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,

Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—

Now lending splendour, where from secret springs

The source of human thought its tribute brings

Of waters—with a sound but half its own,

Such as a feeble brook will oft assume,

In the wild woods, among the mountains lone,

Where waterfalls around it leap for ever,

Where woods and winds contend, and a vast river

Over its rocks ceaselessly bursts and raves.

Section 1: In the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge, mysticism is the perception of a spiritual presence in nature. Shelley, who professed to be an atheist, pictures the “spiritual” presence not as a divine presence, but as an intellectual power. Note the first two lines of “Mont Blanc”: “The everlasting universe of things / Flows through the mind....” It is the power of the mind—the intellect—that is the force evident in nature.

II

Thus thou, Ravine of Arve—dark, deep Ravine—
Thou many-colour'd, many-voiced vale,
Over whose pines, and crags, and caverns sail
Fast cloud-shadows and sunbeams: awful scene,
Where Power in likeness of the Arve comes down
From the ice-gulfs that gird his secret throne,
Bursting through these dark mountains like the flame
Of lightning through the tempest;—thou dost lie,
Thy giant brood of pines around thee clinging,
Children of elder time, in whose devotion
The chainless winds still come and ever came
To drink their odours, and their mighty swinging
To hear—an old and solemn harmony;
Thine earthly rainbows stretch'd across the sweep
Of the aethereal waterfall, whose veil
Robes some unsculptur'd image; the strange sleep

Which when the voices of the desert fail
Wraps all in its own deep eternity;
Thy caverns echoing to the Arve's commotion,
A loud, lone sound no other sound can tame;
Thou art pervaded with that ceaseless motion,
Thou art the path of that unresting sound—
Dizzy Ravine! and when I gaze on thee
I seem as in a trance sublime and strange
To muse on my own separate fantasy,
My own, my human mind, which passively
Now renders and receives fast influencings,
Holding an unremitting interchange
With the clear universe of things around;
One legion of wild thoughts, whose wandering wings
Now float above thy darkness, and now rest
Where that or thou art no unbidden guest,
In the still cave of the witch Poesy,

Seeking among the shadows that pass by
Ghosts of all things that are, some shade of thee,
Some phantom, some faint image; till the breast
From which they fled recalls them, thou art there!

Section 2: Shelley compares this intellectual force to the River Arve that flows down the mountain. In lines 15–16, the speaker says that, like the source of the Arve, the “Power”—the presence in nature—is “secret,” unknown to humans. We can’t see the source of the river, but that certainly doesn’t mean we doubt the river’s existence; likewise, we don’t know the source, but we should not doubt the existence of the intellectual power in nature. When he gazes on the ravine, he feels compelled to “muse” upon his own human mind which both passively receives the information the senses provides and communicates with the “clear universe of things around.”

III

Some say that gleams of a remoter world
Visit the soul in sleep, that death is slumber,
And that its shapes the busy thoughts outnumber
Of those who wake and live.—I look on high;
Has some unknown omnipotence unfurl'd
The veil of life and death? or do I lie
In dream, and does the mightier world of sleep
Spread far around and inaccessibly
Its circles? For the very spirit fails,
Driven like a homeless cloud from steep to steep
That vanishes among the viewless gales!
Far, far above, piercing the infinite sky,
Mont Blanc appears—still, snowy, and serene;
Its subject mountains their unearthly forms
Pile around it, ice and rock; broad vales between
Of frozen floods, unfathomable deeps,

Blue as the overhanging heaven, that spread
And wind among the accumulated steeps;
A desert peopled by the storms alone,
Save when the eagle brings some hunter's bone,
And the wolf tracks her there—how hideously
Its shapes are heap'd around! rude, bare, and high,
Ghastly, and scarr'd, and riven.—Is this the scene
Where the old Earthquake-dæmon taught her young
Ruin? Were these their toys? or did a sea
Of fire envelop once this silent snow?
None can reply—all seems eternal now.
The wilderness has a mysterious tongue
Which teaches awful doubt, or faith so mild,
So solemn, so serene, that man may be,
But for such faith, with Nature reconcil'd;
Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal
Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood

By all, but which the wise, and great, and good

Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel.

Section 3: Shelley claims that the “wilderness” [nature] can teach one either “doubt” or “faith.” Perception of the Power may result in faith (like that of Wordsworth and Coleridge) which comes from the peaceful acceptance of God’s presence in nature. An equally possible reaction is to develop “doubt” of any orthodox religious view that sees nature as God’s handiwork. The mountain, though, has a voice to “repeal / Large codes of fraud and woe.” Not all, however, can understand that voice. In an idea reminiscent of Wordsworth’s claim that a poet is a “man speaking to men” but a man of greater sensibility, Shelley points out that the “wise, and great, and good” can interpret the mountain’s voice.

IV

The fields, the lakes, the forests, and the streams,
Ocean, and all the living things that dwell
Within the daedal* earth; lightning, and rain,
Earthquake, and fiery flood, and hurricane,
The torpor of the year when feeble dreams
Visit the hidden buds, or dreamless sleep
Holds every future leaf and flower; the bound
With which from that detested trance they leap;
The works and ways of man, their death and birth,
And that of him and all that his may be;
All things that move and breathe with toil and sound
Are born and die; revolve, subside, and swell.
Power dwells apart in its tranquillity,
Remote, serene, and inaccessible:
And this, the naked countenance of earth,
On which I gaze, even these primeval mountains

Teach the adverting mind. The glaciers creep
Like snakes that watch their prey, from their far fountains,
Slow rolling on; there, many a precipice
Frost and the Sun in scorn of mortal power
Have pil'd: dome, pyramid, and pinnacle,
A city of death, distinct with many a tower
And wall impregnable of beaming ice.
Yet not a city, but a flood of ruin
Is there, that from the boundaries of the sky
Rolls its perpetual stream; vast pines are strewing
Its destin'd path, or in the mangled soil
Branchless and shatter'd stand; the rocks, drawn down
From yon remotest waste, have overthrown
The limits of the dead and living world,
Never to be reclaim'd. The dwelling-place
Of insects, beasts, and birds, becomes its spoil;
Their food and their retreat for ever gone,

So much of life and joy is lost. The race
Of man flies far in dread; his work and dwelling
Vanish, like smoke before the tempest's stream,
And their place is not known. Below, vast caves
Shine in the rushing torrents' restless gleam,
Which from those secret chasms in tumult welling
Meet in the vale, and one majestic River,
The breath and blood of distant lands, for ever
Rolls its loud waters to the ocean-waves,
Breathes its swift vapours to the circling air.

*labyrinthine; complex

Section 4: While some people (perhaps like Wordsworth and Coleridge) believe that the spiritual presence in nature interacts with humankind, Shelley suggests that the Power of nature is remote from human affairs. It exists but is inaccessible to us. "Power dwells apart in its tranquility, / Remote, serene, and inaccessible." This "Power" may be destructive as well as beneficial.

V

Mont Blanc yet gleams on high:—the power is there,
The still and solemn power of many sights,
And many sounds, and much of life and death.
In the calm darkness of the moonless nights,
In the lone glare of day, the snows descend
Upon that Mountain; none beholds them there,
Nor when the flakes burn in the sinking sun,
Or the star-beams dart through them. Winds contend
Silently there, and heap the snow with breath
Rapid and strong, but silently! Its home
The voiceless lightning in these solitudes
Keeps innocently, and like vapour broods
Over the snow. The secret Strength of things
Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome
Of Heaven is as a law, inhabits thee!
And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,

If to the human mind's imaginings

Silence and solitude were vacancy?

Section 5: The poem concludes with the assertion that the Power is there, like Mont Blanc, remote and inaccessible.

“To a Skylark”

The European skylark is noted for singing while hovering in the air, sometimes at great heights. Shelley writes, then, of a bird whose song he can hear although the bird itself is not visible.

Excerpts from “To a Skylark”

Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!

Bird thou never wert,

That from heaven, or near it,

Pourest thy full heart

In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

Higher still and higher

From the earth thou springest

Like a cloud of fire;

The blue deep thou wingest,

And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.

In the golden lightning

Of the sunken sun,

O'er which clouds are bright'ning,

Thou dost float and run,

Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun.

The pale purple even

Melts around thy flight;

Like a star of heaven

In the broad daylight

Thou art unseen, but yet I hear thy shrill delight,

The speaker hails the bird, referring to it as a spirit, not a bird, already intimating Romantic mysticism. In an example of **anthropomorphism**¹⁷, attributing human characteristics to animals or inanimate objects, the speaker depicts the bird having a heart so full of emotion that it spills forth in song, in “unpremeditated art,” a description that evokes Wordsworth’s definition of poetry as a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling.” As we cannot see stars in the daylight but know they’re there, the speaker cannot see the bird but is aware, through its song, of its presence. This explanation sets up a series of comparisons in response to the question “what is most like the bird?”

17. Attributing human characteristics to animals or inanimate objects.

Like a poet hidden

In the light of thought,

Singing hymns unbidden,

Till the world is wrought

To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not:

Like a high-born maiden

In a palace tower,

Soothing her love-laden

Soul in secret hour

With music sweet as love, which overflows her bower:

Like a glow-worm golden

In a dell of dew,

Scattering unbeholden

Its aerial hue

Among the flowers and grass, which screen it from the view:

Like a rose embowered

In its own green leaves,
By warm winds deflowered,
Till the scent it gives
Makes faint with too much sweet these heavy-winged thieves:

In a series of four stanzas parallel in structure the speaker presents four comparisons to the skylark—two human, two from nature.

We look before and after,

And pine for what is not:

Our sincerest laughter

With some pain is fraught;

Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

Yet if we could scorn

Hate, and pride, and fear;

If we were things born

Not to shed a tear,

I know not how thy joy we ever should come near.

In these stanzas, the speaker notes one reason that humans cannot produce the beauty that the skylark creates in its song. Yet tears are necessary in order to know joy.

Better than all measures
Of delightful sound,
Better than all treasures
That in books are found,
Thy skill to poet were, thou scorner of the ground!
Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow
The world should listen then, as I am listening now!

In the last two stanzas, the speaker acknowledges that, if the skylark could teach him “half the gladness” that it knows, he could write poetry that would make the world listen to him as he is listening to the skylark.

“Song—To the Men of England”

Following England’s involvement in the Napoleonic wars, from the time of the French Revolution to about 1815, England suffered an economic depression. The Industrial Revolution forced many people, like Wordsworth’s Michael the shepherd, out of their traditional livelihood and into the cities to look for work in factories. Wealthy landowners were able to buy abandoned farm and pasture land. One result was a population shift. Large tracts of land now largely de-populated still had the same representation in Parliament while cities that had grown exponentially in population had little representation. England was in dire need of what we now call re-districting. The few wealthy landowners, however, were quite content with their control of the government.

In addition to the discontent caused by lack of representation, food prices soared as a result of the Corn Laws, a series of laws that placed import tariffs on grains (at that time in England the term *corn* was used as a general term for wheat and other grains).

Lack of jobs, lack of food, and lack of Members of Parliament to represent their interests led the working class to protests and demonstrations. The Peterloo Massacre occurred when mounted troops, with sabers drawn, rode down protestors, including women and children.

Already a strong proponent of reform, Shelley wrote “The Masque of Anarchy” and “Song to the Men of England” to protest the violent government reaction against the protestors and to encourage the working class to revolt against intolerable conditions. Shelley contrasts the lives of the working class and the lives of the nobility.

I

Men of England, wherefore plough

For the lords who lay ye low?

Wherefore weave with toil and care

The rich robes your tyrants wear?

II

Wherefore feed, and clothe, and save,

From the cradle to the grave,

Those ungrateful drones who would

Drain your sweat—nay, drink your blood?

III

Wherefore, Bees of England, forge

Many a weapon, chain, and scourge,

That these stingless drones may spoil

The forced produce of your toil?

IV

Have ye leisure, comfort, calm,

Shelter, food, love's gentle balm?

Or what is it ye buy so dear

With your pain and with your fear?

V

The seed ye sow, another reaps;

The wealth ye find, another keeps;

The robes ye weave, another wears;

The arms ye forge, another bears.

VI

Sow seed,—but let no tyrant reap;

Find wealth,—let no impostor heap;

Weave robes,—let not the idle wear;

Forge arms,—in your defence to bear.

VII

Shrink to your cellars, holes, and cells;

In halls ye deck another dwells.

Why shake the chains ye wrought? Ye see

The steel ye tempered glance on ye.

VIII

With plough and spade, and hoe and loom,

Trace your grave, and build your tomb,

And weave your winding-sheet, till fair

England be your sepulchre.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Shelley uses the typical Romantic structure of an observation of nature leading to a meditation.
- In “Mont Blanc” Shelley identifies the mystical power in nature as an intellectual power.
- Shelley’s poetry reveals the characteristics of Romanticism.
- Shelley responds to the political situation and the Industrial Revolution in his poetry.

EXERCISES

1. Compare “Mont Blanc” with Byron’s Lake Lemnan section from “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage.”
2. What are the four items to which Shelley compares the skylark? What do these things have in common? What do they have in common with the skylark? What point does Shelley make with these comparisons? What tenets of Romanticism are evident in this passage from “To a Skylark”?
3. In “To a Skylark,” when Shelley writes, “We look before and after, / And pine for what is not,” what human characteristic is he describing? Compare this comment about the human condition with Burns’s similar idea in “To a Mouse.”
4. The speaker in “To a Skylark” ponders what it would be like if people could live without “hate, and pride, and fear.” What is his conclusion?
5. In the last two stanzas of “To a Skylark,” the speaker acknowledges that, if the skylark could teach him “half the gladness” that it knows, the “harmonious madness” he could produce would make the world listen to him as he is listening to the skylark. Why does Shelley use the term “harmonious madness” to describe what is presumably poetry?
6. What does “To a Skylark” say about creativity? How does this poem relate to Coleridge’s idea of the Imagination?
7. What specific work does Shelley attribute to the working classes in “Song to the Men of England”? What benefits do the upper class derive from this work?
8. What does Shelley urge the working men of England to do?
9. In the last two stanzas of “Song to the Men of England,” the tone seems accusatory toward the workers. What does the speaker predict will happen to them?

Resources

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- “[Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni](#).” University of Pennsylvania.
- “[Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni](#).” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “[Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mont Blanc](#).” Robert M. Schwartz, Mount Holyoke College. text, notes, and images of Mont Blanc.
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Audio

- “[Josephine Hart on Percy Bysshe Shelley](#).” Learning: Poetry & Performance. British Library. audio and transcript.
- “[Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni](#).” *LibriVox*.
- “[Percy Bysshe Shelley Read by Domini West and Alan Cox](#).” Learning: Poetry & Performance. British Library. audio and transcript.
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Images

- "[Percy Bysshe Shelley \(1792–1822\)](#)." *Shelley's Ghost: Reshaping the Image of a Literary Family*. Bodleian Libraries. Oxford University Exhibit in partnership with the New York Public Library. includes images of manuscripts, first editions, portraits
- [Shelley Sites/Sights](#). *Romantic Circles*. Ed. Darby Lewes and Bob Stikuis.

Concordance

- [P. B. Shelley Selected Poems Web Concordance](#). *The Web Concordances*.

6.12 John Keats (1795–1821)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Analyze Keats's use of the sonnet form in "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" and "When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be."
2. Identify characteristics of Romanticism in Keats's poetry.
3. Compare Keats's use of nature with other Romantic poets.
4. Recognize and identify examples of the richness of imagery for which Keats's is known in "The Eve of St. Agnes" and "To Autumn."

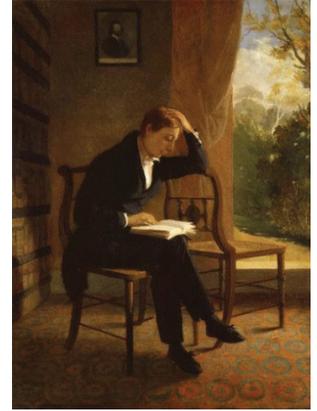
Biography

Unlike Byron and Shelley, John Keats came from a working class background. His father, a stable keeper, died when Keats was eight years old; his mother died of tuberculosis, then called consumption, when he was 14. Keats left school to become an apothecary's apprentice. He left the apprenticeship to study medicine but soon decided to abandon his studies to pursue writing poetry. Keats cared for his brother Tom during his illness and death from tuberculosis, so it is not surprising that Keats also contracted the illness. Because of his medical knowledge, he recognized that he had a fatal illness.

Keats became acquainted with other writers such as Shelley and literary figures such as Leigh Hunt, in whose journal Keats published his first poem. Keats's early work was not well received. Several of Keats's friends, in fact, blamed discouragement caused by the harsh criticism for hastening the poet's death.

After his brother's death and with his own health deteriorating, Keats moved into a house in Hampstead with his friend Brown. Through Brown, Keats met Fanny Brawne, the love of his life. The Brawne family rented the attached house next door to Brown's house.

During the year he lived here, Keats produced his greatest poetry including "The Eve of St. Agnes," "Ode to Psyche," "La Belle Dame sans Merci," "Ode to a Nightingale," "Ode on a Grecian Urn," "Ode on Melancholy," "Lamia," *The Fall of Hyperion*, and "To Autumn." Many critics have noted that Keats produced more great poetry in a year than many poets produce in a lifetime.



Portrait by Joseph Severn from *Letters of John Keats to His Family and Friends*.

ed. Sidney Colvin. Macmillan and Co., Limited. St. Martin's Street, London, 1925



Realizing that his health was failing, Keats decided to move to Rome, hoping that the warmer, drier climate would improve his condition. He traveled to Rome with his friend, artist Joseph Severn. They moved into rooms next to the Spanish Steps, rooms which now house the Keats-Shelley House museum.

Only a few months after his arrival in Rome, Keats died with his friend Severn in attendance and was buried in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome. At his request, his name was not carved into his grave stone. Keats requested that his marker read, “Here lies one whose name was writ in water.” Severn, who was later buried next to Keats, and Brown decided to add the following inscription to the memorial:

This Grave contains all that was mortal, of a YOUNG ENGLISH POET, who on his Death Bed, in the Bitterness of his heart, at the Malicious Power of his enemies, desired these words to be Engraven on his Tomb Stone

These words fueled stories that Keats’s death was hastened by his despair over the brutal critical reviews of his poetry. Shelley’s elegy *Adonais* includes verses attributing Keats’s death to his agitation over the reviews, also adding substance to the stories. A post-mortem, however, revealed that Keats’s lungs had been almost entirely destroyed by tuberculosis.



Views of the interior of Keats's house in Hampstead, London, now a museum.



Texts

- “[The Eve of St. Agnes.](#)” *Bartleby.com*. rpt. from *The Poetical Works of John Keats*. London. Macmillan.1884.
- “[The Eve of St. Agnes.](#)” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “[Ode to a Nightingale.](#)” *Keats-Shelley House*. text and audio.
- “[Ode to a Nightingale.](#)” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “[On Seeing the Elgin Marbles.](#)” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- *The Poems of John Keats*. Ed. E. De Selincourt. New York. Dodd, Mead and Co. 1909. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*.
- *Poems Published in 1820 by John Keats*. Ed. M. Robertson. *Project Gutenberg*.
- “[To Autumn.](#)” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “[To Autumn.](#)” *Keats-Shelley House*. text and audio.
- “[When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be.](#)” *Keats’ Literary Reputation*. British Library. text and audio.
- “[When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be.](#)” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.

Severn’s drawing of Keats on his death bed.



The graves of Keats and Severn in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome.

“On Seeing the Elgin Marbles”

Even as a very young man, Keats seemed tragically aware of death and of his own mortality, as might be expected in one who had suffered loss of immediate family members. Although the subject of this sonnet is the Elgin Marbles, the focus in the first line is on approaching death. In line 5, the poet compares himself to a sick eagle, looking at the sky, longing to fly, yet unable to do so. In contrast to his own brief life span, the marbles are centuries old, yet even they are marked and worn by time.

Video Clip 9

John Keats.wmv

[\(click to see video\)](#)

View a video mini-lecture about “On Seeing the Elgin Marbles.”

My spirit is too weak—mortality
Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep,
And each imagined pinnacle and steep
Of godlike hardship tells me I must die
Like a sick eagle looking at the sky.
Yet 'tis a gentle luxury to weep
That I have not the cloudy winds to keep
Fresh for the opening of the morning's eye.
Such dim-conceived glories of the brain
Bring round the heart an undescribable feud;
So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,
That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude
Wasting of old time—with a billowy main—
A sun—a shadow of a magnitude.
My spirit is too weak—mortality
Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep,
And each imagined pinnacle and steep

Of godlike hardship tells me I must die
Like a sick eagle looking at the sky.

Yet 'tis a gentle luxury to weep

That I have not the cloudy winds to keep
Fresh for the opening of the morning's eye.

Such dim-conceived glories of the brain

Bring round the heart an undescribable feud;
So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,

That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude
Wasting of old time—with a billowy main—

A sun—a shadow of a magnitude.

My spirit is too weak—mortality

Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep,

And each imagined pinnacle and steep
Of godlike hardship tells me I must die
Like a sick eagle looking at the sky.

Yet 'tis a gentle luxury to weep,

That I have not the cloudy winds to keep,
Fresh for the opening of the morning's eye.
Such dim-conceived glories of the brain
Bring round the heart an indescribable feud;
So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,
That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude
Wasting of old Time—with a billowy main—
A sun—a shadow of a magnitude.

“When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be”

“When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be” is an English sonnet; Keats was more interested in form than many of the Romantic poets, which in turn made him interesting to many Victorian poets who experimented with form. The sonnet consists of three quatrains, each beginning with “when,” and a final couplet, which begins with “then.”

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
Before high piled books, in charact'ry,
Hold like rich garners the full-ripen'd grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour!
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love!—then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.

“The Eve of St. Agnes”

18. A poem that tells a story.

19. The renewed interest in the Middle Ages evident in some Romantic literature.

“The Eve of St. Agnes” is a **narrative poem**¹⁸, a poem that tells a story. It is also an example of the **medieval revival**¹⁹, the renewed interest in the Middle Ages evident in some Romantic literature. During the 19th century, many writers idealized the Middle Ages; it seemed romantic and less complicated than the modern world.

However, they often had a fairy tale view of medieval times, thinking only of knights in shining armor rescuing fair damsels in distress rather than recognizing the harsh, violent time period that it really was.

This story is set in the Middle Ages and is a type of Romeo and Juliet story of two feuding families and the children who love each other in spite of their families' enmity. Ambiguity at the end of the story leaves readers to decide whether Madeline and Porphyro "live happily ever after" or whether they freeze in the winter night.

Central to the story is a medieval superstition concerning St. Agnes Eve. This type of superstition—a ritual that allows young girls to find out who their future husband will be—is common in many cultures. In America's past there have been superstitions and folklore involving sleeping with a piece of wedding cake under your pillow, or peeling an apple and throwing the peel over your shoulder. In the Middle Ages, superstition specified a ritual which, if followed on St. Agnes Eve, would allow a girl to dream of her future husband. Note the specifics of the ritual in Stanza 6. Porphyro, aided by Madeline's nurse, decides to take advantage of his knowledge that his beloved Madeline will be expecting to see a vision of her true love. Note in Stanza 35, however, how Madeline reacts to the real Porphyro compared with her dream.

"The Eve of St. Agnes" presents the reader with two contrasting worlds, separated by symbolic doors. The poem begins with a description of a harsh, cold landscape in which even nature suffers, focusing on the beadsman, near freezing to death, who prays for the family. A door opens, and the reader is ushered into a warm, colorful world inside the house where the main action takes place. Then in Stanza 41, a door opens again and the lovers leave the castle, taking with them any hint of love and warmth. The poem ends in images of death and cold.

"To Autumn"

Video Clip 10

Keats's "To Autumn"

[\(click to see video\)](#)

View a video mini-lecture on "To Autumn."

SEASON of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For Summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

2

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,

Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook

Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:

And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep

Steady thy laden head across a brook;

Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,

Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

3

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?

Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—

While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,

And touch the stubble plains with rosy hue;

Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn

Among the river shallows, borne aloft

Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;

And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;

Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft

The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;

And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

“Ode to a Nightingale”

While Keats lived in Brown’s Hampstead house, a plum tree grew next to the front door. One evening, Keats was sitting under the tree when he heard a nightingale singing from the tree.

The poem begins by focusing on the speaker, sick at heart and in spirit, envious of the bird’s happiness. The speaker searches for a way to escape the pain of living. In Stanza 2 he considers wine as a means of escape but rejects that possibility.

In Stanza 3, the speaker recognizes that wine will not make him forget the “weariness, the fever, and the fret” of living, hardships that the nightingale has never known. Even in poetry, the speaker does not find an escape from the cares of living. So burdened by the pain of life, the speaker confesses that he has at times been “half in love with easeful death.” He adds that this moment, enraptured by the beauty of the bird’s song, seems an even more tempting time to die. He realizes, however, that in death he would miss the small consolation of this beauty.

In Stanza 7, the speaker exclaims, “Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!” He recognizes that since ancient times people have been enchanted by this same song.

Finally, he imagines the bird flying across the meadow and river, leaving the speaker wondering if he had imagined or dreamed the entire experience.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- More interested in poetic form than many Romantic writers, Keats wrote sonnets.
- Keats’s “The Eve of St. Agnes” is an example of the medieval revival.
- Keats uses nature to express his themes, often themes concerning death.

EXERCISES

1. What characteristics of Romanticism are evident in Keats's poetry?
2. How does Romantic mysticism appear in the works of Keats?
3. How does Keats's use of nature compare with that of other Romantic writers?

“When I Have Fears that I May Cease to Be”

1. What does Keats mean when he writes, “When I have fears that I may cease to be”?
2. The poet expresses a different fear in each quatrain. What are his three fears?
3. His only consolation from his fears is expressed in the final couplet. What is it?
4. Why does this poem seem especially sad when we know Keats's biography?

“The Eve of St. Agnes”

1. Keats is known for the richness of the descriptive imagery in his poetry. Compile a chronological list of the scenes in the poem, and list some of the description included in each scene. (For example, the first scene in the poem is outdoors, with the owl, the rabbit, and the frozen grass.)
2. “The Eve of St. Agnes” is a poem of contrasts. List and explain contrasting ideas you find in the poem (for example, youth and old age, warmth and cold).
3. Write a character sketch of Madeline, including a physical description, character traits, and actions and motives in the poem.
4. Write a character sketch of Porphyro, including a physical description, character traits, and actions and motives in the poem.
5. What do you think happened to the lovers?

Resources

Biography

- “[Afterlife.](#)” *Presenting John Keats*. Curated by Libby Chenault and Katherine Carlson, Rare Book Collection, Wilson Library. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- [John Keats 1795–1821](#). *Keats-Shelley House*. includes images of Romantic writers, manuscripts, first editions.

- [John Keats \(1795–1821\)](#). Online Gallery: John Keats. British Library. includes images of Keats and of manuscripts.
- [“The Life and Legacy of John Keats.”](#) *Presenting John Keats*. Curated by Libby Chenault and Katherine Carlson, Rare Book Collection, Wilson Library. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- [“Work and Reappraisal.”](#) *Presenting John Keats*. Curated by Libby Chenault and Katherine Carlson, Rare Book Collection, Wilson Library. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Texts

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- [“The Eve of St. Agnes.”](#) *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- [“Ode to a Nightingale.”](#) *Keats-Shelley House*. text and audio.
- [“Ode to a Nightingale.”](#) *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- [“On Seeing the Elgin Marbles.”](#) *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- *The Poems of John Keats*. Ed. E. De Selincourt. New York. Dodd, Mead and Co. 1909. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*.
- [Poems Published in 1820 by John Keats](#). Ed. M. Robertson. *Project Gutenberg*.
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- [“When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be.”](#) Keats’ Literary Reputation. British Library. text and audio.
- [“When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be.”](#) *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire. Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.

Video

- [“John Keats.”](#) Dr. Carol Lowe, McLennan Community College.
- [Keats-Shelley House](#). virtual tour of the house in Rome where Keats was living when he died, now the location of the Keats-Shelley Museum, including information about Keats’s time in Rome
- [“Keats and Brawne: The Romance and Love Letters.”](#) Woman’s Hour. BBC 4.

- “[Keats’s ‘To Autumn.’](#)” Dr. Carol Lowe, McLennan Community College.

Audio

- “[‘Bright Star’ Panel Discussion.](#)” Stuart Curran, Christopher Ricks, Timothy Corrigan and Susan Wolfson At the New York Public Library Performing Arts Library, 13 September 2009. *Romantic Circles*. General Editors: Neil Fraistat and Steven E. Jones Technical Editor: Laura Mandell. University of Maryland.
- “[‘Chris Dombrowski Reads ‘To Autumn’ by John Keats.’](#)” *Poets on Poets*. Ed. Tilar Mazzeo. *Romantic Circles*. General Editors: Neil Fraistat and Steven E. Jones. Technical Editor: Laura Mandell. University of Maryland. text and audio.
- “[‘The Eve of St. Agnes.’](#)” LibriVox.
- “[‘Keats, Shelley, and the ‘Bright Star.’](#)” Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi Lecture at the University of Loyola Chicago, 19 October 2006. *Romantic Circles*. General Editors: Neil Fraistat and Steven E. Jones Technical Editor: Laura Mandell. University of Maryland.
- “[‘Ode to a Nightingale.’](#)” *Keats-Shelley House*.
- “[‘On Seeing the Elgin Marbles.’](#)” LibriVox.
- “[‘The Posthumous Life.’](#)” *Keats-Shelley House*. audio drama of Keats’s last days in Rome.
- “[‘To Autumn.’](#)” *Keats-Shelley House*.
- “[‘Tom Thompson Reads ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ by John Keats.’](#)” *Poets on Poets*. Ed. Tilar Mazzeo. *Romantic Circles*. General Editors: Neil Fraistat and Steven E. Jones. Technical Editor: Laura Mandell. University of Maryland. audio and text of the poem and commentary.
- “[‘Wesley McNair Reads ‘When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be’ by John Keats.’](#)” *Poets on Poets*. Ed. Tilar Mazzeo. *Romantic Circles*. General Editors: Neil Fraistat and Steven E. Jones. Technical Editor: Laura Mandell. University of Maryland. audio of the poem and commentary. Additional recordings of this sonnet by Carey Salerno and Ravi Shankar. text and audio.
- “[‘When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be.’](#)” Keats’ Literary Reputation. British Library. text and audio.

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- “[‘An Electronic Concordance to Keats’s Poetry.’](#)” Electronic Ed. Noah Comet. Ed. Jack Stillinger. *Romantic Circles*. General Editors: Neil Fraistat and Steven E. Jones Technical Editor: Laura Mandell. University of Maryland.
- [John Keats The Odes of 1819 Web Concordance.](#) *The Web Concordances*.

Text Image

- “The Eve of St. Agnes: a Poem / by John Keats; With a Preface Written for It by Edmund Gosse. Edition limited to 800 copies made upon L.L. Brown’s H.M. paper...printed...from plates made from drawings for each page, designed & lettered by Ralph Fletcher Seymour. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*.

Chapter 7

The Victorian Era

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

7.1 The Victorian Era (1832–1901)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize and evaluate the influence that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert exerted on the last half of the 19th century.
2. Identify and explain the conflicts that defined the Victorian Era.
3. Assess the ways in which these conflicts influenced Victorian literature.
4. List, define, and give examples of typical forms of Victorian literature.

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...”

- Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

The Victorian Age—the era when the sun never set on the British Empire, a time when the upper classes of Britain felt their society was the epitome of prosperity, progress, and virtue—Dickens’s words, however, could apply to his own Victorian age as well as they apply to the French Revolution setting of his novel. The Victorian Era was a time of contrasts—poverty as well as prosperity, degrading manual labor as well as technological progress, and depravity as well as virtue.



Snow Hill, Holburn, London
(Anonymous).

Queen Victoria

The last seventy years of the 19th century were named for the long-reigning Queen Victoria. The beginning of the Victorian Era may be rounded off to 1830 although many scholars mark the beginning from the passage of the first Reform Bill in 1832 or Victoria’s accession to the throne in 1837.

Victoria was only eighteen when her uncle William IV died and, having no surviving legitimate children, left the crown to his niece.

Although by the 19th century Britain was a constitutional monarchy and the queen held little governing power, Victoria set the moral and political tone of her century. She became a symbol of decency, decorum, and duty.

Three years into her reign, Victoria married Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, a region in what is now Germany. Prince Albert (given the title “Prince” by Victoria), although he had no actual power in the government, became one of Victoria’s chief advisors and a proponent of technological development in Britain. Together the couple had nine children who married into many of Europe’s royal and noble families. Victoria and Albert were considered the model of morality and respectable family life.

When Prince Albert died in 1861, Victoria retired from public view, spending time in her Balmoral Castle in Scotland or Osborne House on the Isle of Wight. Public opinion of the queen waned as years passed without her resuming her official duties. Even when she conceded to her advisors’ urging to return to London and to honor her public obligations, she continued to wear mourning until her own death. She also commissioned many public memorials to Prince Albert, including the Albert Memorial in Hyde Park (near the original location of the Crystal Palace), Royal Albert Hall, and the Victoria & Albert Museum.



Victoria receives the news that she is Queen. Engraved by Emery Walker (1851–1933), from the picture by Henry Tanworth Wells (1828–1903) at Buckingham Palace.



Balmoral Castle, the royal residence in Scotland.



Osborne House, the royal residence on the Isle of Wight.



The Albert Memorial, Hyde Park, London.



Royal Albert Hall, London.



The ornamental dome on the Victoria & Albert Museum was modeled after Queen Victoria's favorite crown, visible in the portrait below, now on display with the Crown Jewels at the Tower of London.

Queen Victoria reigned as Queen of the United Kingdom and Empress of India until her death in 1901.

Victorian Conflicts

The Victorian Era was, in many ways, paradoxically “the best times” and “the worst of times.”

Conflicts of Morality

Queen Victoria embodied ideals of virtue, modesty, and honor. In fact, the term *Victorian* has in the past been almost a synonym for prim, prudish behavior. At the same time, London and other British cities had countless gaming halls which provided venues not just for gambling but also opium dens and prostitution. With the influx of population into the cities, desperate working class women turned to prostitution in attempts to support themselves and their children. Historian Judy Walkowitz reports that 19th century cities had 1 prostitute for every 12 adult males (quoted in “*The Great Social Evil*”: *Victorian Prostitution* by Prof. Christine Roth). Because of rampant sexually transmitted diseases among the British military, Parliament passed a series of Contagious Diseases Acts in the 1860s. These acts allowed police to detain any woman suspected of having a sexually transmitted disease and to force her to submit to exams that were considered humiliating for women at that time. Police needed little basis for such suspicions, often simply that a woman was poor.



Photograph by Alexander Bassano 1829–1913.

Thomas Hardy’s poem “The Ruined Maid” reveals one reason many women turned to prostitution (*ruined* is a Victorian euphemism for an unmarried woman who has lost her virginity): in the poem, two young women converse. One woman, Melia, has left the farm to become a prostitute. When she meets a former friend, the contrast between the two women is pronounced: Melia is wearing fine clothes and is well fed and well cared for. The virtuous young woman, doing honest work on the farm, is wearing rags, digging potatoes by hand for subsistence, and suffering poor health. Hardy forces his readers to question what kind of society would reward prostitution while leaving the virtuous woman in abject poverty.

Conflicts of Technology and Industry

As an advocate of Victorian progress in science and industry, Prince Albert commissioned the Great Exhibition of 1851, a type of world’s fair where all the countries in the British Empire had displays and Britain could show off its

prosperity to the rest of the world. Albert had the Crystal Palace, a huge, modern building of glass and iron, built in Hyde Park to house the exhibition. After the Great Exhibition ended, the building was dismantled and moved and in its new location was destroyed by fire in 1936.

Video Clip 1

The Albert Memorial Symbol of the Victorian Age

[\(click to see video\)](#)

View a video lecture about the Albert Memorial.

The Albert Memorial commemorated all the same things the Great Exhibition vaunted. The four arms extending from the main statue represent four continents on which the British Empire had holdings: Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas—the sun literally never set on the British Empire. The figures on the frieze are great painters, poets, sculptors, musicians, and architects, representatives of the world’s accomplishments which culminated in the British Victorian culture. The mosaics on the canopy represent manufacturing, commerce, agriculture, and engineering—the foundations of British prosperity. And, of course, in the center, is the gilded figure of Albert himself.



The Great Exhibition of 1851 held in the Crystal Palace, Hyde Park, London.

Source: Exterior: from Dickinson's Comprehensive Pictures of the Great Exhibition of 1851, 1854 interior: William Simpson (lithographer), Ackermann & Co. (publisher), 1851, V&A.

Prince Albert's Great Exhibition of 1851 focused attention on the technological advances made during the Industrial Revolution. Although achievements such as the building of the railroad system and the implementation of mechanized factories produced great prosperity for some, others suffered. Even before the Victorian Era, writers drew attention to these problems. Wordsworth's "Michael," for example, portrays a man whose family had made their living from their land for many generations. With the advent of machines to weave woolen cloth, their livelihood, their way of life, was lost. Blake's "Chimney Sweeper" poems illustrate how children suffered in the industrial age.



Arm representing Africa.

In addition, working conditions in factories were deplorable. With no safety regulations and no laws limiting either the number of hours people could be required to work or the age of factory workers, some factory owners were willing to sacrifice the well-being of their employees for greater profit. Children as young as five worked in factories and mines. Shelley's "Men of England" and Barrett Browning's "The Cry of the Children" are two examples of poems written specifically to address these problems.



The 1833 Factory Act outlawed the employment of people under age eighteen at night, from 8:30 p.m. to 5:30 a.m. and limited the number of hours those under eighteen could work to twelve hours a day. For the first time, textile factory owners were forbidden to employ children under the age of nine. Children under age eleven could not work more than nine hours a day. The 1833 Factory Act also stipulated that children working in factories attend some type of school.



A girl pulling a coal tub in a mine.

*Source: Parliamentary Papers
1842.*

The Mines Act of 1842 prohibited females and boys under ten from working below ground in mines.

While these provisions hardly seem protective according to modern standards, the resulting conditions greatly improved life for many children. Throughout Victoria's reign, other parliamentary acts continued to alleviate working conditions in the ever-expanding Victorian industrial age.

Conflicts of Faith and Doubt

The scientific and technological advances celebrated at the Great Exhibition of 1851 led to another crisis in Victorian England: a crisis of faith and doubt. During the earlier part of the 19th century, the work of Charles Lyell and other geologists with their discoveries of fossilized remains of animals never seen before led to debates among scientists about the origins of these creatures. Debates about the age of the earth for some called into question the Genesis account of creation. In 1859, Charles Darwin published his *On the Origin of Species*. Lyell and Darwin were among many who contributed to scientific theories that some saw as contradictory to established religious beliefs.

These scientific issues together with apparent lack of concern for appalling human conditions among the lower classes led some to doubt the presence of a divine being in the world and others to question the value of Christianity. Literature by writers such as Thomas Hardy and Matthew Arnold questions the presence of religious faith in the world.

At the same time, a conviction that Britain had a duty to spread Christianity around the world became one reason, or to some an excuse, for British imperialism.

Conflicts over Imperialism

A desire to expand industrial wealth and to have access to inexpensive raw materials led to the British occupation of countries around the globe. Although the United States and other European countries participated in this type of imperialism, the British Empire was the largest and wealthiest of its time.

Along with their desire for material gain, many British saw the expansion of the British Empire as what Rudyard Kipling referred to as “the white man’s burden,” the responsibility of the British to bring their civilization and their way of life to what many considered inferior cultures. The result of this type of reasoning was often the destruction of local cultures and the oppression of local populations. In addition, a religious zeal to bring British religion to “heathen” peoples resulted in an influx of missionaries with the colonialists.

A backlash of protest against the concept of imperialism further divided a British nation already divided by class, religion, education, and wealth. While many British citizens sincerely desired to share their knowledge and beliefs with less developed nations, others found the movement a convenient excuse to expand their country’s, and their own, power and wealth.

Conflicts over Women's Rights

*“The Queen is most anxious to enlist everyone who can speak or write to join in checking this mad, wicked folly of ‘Woman’s Rights,’ with all its attendant horrors, on which her poor feeble sex is bent, forgetting every sense of womanly feeling and propriety.”*Queen Victoria, 1870

- quoted in Lytton Strachey’s Queen Victoria)

Ironically, as seen in this passage from a letter written in the royal third person by Queen Victoria, even the Queen opposed women’s rights. Nonetheless, the Victorian Era did see advancement in women’s political rights. The Married Woman’s Property Act of 1870 gave married women the right to own property they earned or acquired by inheritance. The upper classes were, of course, primarily concerned with inheritances. Before the passage of this act, money or property left to a married woman immediately belonged to her husband. By the late 19th century, women had some rights to their children and the right to leave their husbands because of physical abuse.

Education for women also improved. The idea Mary Wollstonecraft expressed in her “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman” in 1792 very gradually, over more than 100 years, became a reality.

The first schools for the lower classes, girls or boys, were Sunday schools organized by churches to teach children basic literacy as well as religious lessons on the only day they were not working full time. Not until the Education Act of 1870 were public schools in all areas of the country provided by law. Even then, attendance was not made compulsory for another ten years and then only for children aged five to ten.

Girls from the lower classes were included in the first public schools; however, girls from the upper classes continued to receive their basic education primarily in the home and in finishing schools for young ladies. Cambridge University and Oxford University established the first colleges for women in the latter half of the 19th century. Women were not allowed to attend the existing colleges for men and were not considered full members of the universities until the 20th century.

Sorry!

This image is permanently unavailable.

A 19th century Sunday school.

Although there was an active woman's suffrage movement during the Victorian Era, women did not receive the right to vote until the 20th century.

Take the Women's Rights Quiz on the BBC website to see how much you know about the rights of Victorian women.

Language

The major change in the English language during the 19th century was the introduction of vocabulary to communicate new innovations, inventions, and concepts that resulted from the Industrial Age. Language mirrored class distinctions in both vocabulary and accents. The well educated upper classes were distinguished by their speech. Slang and an entirely differently accented English were the marks of the lower classes.

Forms of Literature

Novel

As noted in the Romantic Period introduction, a **novel**¹, as defined in the Holman/Harmon *Handbook to Literature*, is an “extended fictional prose narrative.” The novel was a dominant form in the Victorian Era. Many Victorian novelists—Charles Dickens, William Thackeray, Wilke Collins, George Eliot, Robert Louis Stevenson—wrote **serial novels**², novels published in installments over a period of time. Serial novels appeared in newspapers or magazines or could be published in independently printed booklets. As larger portions of the population became literate, demand for reading material grew. The inexpensive booklets, each containing a chapter or other small portion of a novel, were affordable entertainment for the middle classes.

Poetry

As in the Romantic Period, lyric poetry was popular in the Victorian Era. In addition to the lyric, the **verse novel**³, a long narrative poem, such as Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, and Browning's *The Ring and the Book*, also was a prevalent form. Browning popularized the **dramatic monologue**⁴, a form of poetry which presents a speaker in a dramatic situation.

Non-Fiction Prose

The many conflicts of the Victorian Era provided fertile subject matter for non-fiction prose writers such as Matthew Arnold, Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, John Henry Newman, Walter Pater, and John Ruskin.

1. As defined in the Holman/Harmon *Handbook to Literature*, an “extended fictional prose narrative.”

2. Novels published in installments over a period of time.

3. A long narrative poem.

4. A form of poetry which presents a speaker in a dramatic situation.

Drama

Popular forms of entertainment such as the music hall and melodramas flourished during the Victorian Era as entertainment became divided along class lines. Popular music and musical plays, separated from legitimate theater in their own venues, provided leisure-time amusement for the middle classes. Robert Browning wrote **closet dramas**⁵, plays not actually intended for the stage. Oscar Wilde revived the comedy of manners with plays such as *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Although Queen Victoria symbolized decency, decorum, and duty, Victorian society spanned a wide spectrum of prosperity and poverty, education and ignorance, progress and regression
- Victorian society wrestled with conflicts of morality, technology and industry, faith and doubt, imperialism, and rights of women and ethnic minorities.
- Many Victorian writers addressed both sides of these conflicts in many forms of literature.
- Typical forms of Victorian literature include novels, serialized novels, lyric poetry, verse novels, dramatic monologues, non-fiction prose, and drama.

Resources

Victorianism

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- “[Victorians 1850–1901](#).” *The National Archives*.

Queen Victoria

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Victorian Conflicts

Conflicts of Morality

- “[Addiction in the Nineteenth Century](#).” Dr. Susan Zieger, Stanford University.
- “[The Contagious Diseases Act](#).” *The Victorian Web*.
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- “[1832 Reform Act](#).” Taking Liberties: The Struggle for Britain’s Freedoms and Rights. The British Library.
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- “Victorian Science & Religion.” *The Victorian Web*. Aileen Fyfe, National University of Ireland Galway and John van Wyhe, Cambridge University.

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- “The 1870 Education Act.” Living Heritage: Going to School. www.parliament.uk.
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- “Gender Matters.” *The Victorian Web*.
- “The National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies.” *The Victorian Web*. Helena Wojtczak.
- ““The Personal is Political’: Gender in Private & Public Life.” Gender, Health, Medicine & Sexuality in Victorian England. Victoria & Albert Museum.
- “The Suffragettes in Parliament.” History of Parliament Podcasts. www.parliament.uk.
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- “Victorian Britain: A Divided Nation?” Education. *The National Archives*.
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- “[Literary Genre, Mode, and Style.](#)” *The Victorian Web*.
- “[Nineteenth Century Drama.](#)” *Theatre Database*.
- “[Progress of Journalism in the Victorian Era.](#)” *Bartleby.com*. The Growth of Journalism. rpt. from *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature in 18 Volumes* (1907–21). Vol. XIV. The Victorian Age, Part Two.
- “[Serial Publication.](#)” Prof. Joel J. Brattin, Worcester Polytechnic Institute. Dickens. Life and Career. *PBS.org*.
- [Some Questions to Use in Analyzing Novels](#). Prof. Stephen C. Behrendt, University of Nebraska, Lincoln.
- “[Studies of Victorian Literature.](#)” Dr. John P. Farrell, University of Texas at Austin.
- “[Victorian Literature and Culture.](#)” Prof. James Buzard. *MIT Open Courseware*.
- “[Victorian Serial Novels.](#)” Digital Collections. University of Victoria Libraries.
- “[Victorian Women Writers Project.](#)” University of Indiana Digital Library Project.
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Video

- “[The Albert Memorial: Symbol of the Victorian Age.](#)” Dr. Carol Lowe, McLennan Community College.
- “[The Great Exhibition.](#)” Victorians. The British Library.
- “[The Rise of Technology and Industry.](#)” Learning: Victorians. The British Library. images, slide shows, video, podcasts featuring all types

of industry and technological advances in daily life, such as cooking and bathrooms.

Audio

- “A Visitor’s Guide to the Great Exhibition, from ‘The Illustrated Exhibitor.’” The Great Exhibition. Victorians. The British Library.

7.2 Charles Dickens (1812–1870)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize *A Tale of Two Cities* as a serial novel, and account for the popularity of serial novels in Victorian England.
2. Evaluate the role of the novel's structure in conveying themes.
3. Define and illustrate the use of literary devices such as anaphora, asyndeton, parallelism, and paradox in the novel's famous opening lines.
4. Distinguish developing characters from static characters and analyze the purpose of each.
5. List and provide specific examples from the text of significant themes and images.

Biography

Charles Dickens was born in 1812 in Portsmouth, a major port city in England. Although Dickens's father worked as a clerk in a Navy office, he accrued debt and was imprisoned in Marshalsea Prison in London. Dickens's mother and siblings joined him in prison, but at age twelve, Dickens went to work in a boot blacking factory in London to help support his family. The experiences he had there provided material for many of his novels that depict the working poor of London.



Dickens's birthplace in Portsmouth.

When his father was released from prison, Dickens was able to attend school and eventually worked as an office assistant for an attorney, a position which led to his becoming a court reporter, a reporter in Parliament, and eventually a journalist. With the success of his first serialized novel, *Pickwick Papers*, Dickens became a full-time novelist. His novels quickly achieved mass popularity, audiences eagerly awaiting new installments of the serial novels. Always interested in the theatre, Dickens conducted a series of public readings of his novels, drawing large enthusiastic audiences in England, on the continent, and in America. The readings added to his fame but later in life proved harmful to his health. Against his doctor's advice, he completed a final reading tour in America and several more readings in England until he died of a stroke in 1870. Not surprisingly for a writer of his prominence, he was buried in Poet's Corner at Westminster Abbey.



Forty-eight Doughty Street, the only surviving London house Dickens lived in. He was living here when he wrote *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*.

Text

- Dickens, Charles, 1812–1870. *A Tale of Two Cities*. Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library.
- *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens. Project Gutenberg.
- *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens. A. L. Burt Company, Publishers, New York. 1890. Hathi Trust Digital Library.



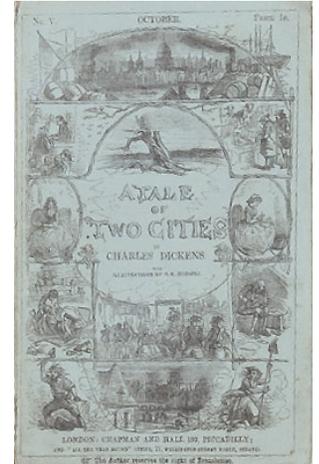
A Tale of Two Cities

Background

Published in 1859, *A Tale of Two Cities* is an example of a serial novel, a novel published in installments over a period of time. The novel was first published in weekly installments and again later in monthly installments.

Fears that England might be heading toward a revolution like the French Revolution persisted into the Victorian Era. Literary references to these fears appear in many 19th-century works including Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*; Barrett Browning's "The Cry of the Children," Shelley's "Men of England," and Byron's *Don Juan*.

The passage of Reform Bills in 1832, 1867, and 1884 to extend voting rights evidences the discontent of the previously disenfranchised working class and the unease of the upper classes who feared open rebellion.



Structure

A Tale of Two Cities is divided into three sections:

- Book the First: Recalled to Life (1775)
- Book the Second: The Golden Thread (1780–1789)
- Book the Third: The Track of a Storm (1792–1793)

Cover of the serial volume of *A Tale of Two Cities* with artwork by Hablot Knight Browne, known as Phiz, who illustrated many of Dickens's works.

Setting

"Chapter 1 The Period" begins with these well-known lines:

It was the best of times,

it was the worst of times,

it was the age of wisdom,

it was the age of foolishness,

it was the epoch of belief,

it was the epoch of incredulity,

it was the season of Light,

it was the season of Darkness,

it was the spring of hope,

it was the winter of despair...

Although these lines do little to depict the actual setting, they provide a hint of the contrasts the novel develops, contrasts of normal life and the Reign of Terror, innocence and guilt, life and death. Dickens makes the lines poetic and memorable with the use of literary devices:

- **Anaphora**⁶. Lines which begin with the same word or phrase (it was, it was, it was...)
- **Asyndeton**⁷. Deletion of conjunctions between sentences or clauses
- **Parallelism**⁸. The use of the same grammatical structure for ideas of equal importance
- **Paradox**⁹. The juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory ideas

To introduce the period in which the novel is set, Chapter 1 moves from these lines to more specific paragraphs which establish the places (Paris and London), the time (1775), and the atmosphere (foreboding). The last lines of Chapter 1 refer to the road of destiny and provide a transition to a literal road: the mail on the road to Dover. And thus the story begins.

Characters

- **Sydney Carton**. Carton is described as virtually dead, “like one who died young.” He may be seen as a Byronic hero, a dark, brooding anti-hero, aware of the profligate path in life he chooses. However, he is also a redemptive figure connected to resurrection imagery—life through death—and to prophecy.
- **Charles Darnay**. Unlike Carton and Dr. Manette, Darnay is a static character, exemplifying the Victorian ideal of the nature of nobility—he is nobly born and chooses to act nobly.
- **Dr. Manette**. Dr. Manette is the most vivid example of the theme of resurrection and redemption, particularly the redeeming capacity of love. Readers learn that Dr. Manette had been a man of strength and character but has been driven to madness by the evils he endures in France. Rescued and brought to England, a place of safety and sanity, he recovers because of Lucie’s loving care and is transformed into a

6. Lines which begin with the same word or phrase.

7. Deletion of conjunctions between sentences or clauses.

8. The use of the same grammatical structure for ideas of equal importance.

9. The juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory ideas.

strong, decisive character capable of planning and implementing a daring rescue.

- **Lucie.** The name Lucie is from the Latin root *lux*, meaning *light*, and her character exudes goodness, symbolized by light. She occupies one end of the good-evil spectrum. Like Darnay, Lucie is a static, flat character, a stereotypical Victorian upper class woman.
- **Madame DeFarge.** Madame DeFarge is the other end of the good-evil spectrum although she has an explanation for her evil and desire for revenge. The image of Madame DeFarge knitting is, in addition to being one of the most famous images in British literature, the central image of the novel. Her knitting intimates the archetypal image of weaving to represent the threads of life, as suggested in the title of Part II, The Golden Thread.
- **Ernest DeFarge.** With a name signifying his role, Ernest DeFarge serves as a comparison and contrast with Madame DeFarge
- **The Vengeance.** The Vengeance is an **allegorical character**¹⁰, a character who represents an abstract quality, creating two levels of meaning in a literary work.
- **Miss Pross.** As Lucie is a stereotype of an upper class British woman, Miss Pross is a stereotype of a British working class woman, loyal and fiercely patriotic.
- **Cruncher.** The inclusion of a “resurrection man” amplifies, and in a subtle way satirizes, the theme of resurrection.

Cities as Characters

The title declares the story a tale of two cities. Paris and London become conveyances of theme: light and dark, good and evil, redemption and retribution.

Portraying London as a place of safety, of survival, even of sanity resonated with patriotic Victorian audiences, contributing to pride in the British Empire.

Themes

10. A character who represents an abstract quality, creating two levels of meaning in a literary work.

11. An image or symbol embedded in the collective unconsciousness of people from all cultures, an idea based on the psychological theory of Carl Jung.

- **Threads of destiny.** The weaving or knitting motif serves as an **archetype**¹¹, an image or symbol embedded in the collective unconscious of people from all cultures, an idea based on the psychological theory of Carl Jung. In mythology, the Fates weave, representing fate determining human destiny, gradually revealing the pattern of one’s life in their tapestry.
- **Guilt and retribution.** The French aristocracy is personified in St. Evrémondes, who in turn personifies guilt. Darnay is inextricably connected to the guilt as surely as he is related to St. Evrémondes, an

example of the weaving together of various threads to form one's destiny. Retribution is embodied in Madame DeFarge.

- **Retribution and redemption.** The contrast of retribution and redemption form a major theme of the novel, a theme in which almost all the characters play a role.
- **The doppelganger.** The word *doppelganger*, translated from German, literally means ‘double walker’ or ‘double goer.’ In folklore, the *doppelganger* is often a harbinger of death or an ill omen, not necessarily a physical double. Elements of the doppelganger in both senses function in *A Tale of Two Cities*.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* was published as a serial novel, a popular form of publication in the Victorian Era.
- The novel is structured in three parts, each part with a title that helps to convey theme.
- In the well-known opening lines, Dickens uses literary devices such as anaphora, asyndeton, parallelism, and paradox.
- The novel's characters include both developing and static characters, both types contributing to the development of theme.
- Major themes of the novel are threads of destiny, guilt and retribution, and retribution and redemption.

EXERCISES

Structure and Theme

Consider the themes conveyed by the three-part structure.

- Part I Recalled to Life
 1. Who is recalled to life? Consider the following characters:
 - Dr. Manette
 - Charles Darnay
 - Sydney Carton
 - Jarvis Lorry
 - Miss Pross
 2. How are these characters “recalled to life”?
 3. What is the purpose of Cruncher and his occupation, “resurrection man”?
- Part II The Golden Thread
 1. How does Lucie function as a “golden thread,” weaving the events?
 2. Could Madame DeFarge function as a “golden thread”?
 3. What are the literal and figurative purposes of Madame DeFarge’s knitting?
- Part III The Track of a Storm
 1. What personal “storms” erupt in Part III?
 2. What public “storms”?

Characters

1. Trace the development of Sydney Carton’s character from his dissipated state to his redemption. What forces affect his developing character?
2. Compare Lucie, the stereotypical Victorian upper class woman, with Miss Pross, the stereotypical Victorian lower class woman.

3. Why doesn't Madame DeFarge anticipate Carton's action?
4. What explanation does the novel provide for Madame DeFarge's evil? After learning the explanation, do her actions seem justified?
5. In what ways and why is *The Vengeance* different from Madame DeFarge?
6. In what ways do the two cities represent "poetic justice," with the "good guys" ending up in England and the "bad guys" ending up in France?
7. Compare and contrast Dickens's portrayal of London and Paris with the Romantic poets' depiction of the pastoral countryside and the industrialized city.

Images

1. Identify images of light and dark throughout the novel. What themes do these images support?
2. Locate references to footsteps throughout the novel. What is the purpose of these references? Also consider Dr. Manette's shoemaking; explain how it symbolizes the path he makes for his own and Lucie's fate.
3. List instances of the spilling of wine throughout the novel. How do these incidents function literally in the plot and figuratively in reinforcing theme?

Themes

1. How do references to Lucie's hair connect to the "threads of destiny" motif?
2. How and why is Darnay different from his relative St. Evrémondes? How do his decisions and actions contribute to a destiny different from his uncle's?
3. What role does Dr. Manette's letter play in the theme of guilt and retribution?
4. Almost all the characters in the novel play a role in developing the theme of retribution and redemption. Identify which of the following characters represent retribution and which represent redemption. After compiling this initial list, reconsider each character to determine those who are more complex, who embody elements of both retribution and redemption.
 - Darnay
 - Carton

- Dr. Manette
 - Lorry
 - Minor characters: Cruncher, Barsad
5. Identify examples of the doppelganger and describe their function in the novel. Include the following examples:
- London-Paris
 - Darnay-Carton
 - Lucie-Madame DeFarge and/or Miss Pross-Madame DeFarge

Resources

General Information

- [“Charles Dickens.”](#) *The Victorian Web*. George P. Landow, Brown University.
- [David Perdue’s Charles Dickens Page.](#)
- [“Dickens in Context.”](#) The British Library. includes videos and images.
- [The Dickens Project.](#) University of California.

Biography

- [“Charles Dickens \(1812–1870\).”](#) BBC History.
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A Tale of Two Cities

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- *[A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens](#)*. A. L. Burt Company, Publishers, New York. 1890. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*.

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- “[Charles Dickens Animation](#).” *BBC Home*.
- “[Virtual Guide for Charles Dickens Birthplace](#).” Portsmouth Museums and Records.

Audio

- “[A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens \(1812–1870\)](#).” *LibriVox*.
- “[A Tale of Two Cities](#).” Charles Dickens. *Lit2Go*. Florida Center for Instructional Technology, College of Education, University of South Florida.

Images

- “[Charles Dickens](#).” *Great Britons: Treasures from the National Portrait Gallery, London*.

7.3 Emily Brontë (1818–1848)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. List major characters, explain their roles in the plot, and analyze their characters within the novel and as they might be interpreted by both Victorian and contemporary audiences.
2. Outline the chronology of the novel's major events, and compare and correlate the chronology with the order in which events are presented in the novel.
3. Assess the relationship between character and setting, and provide specific examples.
4. Analyze the differences in relationships among the second generation and the third generation that allow the younger characters to resolve the novel's conflicts.

Biography

Video Clip 2

Emily Brontë

[\(click to see video\)](#)

View a video mini-lecture about Emily Brontë.

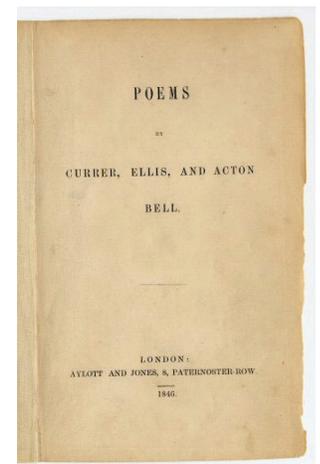
The village of Haworth website offers virtual tours of the interior of the [Brontë Parsonage Museum](#).

Text

- [Wuthering Heights](#). Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library.
- [Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë](#). Project Gutenberg.
- [Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey](#). The Haworth Edition. New York and London. Harper & Brothers Publishers. 1900. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*.

***Wuthering Heights* (1846)**

A novel, according to Holman and Harmon's standard definition is an "extended fictional prose narrative." A novel's components include character, plot, structure, setting, and theme.



As in most novels, in *Wuthering Heights* character, plot, and structure are tightly interwoven; one element drives the others. Particularly significant in *Wuthering Heights* is setting, which Brontë uses to reflect character.

An 1846 edition of *Poems* showing the use of pen names, Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell.

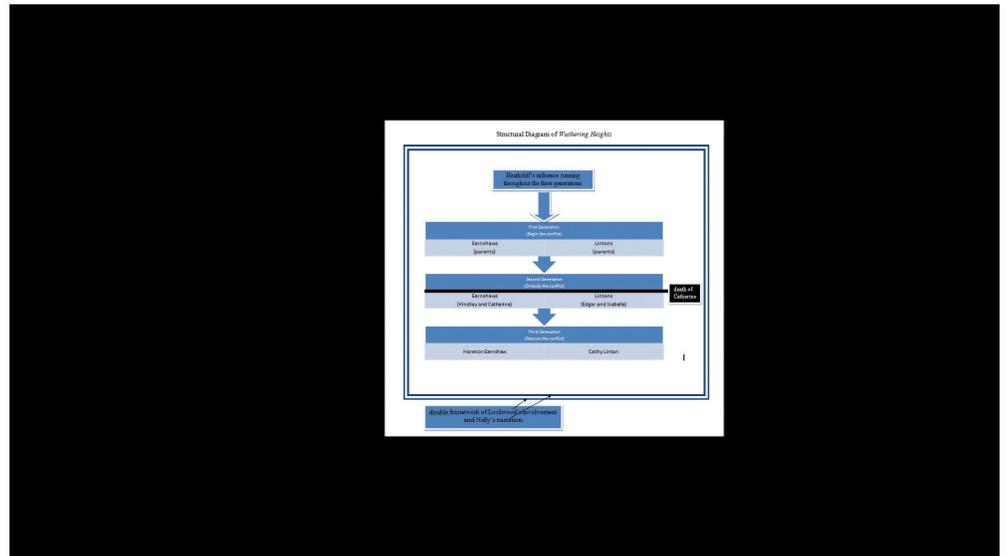
- **Character:** While contemporary audiences tend to read *Wuthering Heights* with a sympathetic view of Heathcliff and Catherine, Victorian audiences would have agreed that Edgar was the appropriate choice of a husband for Catherine. We may think that couples should follow their hearts, but a Victorian audience, particularly an upper or middle class audience, would have believed that Catherine had a duty to marry her social equal—Edgar. The conflict within Catherine as she feels torn between Heathcliff and Edgar is a focal point of the novel. Her death marks the transition between the two parts of the story. Of course, *Wuthering Heights* is largely Heathcliff's story; his desire for revenge drives the plot.



Emily Brontë's drawing of herself and Anne writing at a table in the Brontë parsonage in Haworth. This sketch is on display in the Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth.

- **Plot:** The main story is told as a **flashback**¹², the insertion of an event from earlier in the natural chronology that interrupts the narrative. The story opens with the arrival of Lockwood at Wuthering Heights. After his nightmarish encounter with the apparition of Catherine, Nelly Dean begins to tell Lockwood the story of the Earnshaws and the Lintons. Most of the book, then, is her narration of events that have already happened. The final chapters return to the novel's present, the time of Lockwood, as the conflicts are resolved.
- **Structure:** The structure of *Wuthering Heights* is built on the three generations of characters in the story: the older generation (who set in motion the conflicts); their children (who comprise the conflicts of the novel); and the youngest generation (who resolve the conflicts). Through these three layers of characters runs a connecting thread in the character of Heathcliff. Providing a framework for this structure are the narrations of Nelly and Lockwood.
- **Setting:** The characteristics of the two families, the Earnshaws and the Lintons, are reflected in their homes, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Even the weather is used to mirror the emotions of the characters.

12. The insertion of an event from earlier in the natural chronology that interrupts the narrative.



A structural diagram of *Wuthering Heights*.

Video Clip 3

Emily Brontë and the Yorkshire Moors

[\(click to see video\)](#)

View a video mini-lecture about *Emily Brontë and the Yorkshire Moors*.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Heathcliff, the structurally central character of the novel, is a Byronic hero, generally sympathetic to modern audiences but generally unsympathetic to Victorian audiences.
- *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange* reflect the characters who live there, and conflict occurs when Catherine attempts to cross the social boundaries represented by the estates, boundaries well established for Victorian audiences.
- Setting, including the weather, reflects character.
- The third generation resolves the conflicts, in part by overcoming the social restrictions that bound their parents.

EXERCISES

Catherine

1. How does Brontë depict Catherine's attachment to Heathcliff when they were children? What character traits do Catherine and Heathcliff share that might have drawn them to each other? Identify specific events or specific character traits.
2. How does Catherine change after her stay with the Lintons at Thrushcross Grange? How do the changes affect her relationship with Heathcliff?
3. After Catherine's stay with the Lintons, it becomes clear that she has developed a relationship with Edgar Linton. How would you describe that relationship? How does it affect her relationship with Heathcliff? What factors in society or in Catherine herself affect her feelings about each man?
4. What reasons does Catherine give in her conversation with Nelly for deciding to marry Edgar? How does Nelly respond to her reasoning? During this conversation, Nelly is aware that Heathcliff is listening to part of the conversation although Catherine is not. How does Nelly's decision not to tell Catherine affect the events of the novel? Why did Nelly make the decision not to reveal that Heathcliff was there?
5. What does Catherine mean when she says, "I am Heathcliff"?
6. Catherine is often described as having a dual personality or a split personality. She feels drawn in contradictory directions, torn between Edgar and Heathcliff. In fact, her death is attributed to this duality that she is unable to reconcile. What events bring about the crisis that results in her death?
7. When Heathcliff returns after Catherine is married to Edgar, Catherine seems surprised that Nelly, Edgar, and society in general disapprove of her continuing her friendship with Heathcliff. Why would she expect to continue what society sees as an improper relationship? At the end of the novel, Catherine is buried between Edgar and Heathcliff wearing a locket that contains a lock of each man's hair. How do you characterize Catherine's relationship with the two men?

Heathcliff

1. Emily Brontë's sister Charlotte Brontë wrote a preface for the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights* in which she stated, "Whether it is right or advisable to create beings like Heathcliff, I do not know: I scarcely think it is." Heathcliff is a Byronic anti-hero; in Victorian eyes he would be

seen as an evil person without redeeming qualities, the opinion Charlotte Brontë expressed. Modern audiences might be more inclined to see Heathcliff as a product of his environment. What childhood events and relationships contribute to the warping of Heathcliff's personality?

2. When Nelly informs Heathcliff that Catherine has died, Heathcliff cries out for Catherine to "haunt" him. What evidence indicates that she does, figuratively or literally?
3. When Hindley dies, Heathcliff determines to bring up Hareton himself at Wuthering Heights. He comments to Hareton, "Now, my bonny lad, you are mine! And we'll see if one tree won't grow as crooked as another, with the same wind to twist it!" What does Heathcliff mean? What does this comment reveal about Heathcliff's character?
4. What incident when Hareton was small indicates that Heathcliff may have some concern for him?
5. Describe Heathcliff's treatment of his wife Isabella and his son Linton.
6. Near the end of the novel, Heathcliff's desire for revenge seems to burn itself out. What causes this change, and what incidents illustrate his decreasing interest in life?

The Younger Generation

1. Describe young Cathy when Lockwood first meets her. Describe her relationship with Hareton and the reasons for it.
2. Describe Hareton as he appears when Lockwood first meets him. How has his life been similar to Heathcliff's? Although he has experienced some of the same difficulties, he has not become hardened, or even evil, like Heathcliff; why? Do internal characteristics or outside influences temper his character?
3. Although Linton is a pathetic character, he is not entirely sympathetic. How would you describe him? How would you account for his selfish, petty behavior?
4. Describe Cathy and Hareton when Lockwood meets them again at the end of the novel. What has caused the change? How is that change reflected in the physical description of Wuthering Heights?
5. How would you compare Cathy and Hareton with Catherine and Heathcliff?

The Settings

1. Describe Wuthering Heights as it appears at the beginning of the novel. How is the description different at the end of the novel?

2. How does weather function to reveal character? Consider the snowstorm at the beginning of the story, the storm the night Heathcliff leaves, and the weather at the end of the novel.
3. How do the settings of the moors and the valley function to reveal character?
4. Compare *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange*. How do the two estates reflect the characters who live there?

Resources

General Information

- [“The Brontës.”](#) *The Brontë Parsonage Museum & Brontë Society*.
- [“Emily Brontë \(1818–48\).”](#) *The Victorian Web*. links to biographical and critical information.
- [“Haworth, November 1904’ by Virginia Woolf.”](#) Mary Mark Ockerbloom, ed. *A Celebration of Women Writers*.
- [“Love on the Moors: The Bronte Family.”](#) *Sublime Anxiety: The Gothic Family and The Outsider*. University of Virginia.
- [“Overview of Emily Brontë.”](#) *Emily Brontë*. Lilia Melani, Brooklyn College, City University of New York.
- [“The Romantic Novel, Romanticism, and *Wuthering Heights*.”](#) Lilia Melani, Brooklyn College, City University of New York.

Biography

- [“Emily Jane Brontë.”](#) *The Brontë Parsonage Museum & Brontë Society*.
- [“Emily Jane Brontë: Poet and Novelist \(1818–48\).”](#) *The Victorian Web*. Philip V. Allingham, Lakehead University.

Text

- [Wuthering Heights](#). Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library.
- [Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë](#). *Project Gutenberg*.
- [Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey](#). The Haworth Edition. New York and London. Harper & Brothers Publishers. 1900. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*.

Audio

- [Wuthering Heights](#). *Learn Out Loud.com*.
- [Wuthering Heights](#). *LibriVox*.

Video

- [Emily Bronte](#). Dr. Carol Lowe, McLennan Community College.
- [Emily Bronte and the Yorkshire Moors](#). Dr. Carol Lowe, McLennan Community College.

Concordance

- [“A Hyper-Concordance to the Works of the Brontë Sisters.”](#) *The Victorian Literary Studies Archive*. Prof. Mitsu Matsuoka, Nagoya University.

7.4 Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Characterize *Sonnets from the Portuguese* as a sonnet sequence.
2. Analyze and evaluate Barrett Browning's "The Cry of the Children" as persuasive discourse.

Biography

PowerPoint 7.1.

Follow-along file: PowerPoint title and URL to come.

Texts

- “[The Cry of the Children](#).” Edmund Clarence Stedman, ed. *A Victorian Anthology, 1837–1895*. *Bartleby.com*.
- “[The Cry of the Children](#)” in *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*. London: Oxford University Press, 1920. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*.
- “[The Cry of the Children](#)” in *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*. *Project Gutenberg*.
- *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. London: George Bell and Sons, 1900. *Google Books*.
- *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. *Project Gutenberg*.
- *Sonnets from the Portuguese* in *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*. London: Oxford University Press, 1920. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*.

Sonnets from the Portuguese

Barrett Browning’s sonnets were written to express her feelings for her husband Robert Browning. She never intended that they be published but acquiesced to her husband’s opinion that the poems were too good to keep from the world. Various biographers have attempted to explain the title: “Portuguese” was supposedly a pet name Browning had for his wife. Or the title may have been intended to disguise the biographical nature of the poems by suggesting that they were translated from the Portuguese language.

Sonnets from the Portuguese form a **sonnet sequence**¹³, a group of sonnets exploring all aspects of a topic, a form of literature that had reached its height of popularity in the 16th century. Barrett Browning uses the form to trace the growth of a love, at first tentative, then more self-assured as the sequence progresses.

13. A group of sonnets exploring all aspects of a topic.

Sonnet 43

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth 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.

Sonnet 43 is one of the world's best known poems. The first line, "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways," surely figures in the most often quoted poetic lines.

The poet recounts eight ways in which she loves:

1. Her love is as expansive as the space her soul is capable of reaching.
2. Her love encompasses everyday moments, by night and day, in contrast to the expansive metaphor of the first “way of loving.”
3. Her love is freely given. She compares this gift of love to the way men voluntarily strive for the things they believe in.
4. Her love is pure as the men fighting for their beliefs do so from pure motives, not for glory or honor.
5. Her love is as intense as the passions she felt in her childhood.
6. Her love is as intense as the love she thought she’d lost when she lost her childhood “saints,” perhaps a reference to loved ones she lost through death, or perhaps a reference to disillusionment—learning that people she considered “saints” are not perfect.
7. Her love lasts through “smiles” and “tears,” good and bad experiences.
8. Her love will last even after death.

“The Cry of the Children”

“Pheu, pheu, ti prosderkesthe m’ ommasin, tekna?”

- Medea

I.

Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers,

Ere the sorrow comes with years?

They are leaning their young heads against their mothers.

And that cannot stop their tears.

The young lambs are bleating in the meadows,

The young birds are chirping in the nest,

The young fawns are playing with the shadows,

The young flowers are blowing toward the west—

But the young, young children, O my brothers,

They are weeping bitterly!

They are weeping in the playtime of the others,

In the country of the free.

II.

Do you question the young children in the sorrow

Why their tears are falling so?

The old man may weep for his to-morrow

Which is lost in Long Ago;

The old tree is leafless in the forest,

The old year is ending in the frost,

The old wound, if stricken, is the sorest,

The old hope is hardest to be lost:

But the young, young children, O my brothers,

Do you ask them why they stand

Weeping sore before the bosoms of their mothers,

In our happy Fatherland?

III.

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,

And their looks are sad to see,

For the man's hoary anguish draws and presses

Down the cheeks of infancy;

"Your old earth," they say, "is very dreary,

Our young feet," they say, "are very weak;

Few paces have we taken, yet are weary—

Our grave-rest is very far to seek:

Ask the aged why they weep, and not the children,

For the outside earth is cold,

And we young ones stand without, in our bewildering,

And the graves are for the old."

IV.

"True," say the children, "it may happen

That we die before our time:

Little Alice died last year, her grave is shapen

Like a snowball, in the rime.

We looked into the pit prepared to take her:

Was no room for any work in the close clay!

From the sleep wherein she lieth none will wake her,

Crying, 'Get up, little Alice! it is day.'

If you listen by that grave, in sun and shower,

With your ear down, little Alice never cries;

Could we see her face, be sure we should not know her,

For the smile has time for growing in her eyes:

And merry go her moments, lulled and stilled in

The shroud by the kirk-chime.

It is good when it happens," say the children,

"That we die before our time."

V.

Alas, alas, the children! they are seeking

Death in life, as best to have:

They are binding up their hearts away from breaking,

With a cerement from the grave.

Go out, children, from the mine and from the city,

Sing out, children, as the little thrushes do;

Pluck your handfuls of the meadow-cowslips pretty,

Laugh aloud, to feel your fingers let them through!

But they answer, "Are your cowslips of the meadows

Like our weeds anear the mine?

Leave us quiet in the dark of the coal-shadows,

From your pleasures fair and fine!

VI.

"For oh," say the children, "we are weary,

And we cannot run or leap;

If we cared for any meadows, it were merely

To drop down in them and sleep.

Our knees tremble sorely in the stooping,

We fall upon our faces, trying to go;

And, underneath our heavy eyelids drooping,

The reddest flower would look as pale as snow.

For, all day, we drag our burden tiring

Through the coal-dark, underground;

Or, all day, we drive the wheels of iron

In the factories, round and round.

VII.

“For all day the wheels are droning, turning;

Their wind comes in our faces,

Till our hearts turn, our heads with pulses burning,

And the walls turn in their places:

Turns the sky in the high window, blank and reeling,

Turns the long light that drops adown the wall,

Turn the black flies that crawl along the ceiling:

All are turning, all the day, and we with all.

And all day the iron wheels are droning,

And sometimes we could pray,

'O ye wheels' (breaking out in a mad moaning),

'Stop! be silent for to-day!'"

VIII.

Ay, be silent! Let them hear each other breathing

For a moment, mouth to mouth!

Let them touch each other's hands, in a fresh wreathing

Of their tender human youth!

Let them feel that this cold metallic motion

Is not all the life God fashions or reveals:

Let them prove their living souls against the notion

That they live in you, or under you, O wheels!

Still, all day, the iron wheels go onward,

Grinding life down from its mark;

And the children's souls, which God is calling sunward,

Spin on blindly in the dark.

IX.

Now tell the poor young children, O my brothers,

To look up to Him and pray;

So the blessed One who blesseth all the others,

Will bless them another day.

They answer, "Who is God that He should hear us,

While the rushing of the iron wheels is stirred?

When we sob aloud, the human creatures near us

Pass by, hearing not, or answer not a word.

And we hear not (for the wheels in their resounding)

Strangers speaking at the door:

Is it likely God, with angels singing round Him,

Hears our weeping any more?

X.

“Two words, indeed, of praying we remember,

And at midnight’s hour of harm,

‘Our Father,’ looking upward in the chamber,

We say softly for a charm.[1]

We know no other words except ‘Our Father,’

And we think that, in some pause of angels’ song,

God may pluck them with the silence sweet to gather,

And hold both within His right hand which is strong.

‘Our Father!’ If He heard us, He would surely

(For they call Him good and mild)

Answer, smiling down the steep world very purely,

‘Come and rest with me, my child.’

XI.

“But, no!” say the children, weeping faster,

“He is speechless as a stone:

And they tell us, of His image is the master

Who commands us to work on.

Go to!" say the children,—“up in Heaven,

Dark, wheel-like, turning clouds are all we find.

Do not mock us; grief has made us unbelieving:

We look up for God, but tears have made us blind.”

Do you hear the children weeping and disproving,

O my brothers, what ye preach?

For God's possible is taught by His world's loving,

And the children doubt of each.

XII.

And well may the children weep before you!

They are weary ere they run;

They have never seen the sunshine, nor the glory

Which is brighter than the sun.

They know the grief of man, without its wisdom;

They sink in man's despair, without its calm;

Are slaves, without the liberty in Christdom,

Are martyrs, by the pang without the palm:

Are worn as if with age, yet unretrievingly

The harvest of its memories cannot reap,—

Are orphans of the earthly love and heavenly.

Let them weep! let them weep!

XIII.

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,

And their look is dread to see,

For they mind you of their angels in high places,

With eyes turned on Deity.

“How long,” they say, “how long, O cruel nation,

Will you stand, to move the world, on a child’s heart,—

Stifle down with a mailed heel its palpitation,

And tread onward to your throne amid the mart?

Our blood splashes upward, O gold-heaper,

And your purple shows your path!

But the child’s sob in the silence curses deeper

Than the strong man in his wrath.”

The epigraph to Barrett Browning’s poem from Euripides’s Greek tragedy *Medea* may be translated, “Woe, woe, why do you look at me with your eyes, children?” Stanzas 1 and 2 begin with questions for Barrett Browning’s readers, directing their attention to the children’s tears. The suffering and sorrow felt by the children is to be expected only in a much older person, one who has lived long enough to experience life’s hardships.

Stanza 4 relates the children’s reactions to the death of Alice, one of the children. The children peer into her grave, noting that there is no room for her to do the work she’s been used to. Alice will never again hear someone calling her from her bed at dawn to resume her work, and the children do not hear her crying from her grave. Based on these observations, in their childish reasoning, they conclude that death is preferable to life.

Stanzas 5 and following address the children’s relationship to nature and to God while always pleading with the reader to recognize the children’s plight. The last stanza addresses the reader directly with a condemnation of a society that allows this situation to exist.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- “Sonnets from the Portuguese” is a sonnet sequence.
- “The Cry of the Children” is persuasive discourse.
- “The Cry of the Children” drew on published government documents inquiring into child labor abuses.

EXERCISES

1. “The Cry of the Children” falls into the category of persuasive discourse. Who is Barrett Browning attempting to persuade? Of what is she attempting to persuade her audience? Persuasive discourse uses logical (*logos*) and emotional appeal (*pathos*); what examples of each type of appeal do you find in this poem?
2. Read some of the following documents from the Victorian era about child labor:
 - “Testimony Gathered by Ashley’s Mines Commission.” *The Victorian Web*. Laura Del Col, West Virginia University.
 - “Early Factory Legislation.” Reforming Society in the 19th Century. Living Heritage. www.parliament.uk.
 - “The 1833 Factory Act.” Reforming Society in the 19th Century. Living Heritage. www.parliament.uk.
 - “News on Mine Accidents.” Victorian Britain: An Industrial Nation. *National Archives*.
 - “Child Miners.” Victorian Britain: An Industrial Nation. *National Archives*.

Which do you find more persuasive, Barrett Browning’s poem or the documents? Which do you think would have been more effective in convincing a Victorian audience to take action?

3. Barrett Browning uses descriptions of nature although there is no hint of Romantic mysticism. What is the purpose of the natural descriptions in “The Cry of the Children”?
4. Barrett Browning also uses frequent references to wheels. What is the literal and metaphorical meaning of the wheels? An apostrophe is an address to an inanimate object or an abstract quality. In stanzas 7 and 8, Barrett Browning addresses the wheels; what is the purpose of this apostrophe?
5. Compare Barrett Browning’s description of the children and their lives with Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, particularly in the “Holy Thursday” and “Chimney Sweeper” poems. Compare the children’s attitude toward religion in both authors’ works. Compare the line “if all do their duty we need not fear harm” from the *Innocence* “The Chimney Sweeper” with the last stanza of “The Cry of the Children.”

Resources

Biography

- [The Browning Letters](#). Baylor University and Wellesley College.
- [“Elizabeth Barrett Browning.”](#) The Browning Society.
- [“Elizabeth Barrett Browning \(1806–1861\).”](#) The Brownings. Armstrong Browning Library. Baylor University.
- [Elizabeth Barrett Browning—Biographical Materials](#). *The Victorian Web*. George P. Landow, Brown University.
- [“Guidi House—Casa Guidi.”](#) The Museums of Florence.

Texts

- [“The Cry of the Children” in *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*](#). London: Oxford University Press, 1920. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*.
- [“The Cry of the Children” in *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*](#). Project Gutenberg.
- [Sonnets from the Portuguese in *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*](#). London: Oxford University Press, 1920. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*.
- [Sonnets from the Portuguese](#). Project Gutenberg.

Audio

- [“The Cry of the Children.”](#) LibriVox.
- [Sonnets from the Portuguese](#). LibriVox.
- [Sonnets from the Portuguese](#). Project Gutenberg.

Video

- [“Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning.”](#) Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College.

7.5 Robert Browning (1812–1889)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define *dramatic monologue* and apply the definition to appropriate poems by Robert Browning.
2. Define *lyric* and apply the definition to appropriate poems by Robert Browning.
3. Describe the speakers in “Porphyria’s Lover,” “My Last Duchess,” and “The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed’s Church.” Consider their words, implied actions, tone, and inferences drawn from their speeches.

Biography

Robert Browning was born in 1812, the son of a prosperous bank clerk and a nonconformist, musical mother. His father collected a voluminous library, and, disliking school, Browning grew up largely self educated in his father’s library, both he and his sister Sarianna immersed in a household filled with music, art, and literature. His early poems, such as *Pauline* and *Paracelsus*, attracted little attention. Encouraged by an actor friend, William Macready, Browning attempted to write several plays, none of which was particularly successful on stage. His next published long poem *Sordello* was ravaged by critics and popular writers of the time, such as Tennyson and Thomas Carlyle, and earned Browning a reputation for “obscurity” which persists to the present.



Browning’s attempts at writing plays did lead him to develop a form for which he is most well-known, the dramatic monologue, a poem spoken by a single speaker to a recognizable but silent audience at a critical moment in the speaker’s life. Although he did not invent the dramatic monologue form, he perfected it and used it so well that it has come to be closely associated with Browning.

The negative critical reception much of Browning's early work received may account for the exceptional notice he took of Elizabeth Barrett's mention of him in her poem "Lady Geraldine's Courtship":

Or from Browning some "Pomegranate," which, if cut deep down the middle, shows a heart within blood-tinctured of a veined humanity.

Feeling as if he'd found someone who understood his poetry, Browning began corresponding with Barrett and, through mutual friend John Kenyon, one of London's literati, arranged to meet her. After their marriage and move to Florence, Italy, the most productive period of Browning's life began with the publication of *Men and Women* in 1855.

Browning's magnum opus *The Ring and the Book* is a verse novel consisting of twelve books, ten books presenting ten dramatic monologues recounting a sensational murder trial that took place in Italy in 1698. In the introductory Book I, Browning describes walking through a street market in Florence and purchasing what he called *The Old Yellow Book*, a compilation of documents pertaining to the trial from which he drew the story conveyed in *The Ring and the Book*. This is the "Book" of the title. The "Ring" of the title may refer to an actual ring or to the ring of stories which attempt to arrive at the truth of the murder case. The verse novel is an experiment in dialectical writing, a story told through nine different filters (one character, the murderer Guido Franceschini, speaks two books), nine characters with their own preconceptions and circumstances which color their versions of the truth. The speakers of the monologues reveal as much about themselves as they do about the murder—which is the main purpose of a dramatic monologue: to reveal the character of the speaker.

By the time of his death in 1889, Browning had become a major figure in England's literary scene. He was buried in Westminster Abbey's Poets Corner although he had expressed to his son his desire to be buried next to his wife Elizabeth Barrett Browning in Florence, Italy.



The Old Yellow Book on display in the Browning Room at Balliol College, Oxford.

Texts

- "[The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed's Church Rome, 15—](#)." *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire, Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.

- “[The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed’s Church, 15—](#).” *The Victorian Web*. Dr. George Landow, Brown University.
- “[Home Thoughts from Abroad](#).” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire, Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “[My Last Duchess](#).” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire, Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “[My Last Duchess](#).” *The Victorian Web*. Dr. George Landow, Brown University.
- “[Porphyria’s Lover](#).” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire, Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “[Porphyria’s Lover](#).” *The Victorian Web*. Dr. George Landow, Brown University.
- “[Prospice](#).” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire, Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.

The Dramatic Monologue

From John Donne in the 17th century to Robert Burns in the late 18th century, poets wrote dramatic monologues. Browning, however, is most often associated with the form, and his dramatic monologues are considered his best poems.

Although the dramas that Browning wrote early in his career were not successful as theater productions, they reveal a gift for creating fictional characters and presenting them through their speeches. While this made “talky,” uninteresting stage presentations, it created dynamic poetry.

A dramatic monologue has the following four characteristics:

1. a fictional speaker
2. a speech made at a dramatic moment in the speaker’s life
3. a silent but identifiable listener
4. a revelation of the speaker’s character

Think of a dramatic monologue as a scene in a play, but a scene in which only one of the characters on stage speaks. The “I” of a dramatic monologue is not the poet; the poet makes up a character who delivers the speech. It is this fictional character whose life and thoughts we hear about.

The speech that is the dramatic monologue is given at a dramatic moment in the speaker's life; some significant event has or is about to occur.

The existence of a silent but identifiable listener means that the speaker is not the only character present in this scene. We can tell from the speaker's comments that another person (or persons) is present, but the poem contains only the words of the speaker.

A dramatic monologue reveals the character of the speaker. By hearing what s/he says, we know what kind of person s/he is.

Robert Browning was interested in psychology; his dramatic monologues give us insight into a variety of people—some good, some evil. In “Porphyria’s Lover,” for example, Browning takes his audience into the mind of a psychotic man. We wonder how someone could commit such a violent act, and Browning’s poem attempts to let us see how this criminally insane mind works.

Porphyria's Lover

The rain set early in tonight,
The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
And did its worst to vex the lake:
I listened with heart fit to break.
When glided in Porphyria; straight
She shut the cold out and the storm,
And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;
Which done, she rose, and from her form
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
And laid her soiled gloves by, untied
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
And, last, she sat down by my side
And called me. When no voice replied,
She put my arm about her waist,

And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
And all her yellow hair displaced,
And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,
Murmuring how she loved me—she
Too weak, for all her heart's endeavor,
To set its struggling passion free
From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
And give herself to me forever.
But passion sometimes would prevail,
Nor could tonight's gay feast restrain
A sudden thought of one so pale
For love of her, and all in vain:
So, she was come through wind and rain.
Be sure I looked up at her eyes
Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshiped me: surprise

Made my heart swell, and still it grew
While I debated what to do.
That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
Perfectly pure and good: I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her. No pain felt she;
I am quite sure she felt no pain.
As a shut bud that holds a bee,
I warily oped her lids: again
Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.
And I untightened next the tress
About her neck; her cheek once more
Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:
I propped her head up as before,
Only, this time my shoulder bore

Her head, which droops upon it still:
The smiling rosy little head,
So glad it has its utmost will,
That all it scorned at once is fled,
And I, its love, am gained instead!
Porphyria's love: she guessed not how
Her darling one wish would be heard.
And thus we sit together now,
And all night long we have not stirred,
And yet God has not said a word!

“My Last Duchess” is based on an historical incident involving the Duke of Ferrara, Italy during the Renaissance.

My Last Duchess

Ferrara

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,

Looking as if she were alive. I call

That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands

Worked busily a day, and there she stands.

Will't please you sit and look at her? I said

"Frà Pandolf" by design: for never read

Strangers like you that pictured countenance,

The depth and passion of its earnest glance,

But to myself they turned (since none puts by

The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)

And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,

How such a glance came there; so, not the first

Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not

Her husband's presence only, called that spot

Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps

Frà Pandolf chanced to say “Her mantle laps
Over my lady’s wrist too much,” or “Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat:” such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate’er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, ‘twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked

My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
—E'en then would be some stooping: and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence

Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

“The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed’s Church” also takes place in Renaissance Italy. The Bishop is on his deathbed and addresses “Nephews—sons mine...ah, God I know not!” In the next line he refers to his long-ago mistress. The implication of calling the priests gathered around his bed first nephews then sons followed immediately by a reference to his mistress is that he has fathered them but, as a priest, has pretended they are his nephews for so long that now, in the confusion of his mind as he faces death, he is not sure of the truth himself. The Bishop continues throughout his monologue to reveal that he is far from a devout clergyman.

His purpose in calling his sons/nephews to his deathbed is, as the title states, to order his tomb, to give them instructions for constructing his monument in the church. He compares himself and the tomb he wants to that of his rival in life, Gandalf. We learn that they were rivals for everything from position in the church to the mistress that bore his children.

The Bishop orders the finest, most expensive of materials and the most elaborate of ornamentation. The extent of the Bishop’s depravity is revealed in lines such as these when he describes the items he wants carved on his tomb:

The Saviour at his sermon on the mount,

Saint Praxed in a glory, and one Pan

Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off,

And Moses with the tables

The sacrilegious combination of Christ, Moses, and a saint with the mythological Pan taking off a girl's clothes represents the combination of sacred and profane that has been his life. Overall, the audience is struck foremost by the fact that in the Bishop's last moments of life, his thoughts are not of his God and the state of his immortal soul but of material and worldly matters.

Lyric Poems

Although Browning is known primarily for his dramatic monologues, he also wrote **lyric poetry**¹⁴, brief poems expressing emotion, imagination, and meditative thought, usually stanzaic in form such as "Home Thoughts from Abroad" and "Prospice."

In "Home Thoughts" the speaker longs nostalgically to be back in his home country of England. The reference to the "gaudy melon flower" represents Italy and contrasts with the delicate beauties of England in spring.

"Prospice," written months after Elizabeth Barrett Browning's death, expresses courage and faith in the face of death. The last lines are considered a statement of Browning's personal belief that he will be reunited with his wife after death:

O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,

And with God be the rest!

14. A brief poem, expressing emotion, imagination, and meditative thought, usually stanzaic in form.

Home Thoughts from Abroad

Oh, to be in England

Now that April's there,

And whoever wakes in England

Sees, some morning, unaware,

That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf

Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,

While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough

In England—now!

And after April, when May follows,

And the white-throat builds, and all the swallows!

Hark I where my blossomed pear tree in the hedge

Leans to the field and scatters on the clover

Blossoms and dewdrops—at the bent spray's edge—

That's the wise thrush; he sings each song twice over,

Lest you should think he never could recapture

The first fine careless rapture!

And though the fields look rough with hoary dew,

All will be gay when noontide wakes anew

The buttercups, the little children's dower

—Far brighter than this gaudy melon-flower!

Prospice*

Fear death? to feel the fog in my throat,

The mist in my face,

When the snows begin, and the blasts denote

I am nearing the place,

The power of the night, the press of the storm,

The post of the foe;

Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,

Yet the strong man must go:

For the journey is done and the summit attained,

And the barriers fall,

Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,

The reward of it all.

I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,

The best and the last!

I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,

And bade me creep past,

No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers
The heroes of old,
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
Of pain, darkness, and cold.
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
The black minute's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest!

*looking forward

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Known primarily for his dramatic monologues, Robert Browning also wrote lyric poetry, a verse novel, and plays.
- A dramatic monologue is a poem spoken by a single speaker to a recognizable but silent audience at a critical moment in the speaker's life.
- Browning's reading about history, art, and music allowed him to portray historical figures and artists realistically in his dramatic monologues.

EXERCISES

1. Browning, like other Victorian writers, uses nature in his work, but without the sense of Romantic mysticism that pervades most Romantic era poetry. Describe the weather on the night Porphyria was murdered in “Porphyria’s Lover.” How does the description of the weather reinforce the atmosphere of the poem?
2. What was the murder weapon in “Porphyria’s Lover”?
3. Why did Porphyria’s lover choose that particular moment to murder her? Identify specific lines in the poem that explain his motivation.
4. The silent but identifiable listener is not as easily identified in “Porphyria’s Lover.” Browning originally published this poem and one other (“Johannes Agricola in Meditation”) under the title “Madhouse Cells.” In the 19th century insane asylums were much more like prisons than hospitals. At the time there was little understanding of mental illnesses or how to treat them. Mentally disturbed people were frequently locked away in what was essentially a prison. To make the situation even worse, the public was allowed to pay an admission fee and to tour the insane asylum, looking into the various cells at the inmates in the same way we might look at animals in a zoo for entertainment. With the title “Madhouse Cells,” perhaps Browning had in mind that the speaker, Porphyria’s lover, was in a cell in such an insane asylum. With this knowledge in mind, who do you think might be the silent listener?
5. In “My Last Duchess, what happened to the last duchess?
6. What art work is the Duke revealing to his guest?
7. What is the Duke currently negotiating for?
8. In “The Bishop Orders His Tomb,” who is Anselm?
9. Who is Gandalf?
10. List evidence that indicates the Bishop is not a devout clergyman.
11. Does the bishop assume that his wishes for his tomb will be carried out? Why?
12. Analyze the dramatic monologue form in “Porphyria’s Lover,” “My Last Duchess,” and “The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed’s Church” by answering the following questions:
 - Who is the speaker?
 - What is the situation?
 - Who is the silent listener?
 - What do you find out about the speaker’s character?

Resources

General Information

- “[About the Poems of Robert Browning](#).” Josephine Hart on Robert Browning. Learning: Poetry and Performance. The British Library.
- “[Robert Browning](#).” *The Victorian Web*. Dr. George P. Landow, Brown University.

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- “[Biography of Robert Browning](#).” Learning: Poetry & Performance. The British Library.
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- “[Robert Browning—Biography](#).” *The Victorian Web*. Glenn Everett, University of Tennessee at Martin.
- “[Robert Browning Chronology](#).” *The Victorian Web*. Dr. George P. Landow, Brown University.

Texts

- “[The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed’s Church Rome, 15—](#).” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire, Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “[The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed’s Church, 15—](#).” *The Victorian Web*. Dr. George Landow, Brown University.
- “[Home Thoughts from Abroad](#).” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire, Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “[My Last Duchess](#).” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire, Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “[My Last Duchess](#).” *The Victorian Web*. Dr. George Landow, Brown University.
- “[Porphyria’s Lover](#).” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire, Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “[Porphyria’s Lover](#).” *The Victorian Web*. Dr. George Landow, Brown University.

- “[Prospice](#).” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire, Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.

Dramatic Monologue

- [Browning’s “My Last Duchess” and Dramatic Monologue](#). National Endowment for the Humanities. *Edsitement!*
- “[Poetic Technique: Dramatic Monologue](#).” The Academy of American Poets. *Poets.org*.

Audio

- “[Home Thoughts from Abroad](#).” *LibriVox*.
- “[How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix—an extract](#).” *The Poetry Archive*. recording of Robert Browning reciting a few lines of his poem recorded on an Edison cylinder in 1889, the year of Browning’s death.
- “[My Last Duchess](#).” *LibriVox*.
- “[Prospice](#).” *LibriVox*.
- “[Robert Browning \(1812–1889\)](#).” *The Poetry Archive*. recording of Browning reading lines from his “How They Brought the Good News.”
- “[Robert Browning Read by Robert Hardy and Greg Wise](#).” Learning: Poetry & Performance. The British Library.

Video

- “[About the Poems of Robert Browning](#).” Josephine Hart on Robert Browning. Learning: Poetry and Performance. The British Library.
- “[Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning](#).” Dr. Carol Lowe. McLennan Community College.
- “[Robert Browning Recites ‘How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix.’](#)” Nick Wallace Smith, University of New South Wales. *YouTube*. recording of Robert Browning reciting a few lines of his poem recorded on an Edison cylinder in 1889, the year of Browning’s death.

7.6 Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892)

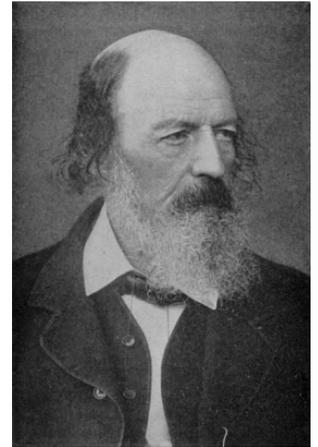
PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Categorize works by Tennyson as illustrations of conflicts of the Victorian Age.
2. Identify parallels between Tennyson’s Arthurian works and Tennyson’s contemporary world.
3. Characterize “Ulysses” as a dramatic monologue.

Biography

Alfred Tennyson was born into a middle class family in Lincolnshire, the son of a clergyman. Tennyson attended Trinity College, Cambridge where he published his first collection of poetry written with his two older brothers, both already students at Cambridge. The volume was called *Poems by Two Brothers* although all three collaborated on the work. Also while at Cambridge Tennyson became close friends with Arthur Henry Hallam. While visiting Tennyson’s family, Hallam met and later became engaged to one of Tennyson’s sisters. Before the marriage could take place, Hallam died. Tennyson’s devastation over Hallam’s death led him to write one of his greatest poems, the elegy *In Memoriam A.H.H.* The following verses from *In Memoriam* record a visit made to Trinity College after Tennyson’s student days; he describes walking through the campus to visit Hallam’s old rooms:



LXXXVII

'I past beside the reverend walls
In which of old I wore the gown;
I roved at random through the town,
And saw the tumult of the halls;
And heard once more in College fanes
The storm their high-built organs make,
And thunder-music, rolling, shake
The prophet blazoned on the panes;
And caught once more the distant shout,
The measured pulse of racing oars
Among the willows; paced the shores
And many a bridge, and all about
The same gray flats again, and felt
The same, but not the same; and last
Up that long walk of limes I past
To see the rooms in which he dwelt.'

After his father's death, Tennyson left Cambridge before graduating to assist his family. His 1833 volume of poems, which included "The Lady of Shalott," received poor reviews. Discouraged by the criticism, he didn't publish another volume until 1842. That volume, including "Ulysses," was extremely popular with the public and was quickly followed by his long poems *The Princess* and *In Memoriam A.H.H.* When the Poet Laureate William Wordsworth died in 1850, Tennyson's popularity led to his being appointed to the post. In addition, Queen Victoria, who admired Tennyson's poetry, offered him a title and estate.

Tennyson, now Lord Tennyson, moved to his Farringford estate on the Isle of Wight, off the southern coast of England.

While living at Farringford, Tennyson, a favorite of Queen Victoria, visited her at her Isle of Wight home, Osborne House. Tennyson took long rambling walks over the downs of the Isle of Wight, an area now known as Tennyson Down.



Farringford, Lord Tennyson's home on the Isle of Wight.

When Tennyson died at age 83, he was buried in Westminster Abbey's Poets Corner, next to Robert Browning.



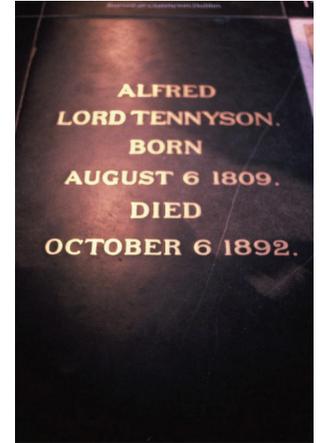
Tennyson Monument on Tennyson Down, Isle of Wight.



Tennyson's study at Farringford.

Texts

- “Crossing the Bar.” rpt. from *English Poetry III: From Tennyson to Whitman*. The Harvard Classics. 1909–14. *Bartleby.com*.
- “Crossing the Bar.” *The Victorian Web*. Dr. George Landow, Brown University.
- *Idylls of the King*. A Penn State Electronic Classics Series Publication. Jim Manis, Faculty Editor.
- *Idylls of the King*. The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Idylls of the King*, by Alfred, Lord Tennyson
- *In Memoriam*. Ed. W. J. Rolfe. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1895. University of Toronto, Robarts Library. *Internet Archives*.
- *In Memoriam*. Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1865. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*.
- “The Lady of Shalott.” The Camelot Project at The Rochester University. comparison of 1833 and 1842 versions.
- “The Lady of Shalott.” *The Victorian Web*. Dr. George Landow, Brown University.
- “Ulysses.” rpt. from Edmund Clarence Stedman, ed. *A Victorian Anthology, 1837–1895*. *Bartleby.com*.
- “Ulysses.” *The Victorian Web*. Dr. George Landow, Brown University.



In Memoriam

Published at mid-century, 1850, the poem’s publication date symbolizes its philosophy, half-way between the mysticism of Coleridge’s “Eolian Harp” and Hardy’s “strings of a broken lyre.” In contrast with the Romantic view of nature as a spiritual or intellectual force, *In Memoriam*’s first six sections picture nature as an indifferent force and then, in section 130, the speaker recognizes Hallam’s essence in nature.

Tracing the speaker’s journey through grief, from despair to doubt and eventually to a reaffirmation of faith, *In Memoriam* embodies the Victorian conflict of faith and doubt. Rather than a stabilizing, constant force, faith appears to crumble in the midst of personal and social disorder.

In the Prologue, the speaker affirms faith in God in the famous first stanza:

Strong Son of God, immortal Love,

Whom we, that have not seen thy face,

By faith , and faith alone, embrace,

Believing where we cannot prove.

In stanza 5 of the Prologue, the speaker acknowledges that “our little systems”—which may refer to organized religion, to social structures, to governments, to scientific theories, to any systems resulting from human endeavors to impose order and certainty on the world—eventually fail.

Our little systems have their day;

They have their day and cease to be:

They are but broken lights of thee,

And thou, O Lord, art more than they.

The structure and unity of the poem hinge on time, the three Christmas Eves described in the poem. Otherwise the progression of ideas seems to wander from despair to hope and faith and back to despondency, perhaps a realistic picture of a journey through personal grief.

In Memoriam consists of 131 sections plus a prologue and an epilogue, all of varying numbers of stanzas composed of 4 lines of iambic tetrameter rhyming ABBA.

“The Lady of Shalott”

In “The Lady of Shalott,” Tennyson draws on the Arthurian legends, the stories of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table, which he also uses in his major work, *Idylls of the King*.

While writing about the mythical medieval world of Camelot, Tennyson poses questions about his Victorian world: were Victorians, especially the upper classes,

becoming complacent and self-satisfied; what is the relationship of the artist and the world?

The Lady of Shalott lives shut away in a tower on an island near Camelot. Note the description of her island in stanzas 1 and 2. Words such as “lilies” (which usually are white), “willows whiten,” “aspens” (which have whitish bark), “gray walls,” “gray towers,” and “silent” all add up to a picture of a drab, colorless world inhabited by the Lady.

Part 2 informs us that the Lady of Shalott spends her life weaving in her tower. Because of a curse that has been put on her, she cannot even look out the window, certainly not go outside the tower into the world. She can see the world only through her weaver’s mirror which reflects the events going on outside her window. Tennyson does not give us any information about the “curse”; we don’t know who cursed the Lady or why. Apparently Tennyson considers these details unimportant; we accept the curse as a supernatural, fairy tale element. The focus, instead, is on the Lady’s reaction to her banishment from being involved in the world. Notice the last two lines of Part 2.

In Part 3, attention shifts to the world outside the tower as Sir Lancelot rides by. In contrast to the pale, colorless description of the Lady’s world, Sir Lancelot is described in bright, colorful terms: “dazzling,” “flamed,” “sparkled,” “glittered,” “golden,” “blazoned,” “jeweled,” “glowed,” “burnished,” “flashed.” The last stanza of Part 3 relates the Lady’s reaction to seeing Sir Lancelot in her mirror.

Part 4 concludes the story. As soon as the Lady looks out the window and directly at the world, the curse comes upon her. Her weaving, her art, flies out the window. She leaves her tower, climbs into a boat, and dies as the boat drifts toward Camelot. Ironically, Sir Lancelot voices a final blessing on the Lady of Shalott.

Many artists have painted their impressions of Tennyson’s poem. One of the most well-known is this painting by John William Waterhouse.



Idylls of the King

At Farringford Tennyson finished one of his major works, the long poem *Idylls of the King*, a series of twelve narrative poems based on the Arthurian legends.

The Lady of Shalott, based on Tennyson's poem.

Source: John William Waterhouse 1888.

The first four *Idylls*, published in 1856, were “Enid,” “Vivien,” “Elaine,” and “Guinevere.” As suggested by the title Tennyson originally planned, *The True and the False*, these four idylls place four women characters on a spectrum of good and evil, fidelity and betrayal, idealism and reality. The rejection of *The True and the False* as a title in favor of *The Idylls of the King* shifts the focus to Arthur. Rather than standing individually, the four women in the completed work serve as pivotal points in a schema dominated by the king. Although revised and fitted into this more expansive plan, the four poems are still the cornerstones of *The Idylls*, their stories functioning as vehicles for the presentation of theme. The complexity of theme is reflected in the complexity of the characters' dilemmas, and is played out, not among the four women or in an attempt to place them on a spectrum, but in each individual's effort to deal with the real and the ideal. In each idyll, Arthur's standards, his values, his vision are the controls which govern the action and the result.

In 1862, Tennyson dedicated the expanded work to the memory of Prince Albert, much to the pleasure of the widowed Queen Victoria. In the epilogue “To the Queen,” Tennyson describes his work as “shadowing Sense at war with Soul,” an expression of the faith and doubt conflict of the Victorian Age. In this war of Sense and Soul, Arthur's stance is the touchstone and Enid, Vivien, Elaine, and Guinevere, the tokens of the battle.

The *Idylls of the King* may be read as Tennyson's commentary on problems he recognized in Victorian society, including loss of religious faith, the dehumanizing effects of industrialization, complacency among the upper classes, and the active versus the inactive life.

“Ulysses”

For the dramatic monologue, “Ulysses,” Tennyson borrows a character from classical Greek literature, the *Odyssey*. Tennyson portrays the main character Ulysses (the Latin version of the Greek name Odysseus) after he has returned home from his 20-year voyage following the Trojan War.

Because this poem is a dramatic monologue, we can identify the four characteristics of that form. The fictional speaker of the poem is, of course, Ulysses. The dramatic moment is a moment of choice in his life: he has to decide whether to stay at home to rule his kingdom or to return to the sea for more adventures (see line 6). The silent but identifiable listeners are his mariners, the sailors whom he tries to convince to accompany him on one more great voyage (see lines 45–46). The entire poem provides a vivid picture of Ulysses as a man not content to sit at home but who wants to cram as much experience as possible into his life.

In the first stanza, Ulysses speaks disparagingly of his people, referring to them in animal terms (lines 4–5). He complains about the idleness of his life and how old his wife has become (apparently not realizing that she is also stuck with an old husband).

Stanza 2 proclaims Ulysses’s desire to live life to the fullest. In the well-known lines 22–26 he complains about the dullness of retiring from an active life and expresses his wish to live as fully as possible in the time remaining.

In stanza 3, Ulysses turns to his son Telemachus, expressing his intent to leave him in charge of ruling Ithaca. A question raised in these lines is if Ulysses thinks less of his son for staying at home instead of seeking new experiences like his father. Consider lines 39–40.

In stanza 4, Ulysses addresses his mariners, urging them to accompany him. He concedes that they are old, yet convinces them that even in old age “some work of noble note” may still be accomplished. See lines 49–57. The last line of the poem is a famous one that expresses Ulysses’s determination to keep trying, to keep accomplishing, rather than to be satisfied with past accomplishments.

Both of these poems, “The Lady of Shalott” and “Ulysses,” employ a common theme in Tennyson’s work: the active life versus the inactive life. Both poems portray characters who make a decision to become actively involved in life when they might more safely sit on the sidelines. Tennyson includes in these works a message for his Victorian society; he fears that they, too, may become complacent. In a century pleased with its expansive empire, its technological and industrial progress, and its scientific advances, Tennyson reminds readers that there are always new horizons to explore.

“Crossing the Bar”

Tennyson stated that he composed “Crossing the Bar” while sailing from the Isle of Wight to the mainland at Lymington. Composed in 1889, the poem is often considered an elegy for Tennyson himself. Before his death in 1892, Tennyson requested that “Crossing the Bar” be placed last in every collection of his poetry.



View from a ferry crossing the Isle of Wight to Lymington.

Crossing the Bar

Sunset and evening star,

And one clear call for me!

And may there be no moaning of the bar,

When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,

Too full for sound and foam,

When that which drew from out the boundless deep

Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,

And after that the dark!

And may there be no sadness of farewell,

When I embark;

For though from out our bourne of Time and Place

The flood may bear me far,

I hope to see my Pilot face to face

When I have crossed the bar.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Tennyson's *In Memoriam* may be read as a personal working through grief and as an expression of Victorian conflict leading toward a modern view of nature and social order.
- Tennyson's Arthurian works also reflect conflicts evident in Victorian thought.

EXERCISES

1. Compare Tennyson's lines from *In Memoriam* with Shelley's lines from another of the great elegies, *Adonais*:

Our little systems have their day;

They have their day and cease to be:

They are but broken lights of thee,

And thou, O Lord, art more than they.

Tennyson

The One remains, the many change and pass;

Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;

Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,

Stains the white radiance of Eternity,

Until Death tramples it to fragments.

Shelley

2. Although published before *On the Origin of Species* (1859), the quotation "Nature red in tooth and claw" (*In Memoriam*, section 56) is often cited as characterizing Darwin's idea of natural selection. Trace references to nature throughout the poem and identify those that suggest a naturalist view, (literature that posits an indifferent natural universe working according to scientific law and that sees human action as the result of natural processes and the environment) and those that suggest a more Romantic view.
3. Critics have interpreted the *Lady of Shalott* as depicting the dilemma of artists with a choice of living in the world or alienating themselves from the world to devote themselves to their art. Evaluate "The Lady of Shalott" as a statement of an artist's relationship to society.
4. Why did the *Lady of Shalott* look out her window even though she knew a curse would come upon her?

5. In your opinion, did the Lady of Shalott do the right thing in looking out the window?
6. What is your opinion of Ulysses? Do you admire his desire to keep striving to achieve more in his life, or do you think he was abandoning his responsibilities to his kingdom?
7. “Ulysses” is a dramatic monologue. Analyze the poem as a dramatic monologue by identifying the four characteristics of dramatic monologues:
 - a fictional speaker
 - a speech made at a dramatic moment in the speaker’s life
 - a silent but identifiable listener
 - a revelation of the speaker’s character
8. What is the overriding metaphor of “Crossing the Bar”? Identify the various specifics of the nautical metaphor.

Resources

General Information

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- “[Crossing the Bar](#).” *The Victorian Web*. Dr. George Landow, Brown University.
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- *Idylls of the King*. The Project Gutenberg EBook of Idylls of the King, by Alfred, Lord Tennyson
- *In Memoriam*. Ed. W. J. Rolfe. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1895. University of Toronto, Robarts Library. *Internet Archives*.
- *In Memoriam*. Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1865. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*.
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- “[The Lady of Shalott](#).” *The Victorian Web*. Dr. George Landow, Brown University.
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- “[Ulysses](#).” *The Victorian Web*. Dr. George Landow, Brown University.

Audio

- “[The Charge of the Light Brigade](#).” Wax cylinder recording of Tennyson reading part of his poem.
- “[Crossing the Bar](#).” *LibriVox*.
- “[The Lady of Shalott](#).” *LibriVox*.
- “[Reading Tennyson: 23 October 2009](#).” A Celebration of the Bicentenary of the Birth of Alfred, Lord Tennyson. Faculty of English. Cambridge University.
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Images

- “[Pictorial Interpretations of Tennyson’s ‘The Lady of Shalott’](#).” *The Victorian Web*. Dr. George Landow, Brown University.

Video

- “[Alfred Tennyson—Proms Literary Festival](#).” BBC Radio 3 Video. *YouTube*.

Podcast

- “[Tennyson’s In Memoriam](#).” *In Our Time*. BBC Radio 4.

7.7 Matthew Arnold (1822–1888)

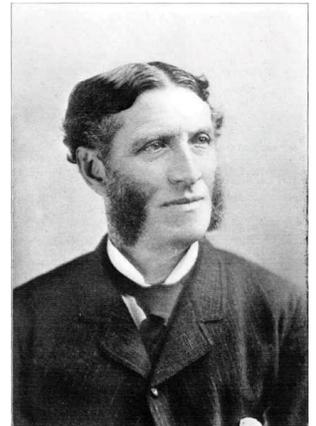
PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Characterize “Dover Beach” as a dramatic monologue.
2. Relate “Dover Beach” to the Victorian conflict of faith and doubt.
3. Evaluate the role of nature in “Dover Beach.”

Biography

From a family of educators, Matthew Arnold was well educated and widely read even before he won a scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford University. For a time, his family lived in the Lake District, where Arnold met William Wordsworth. Arnold worked as a teacher, a fellow at Oriel College Oxford, a school inspector, and finally Professor of Poetry at Oxford. His poetry includes *Thyrsis*, an elegy to his friend Arthur Clough, considered along with Milton’s *Lycidas*, Shelley’s *Adonais*, and Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* to be the great pastoral elegies of British literature. Other of Arnold’s major poems include “The Scholar Gipsy,” “Tristram and Iseult,” and “Sohrab and Rustum.”



In addition to his poetry, Arnold wrote prose works addressing literature (*Essays in Criticism*), cultural and class issues (*Culture and Anarchy*) and religious issues (*Literature and Dogma*) in Victorian England. Throughout much of the 20th century, the reputation of Arnold's prose works overshadowed that of his poetry.

Text

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“Dover Beach”

The sea is calm to-night.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand;
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.
Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow

Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.
The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
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! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;

And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Video Clip 4

Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach"

[\(click to see video\)](#)

View a video mini-lecture on Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Arnold's "Dover Beach" is an example of a dramatic monologue.
- "Dover Beach" addresses the Victorian conflict of faith and doubt.

EXERCISES

1. Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" uses a pattern familiar in the Romantic poetry of the earlier 19th century, an observation of nature which leads to a meditation. Describe the natural phenomenon that Arnold sees and hears in lines 1 through 14.
2. Lines 15 through 20 serve as a transition into the meditation. Of what do the sights and sounds of nature make him think?
3. Lines 21 through 28 contain the meditation, including Arnold's famous metaphor of the "sea of faith." What is the "sea of faith" and what is happening to it?
4. How does Arnold describe the world in lines 29 through 37? What metaphor does he use to picture the state of the world?
5. "Dover Beach" is a dramatic monologue. Analyze the poem as a dramatic monologue by identifying the four characteristics of dramatic monologues:
 - a fictional speaker
 - a speech made at a dramatic moment in the speaker's life
 - a silent but identifiable listener
 - a revelation of the speaker's character

Resources

Biography

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- "[Matthew Arnold: A Biography.](#)" rpt. from *British Authors of the Nineteenth Century*. Ed. Stanley Kunitz. New York: H.W. Wilson, 1936. 16–18. *The Victorian Web*.
- "[Matthew Arnold: A Chronology.](#)" *The Victorian Web*. Dr. George Landow, Brown University.

Text

- "[Dover Beach.](#)" rpt. in Edmund Clarence Stedman. ed. *A Victorian Anthology, 1837–1895*. *Bartleby.com*.
- "[Dover Beach.](#)" *The Victorian Web*. Dr. George Landow, Brown University.

Audio

- “[Dover Beach.](#)” *LibriVox.*

Video

- “[Matthew Arnold’s Dover Beach.](#)” Dr. Carol A. Lowe, McLennan Community College.

7.8 Oscar Wilde (1854–1900)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define comedy of manners and apply the definition to *The Importance of Being Earnest*.
2. Analyze the use of characteristics of comedy of manners in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.
3. Appraise *The Importance of Being Earnest* as a criticism of and satire on Wilde's contemporary society.

Biography

Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin, Ireland, moved to England to attend Oxford University, and then moved to London. Wilde had been rejected by his first love, but in London met and married Constance Lloyd, with whom he had two children.

Wilde is considered one of the founders of the **aesthetic movement**¹⁵, the theory of “art for art’s sake” that places the pursuit of beauty as the highest purpose of art. Aestheticism, with its ideals of beauty and the belief that art and morality are not connected, spread throughout Europe in the late 19th century. The aesthetic philosophy contrasted with the Victorian ideals of duty, decorum, and decency represented by Queen Victoria and perceived in the works of Victorian writers such as Browning and Tennyson. In addition to literature, aestheticism influenced visual and decorative arts. From aestheticism grew the concept of the alienated artist, divorced from mainstream society, isolated from a middle class who cannot understand his/her work, an individual of more sensitive perception, more refined sensibilities than the ordinary person.



15. The theory of “art for art’s sake” that places the pursuit of beauty as the highest purpose of art.

Wilde wrote children's books, the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and, most famously, a series of satirical plays, the last and most well known *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

In the 1890s, Wilde's scandalous court trials all but overshadowed his literary accomplishments. When the Marquis of Queensberry accused Wilde of homosexuality, Wilde sued him for libel. During the trial, witnesses testified that Wilde was guilty of homosexual activity, and even though Wilde dropped his suit against the Marquis, the government issued a warrant for Wilde's arrest on charges of homosexual activity. Found guilty and sentenced to two years in prison, Wilde suffered declining health throughout his imprisonment. After his release, he moved to France and died there in 1900.

Text

- *The Importance of Being Earnest*. CELT: Corpus of Electronic Texts. University College Cork, Ireland.
- *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Project Gutenberg.
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A contemporary bench commemorating Oscar Wilde near St. Martin's in the Field, London.

Comedy of Manners

First produced in 1895, Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* abounds in witticisms and sly criticism of late Victorian society.

The Importance of Being Earnest is a comedy of manners, a type of play popularized in the late 17th and 18th centuries. A **comedy of manners**¹⁶ is a witty, satirical play which mocks aristocratic society. Wilde revived the comedy of manners, which had its zenith in the Restoration comedies of Sheridan and Goldsmith, to write an immensely popular, funny criticism of Victorian aristocracy. In the play, Wilde attacks Victorian complacency, as did Tennyson, but in a very different manner. Wilde displays the foibles of society for ridicule and for his audience's amusement.

16. A witty, satirical play which mocks aristocratic society.

Albert Edward, the future King Edward VII, was the eldest son of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Although he was heir to the throne, his mother did not entrust him with royal duties or make any attempts to prepare him for his future role as king. Instead, the Prince of Wales (known as Bertie to his family and friends) became the most prominent member of a group of highly elite socialites, the Marlborough House Set, named for the house Albert Edward occupied with his wife and family. Even after he married Princess Alexandra of Denmark (an arranged marriage), Bertie was notorious for his extravagant lifestyle and his string of mistresses, ranging from actresses to the wives of other noblemen, one of whom was at his bedside when he died. He fathered a number of illegitimate children, some of them passed off as the children of their mothers' husbands.

Bertie's crowd of affluent individuals did not work for a living (their families being independently wealthy), spent their lives in pursuit of pleasure, and gathered at their country estates for long weekends of hunting, card playing, and flirting. All members of this group would, like Wilde's character Jack, have homes in the city and in the country.

One of Bertie's well-known mistresses was Daisy, Countess of Warwick, wife of Francis Greville, Lord Brooke, the Earl of Warwick. Daisy and her husband lived in Warwick Castle, the medieval castle that had for generations been home to the Earls of Warwick. Daisy was one of the most popular hostesses of country weekends at the magnificent Warwick Castle. Warwick was owned by the same family until 1978 but is now open as a tourist attraction. One of the exhibits at Warwick Castle is called "A Royal Weekend Party" and depicts Albert Edward (Bertie) the Prince of Wales, Daisy Countess of Warwick, and others of the Marlborough House Set.

In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Wilde writes satirically about these people, the aristocracy of late Victorian England.



A statue of Edward VII at Holy Rood Palace in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Sorry!

This image is permanently unavailable.

Warwick castle.



Characteristics of Comedy of Manners

Daisy, Countess of Warwick.

- **Realistic.** In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Wilde presents aristocratic characters, members of highest Victorian society, people such as the Prince of Wales and his circle. While Jack, Algernon, Lady Bracknell, and Gwendolen may be exaggerated, the Victorians would have recognized their similarity to a real group of people.
- **Satiric.Satire**¹⁷ is a literary manner, used in any genre (in this case in drama), that blends criticism of a person, event, or situation with witty humor for the purpose of improving the object of the satire. Satire is mocking but always with a serious underlying purpose; the goal is to use humor to make the audience aware of a situation that needs improvement. In this case, Wilde satirizes the British aristocracy. He also makes fun of numerous facets of Victorian life—note the comments on everything from the British education system to marriage to Darwinism (Darwin’s theories suggest that humans, like animals, behave according to instinct; Cecily comments twice on her “instinctive” knowledge).
- **Focus on a dissipated and superficial society.** The primary target of satire is the twisted values of the characters. The title of the play is, in itself, a pun on the word “earnest,” meaning honest. The characters are anything but earnest. They value appearance above all else. Note Lady Bracknell’s criteria for a potential husband for her daughter. The young ladies themselves have only one criterion for a future husband: his name must be Ernest. It doesn’t matter if he is a man of character, honesty, worthiness; he just has to have the right name. If any word characterizes Queen Victoria and her age, it is the word *earnest*; Wilde divulges the insincerity underlying much apparent Victorian earnestness.
- **Use of stock characters.** Stock characters are stereotypes that appear in all comedies of manners. All comedies of manners will have an ingénue (Cecily in this play); they all will have a dandy (a young man concerned with fashion and fun—Jack and Algernon), they will have an authoritative matron (Lady Bracknell in this case).
- **Dominance of dialogue over plot.** There is little action; the dialogue is the important element of the play.
- **Presence of intrigue in plot.** In a comedy of manners there is a mystery to solve: in this play, Jack’s identity.



17. A literary manner, used in any genre (in this case in drama), that blends criticism of a person, event, or situation with witty humor for the purpose of improving the object of the satire.

- **Amoral characters.** As might be expected within the aesthetic movement, characters display a distinct lack of perception of moral values. Algernon, for instance, lies as easily about cucumber sandwiches as about his financial situation or his potential fiancée. Equally, he expects his servant to lie for him (a jab at the Victorian idea that the upper classes had a duty to set a moral example for those of lower classes). He creates an elaborate fiction (Bunbury) to use as an excuse for anything he doesn't want to do. Even Jack comments that the truth is not the sort of thing one tells a nice, young girl.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a comedy of manners that exemplifies key characteristics of the form.
- Victorian audiences recognized the satire of the aristocracy and of Victorian “earnestness” in the play.

EXERCISES

1. Consider the title of the play. What is the meaning of the title? Why is the title ironic? To whom does the title apply?
2. Make a list of the objects of satire in this play. For example, Victorian education is satirized when Lady Bracknell comments, “Fortunately in England at any rate education produces no effect whatsoever.”
3. What is Bunburying? What is its purpose?
4. Of the two young ladies Cecily and Gwendolen, does either seem more sincere, more “earnest” than the other? In what ways are they different? In what ways are they the same?
5. How does the play represent the relationship between the classes in Victorian society? Do you think this portrayal is realistic?

6. How is marriage depicted? Although not as prevalent or as overt as in the Middle Ages, marriages were, in a sense, still arranged among the upper classes in Victorian England. Albert Edward, the Prince of Wales, for example, had to marry an appropriate young woman from European royalty even though the two didn’t know each other. Aristocratic young people in Victorian England usually married for the sake of family connection, maintenance of wealth, and the unifying of estates or businesses although those involved had the appearance of making their own choices. Even in the mid-20th century, the late Princess Margaret, younger sister of the current Queen Elizabeth II, was unable to marry the man with whom she fell in love because he was divorced and therefore deemed unsuitable. Although Princess Margaret ostensibly made her own decision not to marry him, she was pressured by her sister the Queen and the government to make a more appropriate choice of husband. Even in the 1980s, Lady Diana Spenser married Charles, Prince of Wales after meeting him only 13 times and was considered an appropriate choice of bride because of her family’s lineage and her own innocent past.

How does society’s expectation of “appropriate” marriages influence the treatment of marriage in the play?

7. What role do diaries, notes, letters, manuscripts play in the plot? How does written communication compare with spoken communication?
8. By the end of the play, who, if anyone, deserves the name *Ernest*?
9. The play is subtitled “A Trivial Comedy for Serious People.” What is the significance of the subtitle?

Resources

General Information

- “[The Important of Being Earnest](#)”: The First Stage Production, 1895. Victoria and Albert Museum.
- “[A Reader’s Guide to The Importance of Being Earnest.](#)” Dr. Stephanie Forward. The Open University, UK.
- “[Oscar Wilde.](#)” *The Victorian Web*. George P. Landow, Brown University..
- [The Oscar Wilde Society](#). includes a biography and images of historic play programs.
- [Reading Wilde: Querying Spaces: An Exhibition Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the Trials of Oscar Wilde.](#) New York University Libraries.
- “[The Trials of Oscar Wilde 1895.](#)” *Famous World Trials*. Prof. Douglas O. Linder. University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law.

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- “[Oscar Wilde: The Spectacle of Criticism.](#)” Dr. Sandra F. Siegel, Cornell University. *Arts & Sciences Newsletter*. Spring 1996: 17.2. argues that the flamboyant image of Wilde has overshadowed the more realistic view of the writer.

Text

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- “[The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People.](#)” London: Methuen & Co., 1919. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*.

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- “[The Importance of Being Earnest.](#)” *LibriVox*.

Concordance

- ISU Play Concordances: *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Rosanne G. Potter and Joe Struss. Iowa State University.

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- “Photographs of Oscar Wilde and His Circle at the Clark Library.” William Andrews Clark Memorial Library. University of California Los Angeles.

Chapter 8

The Twentieth Century

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

8.1 The Twentieth Century

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize characteristics of Modernism in literature.
2. Define postcolonial literature.
3. Describe postmodern literature.
4. Assess the role of English as a global language in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

The Edwardian Age

The death of Queen Victoria in 1901 and the accession of Edward VII inaugurated not only a new century but a new milieu in art, an extension and development of the aestheticism that characterized the last decade of the 19th century. The Edwardian Age and the Modern Period which followed, roughly from 1910 through the end of World War II, differed sharply from the preceding age.



London in the 1930s.

The elegance and extravagance of the aristocracy, led by King Edward VII, continued unchecked until World War I. However, underneath the ostentation so loved by the King sounded ominous warnings of unrest throughout Britain and the European continent. At the death of Edward VII in 1910, the British Empire also was dying as imperialism came under increasing criticism. Events such as the Boer War exposed the consequences of empire-building, and authors such as Joseph Conrad vividly portrayed for the British public a picture contrasting the supposed glory of empire. Even Edward VII himself criticized the British presence in India and the treatment of the country's inhabitants.

Poet Thomas Hardy, often referred to as the great pessimist, depicted the new century as a time of uncertainty and disbelief, both in God and in the integrity of humankind. Cynicism and pessimism replaced Victorian optimism and confidence. Although science and technology continued their ever more rapid advancement with electricity, telegraph and radio, continued mechanization in workplaces, automobiles, and airplanes, society seemed to lack a solid center of reference, a core belief that held the uncertainties of life in check and gave life a sense of purpose and direction.



Hardy and Joseph Conrad bridge the 19th and 20th centuries, both in time and in the philosophy of their writing.

The Modern Age

World War I

King George V followed his father Edward VII to the throne in 1910 and reigned until 1936. Only four years after he became king, George V led his country through World War I, fighting against his first cousin Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany, both men descendants of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Czar Nicholas II of Russia, overthrown and executed with his wife and family in 1917, was also King George's cousin by marriage, his wife Alexandra another descendent of Victoria and Albert, whose children had married into most of the royal families in Europe.

Essentially an entire generation of British men—and many women—were killed in World War I. Others returned maimed, physically and mentally. War poets such as Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owens vividly depicted the horror of war, the reality of war as compared to the slogans and imagined glory of fighting for one's country. The economic cost of the war also devastated Britain. The conspicuous wealth of the Edwardian Era disappeared into a financial depression.



Irish nationalism brought added tension to Britain. The desire for home rule in Ireland, then part of the British Empire, culminating in the Easter Uprising of 1916, caused strife and instability on another front for Britain. Fears that Ireland would collaborate with Germany in World War I led to

British concessions and, after the war, the granting of Irish independence in 1922. William Butler Yeats commemorated and contributed to Irish patriotism in his writing.

George V by Sir Luke Fildes.

The active role of women in the war effort helped achieve universal suffrage in 1928.

By the end of World War I, Britain was a much different place from the exuberant, confident empire that Victoria knew.

World War II

The oldest son of George V, Edward, in his role of Prince of Wales and heir apparent was not allowed to participate in combat during World War I, but his efforts to visit and encourage areas suffering from depressed economic times in the 1930s made him a popular figure among the British. After the death of his father, Edward became King Edward VIII; however, within a year he made the government aware that he wished to marry the twice-divorced American woman Wallace Simpson. Because of the monarch's role as head of the Church of England, political leaders and advisors in Britain opposed the marriage. Edward VIII chose to abdicate the throne in order to marry Simpson. Upon his abdication, his younger brother became King George VI. With his wife and queen, the Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, George VI symbolized the courage, fortitude, and the "stiff upper lip" with which the country endured the hardships of World War II. The couple and their children, the current Queen Elizabeth II and her younger sister the late Princess Margaret, spent the war years at Buckingham Palace and in Windsor rather than evacuate to safer areas. The royal family's determination to share in the hardships and dangers of the war earned the admiration of the British public.



Arrest of a Suffragette, 1914.



Women working in the absence of men during World War I.

Modern Literature

In Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the ill-fated girl Tess has a conversation with her brother in which he remembers that she has told him the stars are other worlds. When he asks if all the star-worlds are like their world, Tess

replies that the worlds are like the apples on their tree, some “splendid and sound—a few blighted.” When he asks which they live on, a splendid one or a blighted one, Tess replies, “A blighted one.”

This comment sums up the world view of modernism.

Modernism in literature, approximately 1910 to 1945, is characterized by a feeling of loss of any centering, stabilizing factor in life, a break with tradition, and a reaction against established society, religion, and politics. Modernism sees humankind as lacking free will; instead individuals are victims of the circumstances in which they find themselves, victims of the environment much like animals. In addition, God, if there is a God, is detached from human affairs; a divine power may have set the world in motion, but the world now runs according to natural law without divine intervention. Writers such as T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf experimented with new forms of literature and new subject matter which explored and depicted modernism as it affected individual lives.

Modern novels attempt to present the reality of the mind, not of the external world. In fact, the narrative tends to reflect what modern writers felt was a lack of order and reason in the world. Novelists such as Virginia Woolf and **James Joyce** use a **stream of consciousness**¹ technique, a narrative style which attempts to reproduce the random thought patterns of the human mind, affected by external stimuli and mental association. This **narrative technique** tends to ignore conventions of punctuation and mechanics, much as they do not figure in one’s thoughts.

In poetry, **imagism**², an early 20th century movement in poetry, favors clear visual pictures painted with concrete, concise language. **Imagism** promotes the use of hard images, sparse but specific language, and irregular meters. The imagists spurred a new interest in the 17th-century Metaphysical poets and their metaphysical conceits.

Early 20th-century drama reflects all the characteristics that permeate the time period: the alienating effects of technology, the loss of faith in traditional values, the feeling of purposelessness of life. Dramatists often attempted to shock and challenge audiences. Experiments in staging and stagecraft paralleled experiments in other genre. Leading 20th-century dramatists include Nobel Prize winner **Harold Pinter**. **Pinter’s plays** such as *The Dumb Waiter* (1957) belong to the **theatre of the absurd**³ (a type of drama intended to show the lack of meaning in modern life by depicting characters in senseless, hopeless situations speaking confusing, sometimes nonsensical dialogue), with its portrayal of an individual’s lack of control over life, the impossibilities of communication among human beings, and social inequities.

1. A narrative style which attempts to reproduce the random thought patterns of the human mind, affected by external stimuli and mental association.
2. An early 20th century movement in poetry that favored clear visual pictures painted with concrete, concise language.
3. A type of drama intended to show the lack of meaning in modern life by depicting characters in senseless, hopeless situations speaking confusing, sometimes nonsensical dialogue.

The U.K.'s The Theatres Trust provides a history of theatre building in the first quarter of the 20th century, the effects of World War I and the precursors of cinema, and the state of the theatre during and immediately after World War II. The Victoria and Albert Museum provides a brief history of early 20th-century drama, as does Theatre Database. *Theatre Database* also includes an article on surrealism, theatre of the absurd, and major 20th-century playwrights and plays.

The New Elizabethan Age and Postcolonial Literature

Upon the death of King George VI in 1952, Elizabeth acceded to the throne as Queen Elizabeth II. Her realm, however, looked quite different from that of her great-great-grandmother Queen Victoria, who died only 51 years earlier.

By the end of the world wars, the British Empire no longer existed, replaced by the British Commonwealth. Countries that had been British colonies had over time become independent nations; many of those remaining colonies into the 20th century were granted their independence but remained dominions, rather than colonies, of Britain.

Postcolonial literature⁴ generally refers to literature written in the English language by residents of former British colonies. The subject matter of postcolonial literature typically addresses the oppression and exploitation of colonialism, the attempt to establish a national identity after independence, and the effects of colonialism and its aftermath on the individual. Emory University provides a Postcolonial Studies website that includes an introduction to postcolonialism, specific authors, themes, and issues typical of postcolonial discourse.

Among the questions raised about postcolonial literature is its place in studies of British literature. Does postcolonial literature belong in the category of “British” literature because the country of origin formerly belonged to the British Empire, or does the literature belong to the nationality which produced it? When the term *English literature* is used to designate literature written in the English language (rather than literature written in England or by English citizens), certainly postcolonial literature belongs in English literature studies, as would American literature, Australian literature, and the literatures of any other English-speaking countries. Some scholars therefore prefer the terminology “World Literature in English” to the word *postcolonial* that may, for some, perpetuate the paradigm of imperialists and their occupied victims. This term emphasizes the global view many scholars consider an important characteristic as well as a prime achievement of this literature. However, such an approach calls into question the inclusion in British literature studies of some writers traditionally considered British, such as Irish writers James Joyce and William Butler Yeats, both born in Ireland while it was a

4. Literature written in the English language by residents of former British colonies.

part of The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (1801–1921) but both advocates of Irish independence.

Postmodernism

In his glossary of literary terms, Dr. L. Kip Wheeler of Carson-Newman College, characterizes postmodernism: “While modernism mourned the passing of unified cultural tradition, and wept for its demise in the ruined heap of civilization, so to speak, postmodernism tends to dance in the ruins and play with the fragments.”

A search for a definition of postmodernism leads many to the conclusion that the term is indefinable. Some proffered descriptions of postmodernism negate the possibility of definition by explaining that postmodernism pushes to an extreme the modernist idea that life and thought have no central core of reality or meaning. Epistemology becomes reliant on the individual mind, and a plurality of epistemologies is considered not only possible but desirable. Only cultural constructs provide what is accepted as reality and truth.

Postmodernism may be placed in time: the years following World War II to the last decade of the 20th century. During the 1990s and the early 21st century scholars began to speak of being in a post postmodern era.

Postmodern literature exhibits some of the same traits as modern literature but pushes these traits to extremes beyond those of the modern era. For example, modernism’s attempts to reproduce the way the human mind works with a stream of consciousness technique lead to postmodern mixing of points of view and deliberate playing with chronology, often for the purpose of questioning realism’s ontology. Harold Pinter’s use of reverse chronology in his 1978 play *Betrayal*, for example, exemplifies a postmodern manipulation of time. In a postmodern world, realism and the possibility of absolute truth, moral truth or empirical truth, do not exist. One hundred years after the Victorians grappled with a faith-doubt conflict, the postmodern world embraced **nihilism**⁵ (a philosophy which denies the existence of an objective reality, intrinsic meaning in life, and absolute moral values) in reality and morality.

5. A philosophy which denies the existence of an objective, knowable reality, intrinsic meaning in life, and absolute moral values.

6. Fiction about the process of creating fiction.

As a means of exploring the construct of reality, postmodernism employs **metafiction**⁶, fiction about the process of creating fiction. A literary work in which both the author and the reader are conscious of the artifact as a creation of the author’s mind mirrors the process of the mind constructing reality.

Descriptions of modernism and postmodernism including a comparative chart are available from Dr. Martin Irvine at Georgetown University.

Post Postmodernism

Although many scholars would agree that the arts, including literature, have moved beyond postmodernism, there is no agreement on a description or characteristics of the current era, most agreeing that history will make those determinations.

The Development of the English Language in the Twentieth Century

Through the 20th century, English became a global language. Although early in the century British and American imperialism played a role, the changing nature of communication and technology now demands a common language in politics, economics, manufacturing, trade, travel, science, technology, indeed in all human endeavors.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Joseph Conrad's criticism of imperialism and Hardy's depiction of the 20th century as a time of uncertainty and lack of belief served as precursors of dominant philosophies of the 20th century.
- Modernism in literature, approximately 1910 to 1945, is characterized by a feeling of loss of any centering, stabilizing factor in life, a break with tradition, and a reaction against established society, religion, and politics.
- Post-colonial literature evolved as former colonies gained their independence and often addresses the resultant issues.
- Postmodernism describes literature produced after World War II which often, sometimes in an ironic fashion, pushes the concerns of modernism to extremes.

EXERCISE

1. Using the websites listed in Resources: Development of the English Language as a starting point, defend or contradict the claim that English has become or will become a global language. Look for specific fields or activities in which English is used globally.

Resources

General Information

- “[Britain 1906–1918: Contrast, Contradiction & Change.](#)” The National Archives.
- [The Modern Word.](#) Allen B. Ruch, editorial director.
- [A Survey of 19th-Century & 20th-Century Literature.](#) Jan Pridmore. *Literary History.com.*

Edwardian England

- “[Edward VII: The First Constitutional Monarch.](#)” Lucy Moore. British History. BBC.
- “[The Edwardian Era.](#)” Eras of Elegance.

World War I

- [The First World War Poetry Digital Archive.](#) University of Oxford and JISC [Joint Information Systems Committee].
- “[Home Front: World War One.](#)” British History. BBC.
- “[Overview: Britain and World War One, 1901–1918.](#)” British History. BBC.
- “[—the rest is silence.](#)” [Lost Poets of the Great War.](#)” Harry Rusche, Emory University.

Modernism

- “[A Brief Guide to Modernism.](#)” Academy of American Poets. *Poets.org.*
- [British Drama 1890 to 1950: A Critical History.](#) Richard Farr Dietrich, University of South Florida. Twayne Publishers.
- “[Imagism.](#)” Prof. Al Filreis, University of Pennsylvania.
- “[Modern Literature.](#)” Prof. Tom Drake, University of Idaho.
- [The Modern Period \(1901 or 1914–1939\).](#) Dr. Jo Koster, Winthron University.
- “[Modernism and the Modern Novel.](#)” Prof. Christopher Keep, University of Western Ontario, Tim McLaughlin, and Robin Parmar. *The Electronic Labyrinth.*
- “[Stream of Consciousness.](#)” The International Society for the Study of Narrative. Georgetown University.
- [Twentieth Century British Drama.](#) John Smart. Series ed. Adrian Barlow. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- “[Understanding Modernism, A Summary.](#)” Prof. Tom Drake, University of Idaho.

- “What is Modernism?” Brenna Dugan, The University of Toledo Libraries.

Postcolonialism

- Contemporary Postcolonial and Postimperial Literature in English. National University of Singapore.
- The Empire Writes Back: Post-Colonial Caribbean Literature. Dr. Kathleen L. Nichols, Pittsburg State University, Pittsburg, Kansas.
- “Literary Theory and Schools of Criticism: Post-Colonial Criticism (1990s–present).” *Purdue Online Writing Lab*. Purdue University.
- Post-Colonial Criticism. *Academic Earth*. Dr. Paul H. Fry, Yale University.
- Post-Colonial Criticism: (1990s–present). *Purdue Online Writing Lab*. Purdue University.

Postmodernism

- “Literary Theory and Schools of Criticism: Postmodern Criticism.” *Purdue Online Writing Lab*. Purdue University.
- “Postmodernism.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Gary Aylesworth.
- “Postmodernity vs. the Postmodern vs. Postmodernism.” *Approaches to Po-Mo*. Dr. Martin Irvine, Georgetown University.

Development of the English Language

- “English in the Twentieth Century.” John Ayto. “Aspects of English.” *Oxford English Dictionary*.
- The Future of English: A Guide to Forecasting the Popularity of the English Language in the 21st Century. David Graddol. The British Council, 2000.
- “The Making of Modern Britain.” *BBC History*.
- “A Brief History of English, with Chronology.” Suzanne Kemmer. Rice University. *Words in English*.
- “The Role of English in the 21st Century.” Melvia A. Hasman. U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Office English Language Programs.

8.2 Thomas Hardy (1840–1928)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Characterize the beginning of the 20th century as depicted in Thomas Hardy's poetry.
2. Identify elements of modernism in the poetry of Thomas Hardy.
3. Evaluate the effect of "Drummer Hodge" in early 20th-century discourse on imperialism.
4. Assess the opinion of traditional religion expressed in "Hap," "The Impercipient," and "The Darkling Thrush" and compare/contrast that expression with other works from the Victorian Era and the early 20th century.

Biography

Video Clip 1

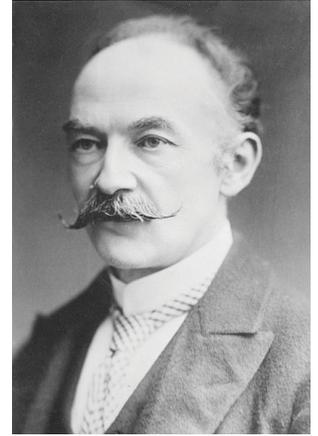
Thomas Hardy

[\(click to see video\)](#)

View a video mini-lecture on Thomas Hardy.

Texts

- “The Darkling Thrush.” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire, Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “The Darkling Thrush.” *Poems of the Past and Present*. David Price, ed. Macmillan and Co., 1919. *Project Gutenberg*.
- “The Dead Drummer [Drummer Hodge].” *Poems of the Past and Present*. David Price, ed. Macmillan and Co., 1919. *Project Gutenberg*.
- “Drummer Hodge or The Dead Drummer.” *The Victorian Web*.
- “Hap.” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire, Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “Hap.” *Wessex Poems and Other Verses*. David Price, ed. Macmillan and Co., 1919. *Project Gutenberg*.
- “The Impercipient.” *Wessex Poems and Other Verses*. David Price, ed. Macmillan and Co., 1919. *Project Gutenberg*.
- “The Impercipient.” *Wessex Poems and Other Verses*. 1898. *Bartleby.com*.
- “The Ruined Maid.” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire, Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “The Ruined Maid.” *Poems of the Past and Present*. David Price, ed. Macmillan and Co., 1919. *Project Gutenberg*.



“Hap”

Although Hardy repudiated the claim, he was labeled “The Great Pessimist.” Hardy, instead, described himself as a **meliorist**⁷, a person who believes the world and individuals have the potential for improvement. Nonetheless, the pessimistic tone of modernism permeates his work.



Hardy's memorial stone in Poets Corner, Westminster Abbey.

7. A person who believes the world and individuals have the potential for improvement.

If but some vengeful god would call to me
From up the sky, and laugh: “Thou suffering thing,
Know that thy sorrow is my ecstasy,
That thy love’s loss is my hate’s profiting!”
Then would I bear, and clench myself, and die,
Steeled by the sense of ire unmerited;
Half-eased, too, that a Powerfuller than I
Had willed and meted me the tears I shed.
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.

In modernism, the proper response to fate beyond individual control is stoicism—an endurance of the pain and heartache of life with dignity and without complaint. Such stoicism is evident in Hardy’s poem “Hap.”

In “Hap” the title gives an important clue about the poem’s content: the word *hap* means *chance*.

The first two stanzas of the poem are just one sentence. It is important to note that the entire first stanza is an “if” clause. The speaker is not saying, “There is a vengeful god”; he is saying “If there were a vengeful god.” If there were a vengeful god that laughed at him, saying that his suffering provided pleasure for the vengeful god, **then** he would react as he describes in stanza 2.

If there were a vengeful god, then he would bear the suffering stoically, halfway finding comfort in the fact that at least there was some reason for his pain, at least some god was directing what happened to him.

Note the first short sentence of stanza 3: “But not so.” The monosyllabic words, each accented, emphasize the speaker’s conclusion. The “if” clause he proposes in stanza 1 is not so; in other words, there is no god, not even a vengeful one. This conclusion leads the speaker to ask why, then, he suffers in life—why are his hopes unfulfilled and his happiness ruined? The last four lines provide the answer to his question: it is simply chance. He personifies time, picturing Time rolling dice to see what will happen to him. It may be something good, or it may be something bad. Either way it’s simply a roll of the dice, a matter of “chance.”

“The Impercipient”

As in “Hap,” the title “The Impercipient” provides an important clue about the poem’s content. The word *impercipient* is from the same Latin root word as the words *perceive* and *perceptive*. The prefix “im” means not. Therefore, this poem is about a person who does not perceive or understand.

The Impercipient (at a Cathedral Service)

That from this bright believing band
An outcast I should be,
That faiths by which my comrades stand
Seem fantasies to me,
And mirage-mists their Shining Land,
Is a drear destiny.
Why thus my soul should be consigned
To infelicity,
Why always I must feel as blind
To sights my brethren see,
Why joys they've found I cannot find,
Abides a mystery.
Since heart of mine knows not that ease
Which they know; since it be
That He who breathes All's Well to these
Breathes no All's Well to me,

My lack might move their sympathies
And Christian charity!
I am like a gazer who should mark
An inland company
Standing upfingered, with, “Hark! hark!
The glorious distant sea!”
And feel, “Alas, ‘tis but yon dark
And wind-swept pine to me!”
Yet I would bear my shortcomings
With meet tranquillity,
But for the charge that blessed things
I’d liefer have unbe [not be].
O, doth a bird deprived of wings
Go earth-bound wilfully!
...
Enough. As yet disquiet clings
About us. Rest shall we.

“The Darkling Thrush”

“The Darkling Thrush,” written at the beginning of a new century, is a statement of sharp contrast to the philosophy of the Romantic Period, one hundred years before this poem was written. Hardy dated the poem 31 December 1900, the eve of the new century.



Cottage where Hardy was born.

The Darkling Thrush

I leant upon a coppice gate

When Frost was spectre-gray,

And Winter's dregs made desolate

The weakening eye of day.

The tangled bine-stems scored the sky

Like strings of broken lyres,

And all mankind that haunted nigh

Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to be

The Century's corpse outleant,

His crypt the cloudy canopy,

The wind his death-lament.

The ancient pulse of germ and birth

Was shrunken hard and dry,

And every spirit upon earth

Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice arose among
The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.
So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

The speaker recounts leaning on a gate leading into a coppice, a small wooded area, on a gray, frosty day. The world appears drab and dark (the “weakening eye of day” referring to the sun’s inability to penetrate the gloom). No people are out enjoying nature, as is often portrayed in Romantic poetry; they have all sought the warmth of human companionship around their household fires. The entire first stanza sets the stage with images of death.

In the midst of this description, Hardy draws attention to the bare, tangled branches, comparing them with the strings of a broken lyre. His image is chosen purposefully. Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s image of the eolian harp (lyre) is one of the central images of Romantic poetry. “The Eolian Harp” was first printed in 1796, just over one hundred years earlier. The eolian harp symbolizes Romantic mysticism, a spiritual presence in the world (Coleridge’s “one Life, within us and abroad”) moving through nature, including human beings. Hardy says the eolian harp is now broken; that image no longer works. His universe is not spirit-filled, but lifeless and dried up. The land itself looks like a corpse.

Suddenly, in the midst of the frozen, dead world, the speaker hears the joyful song of a thrush, not a beautiful, vibrant bird like Shelley’s skylark, but a “frail, gaunt, and small” bird, worn out by storms.

In the final stanza, the speaker notes that the scene around the bird is bleak, certainly nothing to sing about, which leads him to state:

That I could think there trembled through

His happy good-night air

Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew

And I was unaware.

For over one hundred years, critics have disagreed about how to interpret these last four lines. There are two possibilities and scholars who support each side.

Possibility 1: There is some “Hope” in the world. Things aren’t as bleak as they seem. The bird is aware of a reason for hope, even if the speaker is not.

Possibility 2: The last two lines should be interpreted, “The bird may *think* there’s a reason for hope, but I, the speaker, surely don’t know what it is.”

The title of the poem could be seen as supporting either interpretation. The word *darkling* means “in the dark.” That phrase, however, could be interpreted literally (the bird is singing on a dark, cloudy day—“in the dark”) or figuratively (the bird is clueless—“in the dark”—the bird doesn’t know what’s going on, how bleak the world really is).

“The Ruined Maid”

Hardy’s audience would have recognized the expression *ruined maid* although we no longer use the phrase. They would have known immediately that the poem is about an unmarried woman who has lost her virginity. “The Ruined Maid” is, in fact, about two women: one who is “ruined” in a moral sense and another who, though chaste, is living a life of hardship and poverty.

The dialogue of the two women soon reveals that Melia, the ruined maid, is living in town, wearing beautiful clothes and jewelry, living a life of ease. The country woman, though virtuous, wears tattered clothes, digs potatoes to eke out a living, and envies ‘Melia. In the last two lines of the poem, ‘Melia tells her friend that she can’t expect a life of ease; she isn’t “ruined.”

The poem is humorous in effect, but it makes a serious point. Hardy leads the audience to ask themselves about society’s values and the way society works. Isn’t something wrong when virtue leads to poverty and “being ruined” leads to prosperity?

The Ruined Maid

“O ‘Melia, my dear, this does everything crown!

Who could have supposed I should meet you in Town?

And whence such fair garments, such prosperity?”—

“O didn’t you know I’d been ruined?” said she.

“You left us in tatters, without shoes or socks,

Tired of digging potatoes, and spudding up docks;

And now you’ve gay bracelets and bright feathers three!”—

“Yes: that’s how we dress when we’re ruined,” said she.

—”At home in the barton you said ‘thee’ and ‘thou,’

And ‘thik oon,’ and ‘theäs oon,’ and ‘t’other’; but now

Your talking quite fits ‘ee for high company!”—

“Some polish is gained with one’s ruin,” said she.

—”Your hands were like paws then, your face blue and bleak

But now I’m bewitched by your delicate cheek,

And your little gloves fit as on any lady!”—

“We never do work when we’re ruined,” said she.

—”You used to call home-life a hag-ridden dream,
And you’d sigh, and you’d sock; but at present you seem
To know not of megrims or melancholy!”—
“True. One’s pretty lively when ruined,” said she.
—”I wish I had feathers, a fine sweeping gown,
And a delicate face, and could strut about Town!”—
“My dear—a raw country girl, such as you be,
Cannot quite expect that. You ain’t ruined,” said she.

“Drummer Hodge”

Before and after the turn of the century the British were involved the Boer Wars. In a portion of what is now the Republic of South Africa, Dutch farmers settled and farmed peacefully throughout much of the 19th century. The native African people had already been defeated and driven off their land by European settlers. When gold and diamonds were discovered, the British were no longer content to let the Dutch settlers rule the area, and the struggle for control of the region and its riches grew into a horrific armed conflict.

The British set up concentration camps (the first time in history this term had been used) to imprison women and children of the Boer farmers who continued to fight. Loss of life among the British, the Boer fighters, and the innocent families was staggering. Hardy personalizes the loss of life by introducing his readers to one individual. In “Drummer Hodge,” originally titled “The Dead Drummer,” Hardy laments a young boy sent for the first time away from home to fight and die in a land he knew nothing about for a cause that mattered little if at all to him.

Drummer Hodge

I

They throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest

Uncoffined,—just as found:

His landmark is a kopje-crest

That breaks the veldt around;

And foreign constellations west

Each night above his mound.

II

Young Hodge the Drummer never knew—

Fresh from his Wessex home—

The meaning of the broad Karoo,

The Bush, the dusty loam,

And why uprose to nightly view

Strange stars amid the gloam.

III

Yet portion of that unknown plain

Will Hodge for ever be;
His homely Northern breast and brain
Grow to some Southern tree,
And strange-eyed constellations reign
His stars eternally.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Bridging the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, Thomas Hardy's poetry addresses questions that plagued Victorian society, such as imperialism, religion, traditional values, with a perspective that moves toward modernism's view of the world as having no centering, stabilizing core.
- "Drummer Hodge" presents imperialism from an individual point of view, that of a boy sacrificed for reasons beyond his understanding.
- "Hap," "The Impercipient," and "The Darkling Thrush" depict a modern view of the world as lacking a transcendent spiritual power and therefore at the mercy of fate.
- "The Ruined Maid" describes two young women who illustrate the failure of traditional societal values.

EXERCISES

“The Impercipient”

1. Where is the speaker of “The Impercipient”?
2. Who is the “bright believing band” the speaker refers to in line 1?
3. Identify what the speaker refers to in the phrases “fantasies,” “mirage-mists,” and “Shining Land” in stanza 1.
4. In stanza 2, we learn what it is that the speaker does not perceive. What is it he does not understand?
5. The capitalized “He” in stanza 3 presumably refers to God. Does the speaker blame God for his lack of perception?
6. Explain the metaphor employed in stanza 4.
7. In stanza 5 the speaker claims that he could bear his lack of perception calmly, stoically as it were, except for one “charge,” one accusation. What is that accusation?
8. The speaker answers this charge in the abbreviated stanza 6 with another metaphor. To what does he compare himself? How does this metaphor relate to the accusation?
9. Does the speaker reach a resolution to his lack of perception? How does the poem conclude?

“The Darkling Thrush”

1. Compare the descriptive details of nature in “The Darkling Thrush” with the descriptions found in Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, or Keats.
2. Account for Hardy’s choice of the words “spectre” and “haunted” in stanza 1.
3. What is the purpose of describing the thrush as “frail, gaunt, and small” and “blast-beruffled”?
4. Look up the various meanings of the word *darkling* in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Particularly note any definitions and quotations from around the same time period Hardy was writing. Do the definitions affect your interpretation of the last stanza of the poem?
5. How do you interpret the last stanza?

“Drummer Hodge”

1. What is the effect of describing Drummer Hodge as being tossed into a grave with no coffin?
2. What is the purpose of naming features such as the kopje and the veldt that are unfamiliar to Hodge?

3. Why does Hardy refer to the stars in the final stanza?

Resources

General Information

- “[Thomas Hardy 1840–1928](#).” *The Victorian Web*. George P. Landow, Brown University.
- “[Thomas Hardy’s Poetry—Study Guide](#).” Andrew Moore. www.universalteacher.org.uk.
- “[Turning the Century With Thomas Hardy](#).” Dr. James K. Chandler, University of Chicago. *Fathom Archive*. The University of Chicago Archive Digital Collections.

Biography

- “[A Chronology of the Life and Works of Thomas Hardy](#).” *The Victorian Web*. Philip V. Allingham, Lakehead University.
- “[Thomas Hardy](#).” Academy of American Poets. *Poets.org*.
- “[Thomas Hardy](#).” Dr. John P. Farrell, University of Texas. *Studies of Victorian Literature*.
- “[Thomas Hardy: A Biographical Sketch](#).” Dr. Andrzej Diniejko, Warsaw University.

Texts

- “[The Darkling Thrush](#).” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire, Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “[The Darkling Thrush](#).” *Poems of the Past and Present*. David Price, ed. Macmillan and Co., 1919. *Project Gutenberg*.
- “[The Dead Drummer](#) [Drummer Hodge].” *Poems of the Past and Present*. David Price, ed. Macmillan and Co., 1919. *Project Gutenberg*.
- “[Drummer Hodge or The Dead Drummer](#).” *The Victorian Web*.
- “[Hap](#).” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire, Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “[Hap](#).” *Wessex Poems and Other Verses*. David Price, ed. Macmillan and Co., 1919. *Project Gutenberg*.
- “[The Impercipient](#).” *Wessex Poems and Other Verses*. David Price, ed. Macmillan and Co., 1919. *Project Gutenberg*.
- “[The Impercipient](#).” *Wessex Poems and Other Verses*. 1898. *Bartleby.com*.

- “[The Ruined Maid](#).” *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire, Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.
- “[The Ruined Maid](#).” *Poems of the Past and Present*. David Price, ed. Macmillan and Co., 1919. *Project Gutenberg*.

Audio

- “[The Darkling Thrush](#).” *LibriVox*.
- “[The Darkling Thrush: Hardy’s Timely Meditation on the Turning of an Era](#).” *Slate* 30 Dec. 2008. Poet Robert Pinsky’s comments and reading of the poem.
- “[Drummer Hodge \(The Dead Drummer\)](#).” *LibriVox*.
- “[Hap](#).” *Wessex Poems and Other Verses*. David Price, ed. Macmillan and Co., 1919. *Project Gutenberg*.
- “[The Impercipient](#).” *Wessex Poems and Other Verses*. David Price, ed. Macmillan and Co., 1919. *Project Gutenberg*.
- “[The Ruined Maid](#).” *LibriVox*.

Video

- “[Peggy Ashcroft Reading Thomas Hardy](#).” (“The Ruined Maid”). AthenaLearning. *YouTube*.
- “[Thomas Hardy](#).” Dr. Carol Lowe, McLennan Community College.

Images

- [Thomas Hardy and His Wessex](#).
- “[Thomas Hardy’s Dorset](#).” Literary Landscapes. British Library.

Concordance

- [A Hyper-Concordance to the Works of Thomas Hardy](#). *The Victorian Literary Studies Archive*. Mitsu Matsuoka, Nagoya University.

8.3 Joseph Conrad (1857–1924)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

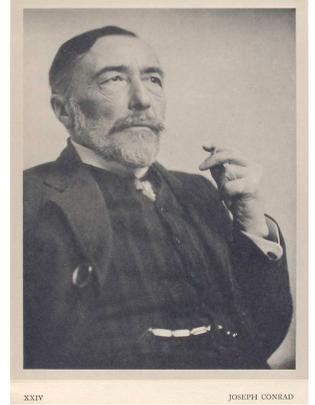
1. Determine various layers of meaning of the title *Heart of Darkness*.
2. Identify and assess elements of modernism in *Heart of Darkness*.
3. Judge the effect *Heart of Darkness* may have had on an audience predisposed to favor British imperialism.

Biography

Joseph Conrad was born in Poland. When his father was arrested on political charges and sent into exile in Russia, his wife and their young son Joseph accompanied him. The harsh weather and living conditions resulted in the early deaths of his parents and in health problems that plagued Conrad throughout his life. Conrad lived for a time with an uncle but in his teens began a career on the sea that took him on many adventures that later appeared in his writing. His voyage up the Congo River formed the basis of *Heart of Darkness*. One voyage took him to England where he joined a crew that included Englishmen from whom he began to learn the language. He eventually became an English citizen, married an English woman, and when his health forced him to retire from his maritime career, lived the rest of his life in England. Conrad had been writing throughout his life, but his retirement allowed him to devote the time and attention to his writing that he had desired.

Text

- *Heart of Darkness*. *Electronic Text Center*. University of Virginia Library.
- *Heart of Darkness*. A Penn State Electronic Classics Series Publication. Pennsylvania State University.
- *Heart of Darkness*. *Project Gutenberg*.



Heart of Darkness

A story about Conrad's childhood claims that he once randomly placed a finger on a far-away place on a map and stated that when he was grown up he would go there. The place was Africa. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad attributes this event to his narrator, Charles Marlow. In his **novella**⁸, a work with the characteristics of a novel but shorter and less complex in plot, *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad draws on his own experience as a riverboat captain sailing up the Congo River.

Heart of Darkness was originally published serially in *Blackwood's Magazine*, 1899. Uppsala University's *Conrad First* website provides [digital copies of the magazine](#).

Like Hardy's work, Conrad's writing bridges the end of the Victorian Era and the Modern Age of the early 20th century. His work, however, reveals **characteristics** that distinguish it as a modern work, distinctly different from the mores of Victorian literature.

Plot in *Heart of Darkness* is more mental than chronological and linear. Although we follow a chronology of events as Marlow experiences his journey to the Congo, that chronology is of less importance than Marlow's mental journey of realization and awakening to the nature of the world. The reader reaches awareness about events and characters as the narrator does. The story takes the reader along with Marlow's journey of discernment about life and human nature.

Characters often are not full drawn, realistic characters like those we might encounter in Dickens's novels. Mental life, the life of the mind, Marlow's mind, and then Kurtz's mind, are the focus. Although *Heart of Darkness* pre-dates the important works of Freud and Jung, Conrad exhibits the interest in human psychology that would lead later modernist writers to study and reflect psychological studies in their works. Even the story's religious and biblical imagery reinforces its rejection of traditional religious values and asserts the modernist tenet that there is no moral center. The basic depravity of humankind is no better than, often worse than, the

8. A work with the characteristics of a novel but shorter and less complex in plot.

instinctive behavior of animals. While humans may, as Darwin's work suggested, work on instinct like animals, animals do not engage in the wanton, futile destruction depicted in *Heart of Darkness*.

The structure of *Heart of Darkness* uses a double narrator.

- At the beginning of the work, an unnamed narrator sets the scene in the story's present time: on the ship *Nellie* on the River Thames in London in Marlow's old age. This narrator is presumably, like Charles Marlow, a sailor on the *Nellie*; in the second paragraph he comments that the river Thames "stretched before us" and later notes that the men present have "the bond of the sea."
- The main story is Marlow's re-telling of his experience as a riverboat captain sailing up the Congo River. We don't experience the events as they happen; we experience them through the filter of Marlow's memory. As you read, watch for instances of the outer framework, the first unnamed narrator, breaking into Marlow's story.

The themes of *Heart of Darkness* become apparent as we consider the title. The story is foremost a journey.

- In one sense, it is literally a story of a journey into the heart of darkness that is, in the view of many turn-of-the-20th-century Europeans, the African continent. Because they knew little about Africa, Europeans referred to Africa as "the dark continent."
- At another level, Marlow's initial desire for an adventure turns into a quest for Kurtz, the mysterious star of the company. He collects more ivory and therefore more money than any other company agent. Marlow hears about him at every turn. At this level, the story also functions as a criticism of European imperialism. Kurtz embodies the concept of robbing another country of its natural resources and laying waste, not just to its land, but its population. The basis of his fame is that Kurtz excels in making money from a land that does not belong to him.
- At its most important level, Marlow's journey becomes a pilgrimage to the heart of humankind's depravity. As he moves deeper into the literal darkness of the jungle and closer to Kurtz's presence, he experiences an **epiphany**⁹, a sudden moment of insight and revelation. Marlow's epiphany is a realization that humankind possesses a core of evil, a heart of darkness. Although the story is not told primarily in religious terms, the presence of original sin, a person's innate capacity

9. A sudden moment of insight and revelation.

for evil—a heart of darkness—is at the terminus of Marlow’s physical, mental, and spiritual journey.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Heart of Darkness* may be interpreted literally as a journey into an unknown territory, metaphorically as Marlowe’s realization of evil, or symbolically as humankind’s natural propensity for evil.
- *Heart of Darkness* evinces modernism in its narrative technique and in its central theme that at the culmination of the search for meaning in human life is only darkness.
- On one level of meaning, *Heart of Darkness* is a criticism of imperialism.

EXERCISES

1. In *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz is involved with two women, one African and one European. Compare the two women. What similarities do they have? What differences? What is their relationship with Kurtz? Why are they important to the story?
2. Describe the Africans in *Heart of Darkness*. What role do they play in the story? What qualities do they represent? What is their relationship with the Europeans?
3. Describe the Europeans in *Heart of Darkness*. What role do they play in the story? What qualities do they represent? What is their relationship with the Africans?
4. Describe Marlow. How does he change from the beginning to the end of the story?
5. At the beginning of his narration, Marlow states, “And this [England] also...has been one of the dark places of the earth.” He refers to the time of the Roman Empire, when that great civilization sent men to conquer Britain, a country foreign in language, culture, climate, almost every conceivable way. How does this comment prepare readers for the story to follow? In what ways has England been one of the “dark” places on earth? How could this statement be interpreted as a statement on imperialism, on empire-building?
6. At the beginning and the end of his story, Marlow is in Europe. What descriptive details suggest that Europe is a place of darkness as much as Africa?
7. Marlow recognizes even before he lands in Africa that the European presence there is futile and destructive to the environment as well as the people. List descriptions and events that picture this destruction.
8. One of the first people Marlowe meets in Africa is the Company’s chief accountant. Marlowe gives a detailed description of his appearance. What does his appearance say about the European presence in Africa?
9. Near the end of the story, when Marlow follows Kurtz back into the jungle, he tells readers, “But his [Kurtz’s] soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad.” It was not the outside surroundings that made Kurtz mad; it was looking into his own soul. How does this statement elucidate the theme of *Heart of Darkness*? Marlow next tells us that, he supposes for his sins, he also has to look into Kurtz’s soul. What change does this revelation effect in Kurtz?
10. As Kurtz is dying, Marlow hears him say, “I am lying here in the dark waiting for death.” Marlow’s response is that this statement is nonsense because there is a candle within a foot of his eyes. How would you

account for Kurtz's statement? Does Marlowe deliberately misinterpret Kurtz's comment? Why or why not?

11. The climactic moment of the story, the moment preceding Kurtz's death, is expressed with religious and biblical images. Explain the reference to the "veil being rent." What does Marlow find when the veil is rent and he comes face to face with the center, the heart, of humankind?
12. Explain Kurtz's last words, "The horror! The horror!"
13. Why does Marlow lie to "the Intended" about Kurtz's last words?

Resources

General Information

- [Conrad First](#). The Joseph Conrad Periodical Archive. The Joseph Conrad Society UK and the Department of English, Uppsala University.
- "[Heart of Darkness](#)." Dr. Pericles Lewis, Yale University. *The Modernism Lab at Yale University*. information on elements of modernism in *Heart of Darkness*.
- [Vox Et...](#) . Dr. David Mulry, ed. Schreiner University. podcasts of comments from Conrad scholars.
- "[White Lies and Whited Sepulchres in Conrad's Heart of Darkness](#)." *The Victorian Web*. Philip V. Allingham, Lakehead University.

Biography

- [Joseph Conrad: A Biographical Note](#). Zdzisław Najder. Joseph Conrad Study Centre in Opole, Poland.
- [Joseph Conrad \(Teodor Josef Konrad Nalecz Korzeniowski\) 1857–1924](#). *The Victorian Web*. Philip V. Allingham, Lakehead University.

Text

- [Heart of Darkness](#). *Electronic Text Center*. University of Virginia Library.
- [Heart of Darkness](#). A Penn State Electronic Classics Series Publication. Pennsylvania State University.
- [Heart of Darkness](#). *Project Gutenberg*.

Concordance

- [A Hyper-Concordance to the Works of Joseph Conrad](#). *The Victorian Literary Studies Archive*. Mitsu Matsuoka, Nagoya University.

Audio

- [Heart of Darkness](#). LibriVox.
- [Heart of Darkness Audiobook Podcast](#). *Learn Out Loud.com*.
- [Vox Et...](#) . Dr. David Mulry, ed. Schreiner University. podcasts of comments from Conrad scholars.

Images

- [Heart of D—the Horror!](#) Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. digital image of page of Conrad's original manuscript.

8.4 The War Poets

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

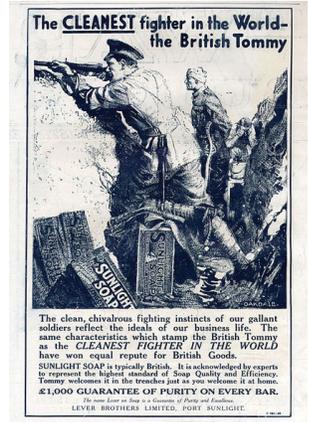
1. Understand the effects of World War I on Britain and on the development of Modern literature.
2. Recognize the cognitive dissonance caused by accounts of the achievements and victories of the British military and the firsthand accounts of returning individuals and of writers such as the war poets.

No words could describe the general public's perception of World War I better than the photo essay at the [Modern American Poetry](#) website (Editors: Cary Nelson and Bartholomew Brinkman. Department of English. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign). In the photo essay note the first pictures of men going off to war, women cheering them on, both sides confident in their abilities and confident that the war would be over within a few months followed by increasingly somber pictures of the reality. The ad pictured here capitalized on the widespread belief that British troops, because they were honorable, chivalrous, gallant, would soon march home in victory. The work of soldier poets such as Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Rupert Brooke informed the British public of the realities of war as much as, perhaps more than, the censored journalistic reports that reached British newspapers and magazines. The brutalities of outdated military tactics used against modern weapons resulted in incomparable [British losses](#). The war poets painted vivid pictures of the realities of war.

The BBC provides extensive information about World War I, including virtual tours of the trenches and excerpts from oral histories, diaries, and letters.

Wilfred Owen (1893–1918)

Wilfred Owen was born in Shropshire, a rural area of England. He was interested in poetry, particularly Keats and other Romantic poets, and wrote poetry in his teens. When he failed to be admitted to college, he moved to France to work as an English language tutor. After World War I began, he moved back to England to enlist. In 1917, he was diagnosed with what was then called shell shock and sent to Craiglockhart Hospital in Scotland for treatment. There he met Siegfried Sassoon. Both poets wrote some of their most well-known poetry while there. Owen returned to the front in the fall of 1918, won the Military Cross, and just days before the war ended was killed in battle. His family received the news of his death in the midst of celebrations on November 11, Armistice Day, 1918.



“Dulce et Decorum Est”

The Latin phrase from a work by Homer may be translated “It is sweet and right to die for one’s country.” Juxtaposed against the illusion of war as a glorious adventure, Owen paints the horrors of war’s reality.



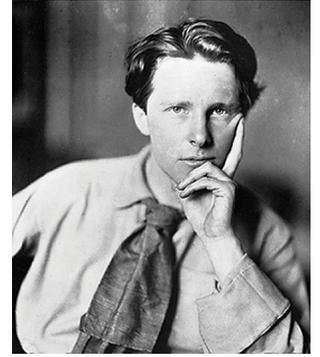
Dulce et Decorum Est

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. Many had lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.
Gas! Gas! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime...
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.
In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
Pro patria mori.

Rupert Brooke (1887–1915)

Rupert Brooke also was fond of the works of the Romantic poets. He attended Cambridge University where he met and befriended members of the Bloomsbury Group whose literature was an important piece of British modernism. Brooke was commissioned into the Royal Navy, but in 1915 he died of sepsis onboard a hospital ship. He is buried on the Greek island of Skyros.



Rupert Brooke's grave.

“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 dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.
And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967)

Although Sassoon grew up in a family divided by religious differences, his father was Jewish, his mother Roman Catholic, his background provided him enough

wealth to live comfortably. He attended Cambridge University for a while, without taking a degree, preferring to live the life of a country gentlemen playing cricket and writing. Sassoon joined the British Army at the beginning of World War I; he was sent home from the front twice, once when he contracted a fever and once for shell shock, this being the occasion when he met Wilfred Owen. Sassoon survived World War I and continued writing until his death.



By George Charles Beresford, 1915

“Glory of Women”

Glory of Women

You love us when we're heroes, home on leave,

Or wounded in a mentionable place.

You worship decorations; you believe

That chivalry redeems the war's disgrace.

You make us shells. You listen with delight,

By tales of dirt and danger fondly thrilled.

You crown our distant ardours while we fight,

And mourn our laurelled memories when we're killed.

You can't believe that British troops “retire”

When hell's last horror breaks them, and they run,

Trampling the terrible corpses—blind with blood.

_O German mother dreaming by the fire,

While you are knitting socks to send your son

His face is trodden deeper in the mud._

In the last three lines, the speaker turns from addressing the people back home in England to speak to the imagined mother of a German soldier. His comment has the effect of humanizing the political enemy.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The staggering casualties and the horrors of modern warfare contributed to the modernist sense that the world lacks a stable, centralizing force and that life lacks ultimate purpose—that the world we live in is, in the words of Thomas Hardy’s character Tess, a “blighted one.”
- The work of the war poets helped enlighten the public about the nature of the war experience.

EXERCISES

1. In “Dulce Et Decorum Est” the last stanza is directed to people back at home. What is the purpose of this stanza?
2. Read this [brief description](#) of the mustard gas used in World War I. Does Owen’s description seem realistic? Which account seems more emotionally based? Which might have had a more profound effect on the people at home away from the war?
3. Brooke’s poem “The Soldier” seems brighter in mood and tone than the other two poems, and yet it describes a soldier’s death. What makes the poem less horrific than “Dulce Et Decorum Est”?
4. How would you describe the mood of the speaker in “The Soldier”?
5. The speaker of “Glory of Women” expresses disillusionment with the supposed glory of war. How would you describe his attitude toward the women back at home?
6. In “Glory of Women,” although the Germans are the enemy of the British, what common human trait does the poet reveal?

Resources

General Information

- [Anthem for Doomed Youth: Writers and Literature of The Great War, 1914–1918](#). An Exhibit Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the Armistice, November 11, 1918. Robert S. Means. Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

- [The First World War Poetry Digital Archive](#). University of Oxford and JISC [Joint Information Systems Committee]. text (including biographies, primary texts, background information), images (including portraits, digital images of manuscripts, photos of World War I, images from the Imperial War Museum); audio; video (including a [Second Life Virtual Simulation](#) from the Imperial War Museum and a [YouTube video introduction](#), over 150 video clips, film clips), and an interactive timeline.
- [“Home Front: World War One.”](#) British History. BBC.
- [“—the rest is silence.” Lost Poets of the Great War.](#) Harry Rusche, Emory University.
- [“Wilfred Owen’s ‘Dulce et Decorum Est.’”](#) Online Gallery. British Library. image of handwritten manuscript and information about Owen and World War I.
- [“World War One.”](#) World Wars. *BBC History*.

Biography

- [Poems by Wilfred Owen with an Introduction by Siegfried Sassoon](#). A Penn State Electronic Classics Series Publication. Pennsylvania State University.
- [“Rupert Brooke, 1887–1915.” “—the rest is silence.” Lost Poets of the Great War.](#) Harry Rusche, Emory University.
- [“Rupert Brooke \(1887–1915\).”](#) Historic Figures. BBC.
- [“Rupert Chawner Brooke.”](#) An Exhibit Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the Armistice, November 11, 1918. Robert S. Means. Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.
- [“Siegfried Sassoon.”](#) An Exhibit Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the Armistice, November 11, 1918. Robert S. Means. Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.
- [“Siegfried Sassoon \(1886–1967\).”](#) Historic Figures. BBC.
- [“Wilfred Owen \(1893–1918\).”](#) Historic Figures. BBC.
- [“Wilfred Owen \(1893–1918\).” “—the rest is silence.” Lost Poets of the Great War.](#) Harry Rusche, Emory University.
- [“Wilfred Edward Salter Owen.”](#) An Exhibit Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the Armistice, November 11, 1918. Robert S. Means. Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

Texts

- [“1914 V. The Soldier”](#) by Rupert Brooke. *Representative Poetry Online*. Ian Lancashire, Department of English, University of Toronto. University of Toronto Libraries.

- “[Anthem for Doomed Youth](#),” by Wilfred Owen. An Exhibit Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the Armistice, November 11, 1918. Robert S. Means. Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. text and a digital image of the original handwritten manuscript.
- “[Dulce et Decorum Est.](#)” by Wilfred Owen. Paul Halsall, Fordham University. *Internet Modern History Sourcebook*.
- “[Dulce et Decorum Est.](#)” by Wilfred Owen. “[—the rest is silence.](#)” [Lost Poets of the Great War.](#)” Harry Rusche, Emory University.
- “[Glory of Women.](#)” by Siegfried Sassoon. *Counter-Attack and Other Poems*. 1918. *Bartleby.com*.
- “[Glory of Women.](#)” *The War Poems of Siegfried Sassoon. Project Gutenberg.*
- “[Sonnet V. The Soldier.](#)” by Rupert Brooke. “[—the rest is silence.](#)” [Lost Poets of the Great War.](#)” Harry Rusche, Emory University.

Images

- “[Wilfred Owen’s ‘Dulce et Decorum Est.’](#)” Online Gallery. British Library.
- “[World War I Photo Essay.](#)” *Modern American Poetry*. Editors: Cary Nelson and Bartholomew Brinkman. Department of English. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Audio

- “[Dulce et Decorum Est.](#)” by Wilfred Owen. *LibriVox*.
- [Extract from a letter by Wilfred Owen, July 1918.](#) “[—the rest is silence.](#)” [Lost Poets of the Great War.](#)” Harry Rusche, Emory University.
- “[Siegfried Sassoon 1886–1967](#)”). A Recording Owned by Mrs. Olga Ironside Wood. 1 January 1967. BBC.
- “[The Soldier.](#)” by Rupert Brooke. *LibriVox*.
- “[Wilfred Owen Audio Gallery.](#)” Dominic Hibberd. World Wars. *BBC History*.

8.5 Virginia Woolf (1882–1941)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Ascertain the state of women's rights during Virginia Woolf's lifetime.
2. Recognize the influence of the Bloomsbury Group on modernism.

Biography

Video Clip 2

Virginia Woolf

[\(click to see video\)](#)

Click to watch a video mini-lecture biography on Woolf.



Virginia Woolf.

The Bloomsbury Group

by George Charles Beresford, 1902

Originating in friendships established at Cambridge University, the **Bloomsbury Group** consisted of writers, artists, and intellectuals who influenced Modern British literature and art. The name Bloomsbury came from the neighborhood in London where several members of the group lived and worked. Their work and their lifestyles were bohemian and controversial, affecting modern views on feminism and sexuality as well as literary criticism, art, and publishing. The circle of friends now known as the **Bloomsbury Group** included Virginia Woolf and her husband Leonard Woolf, her sister Vanessa Bell and her husband Clive Bell, writer Lytton Strachey, writer E.M. Forster, and economist Maynard Keynes.

Text

- [*A Room of One's Own*](#). Project Gutenberg of Australia.
- [A Room of One's Own by Virginia Woolf](#). eBooks@Adelaide. The University of Adelaide Library. University of Adelaide, South Australia.

A Room of One's Own

In 1928, Virginia Woolf gave a series of lectures at Newnham and Girton Colleges, women's colleges at Cambridge University. A year later, she published a revision of her lectures as *A Room of One's Own*. Woolf's premise that a woman must have "money and a room of her own" if she is to become a writer applies literally to becoming a career writer, but more broadly to the idea that women must have the independence and education to support themselves and the political freedom to assume such places in a society that gives preference to men. In speaking on this subject to women attending college, Woolf reminds them and future readers that women have had that right for only a brief time.

In one of the more well-known sections of her lectures, Woolf creates the fictional story of Shakespeare's sister. What if, she surmises, Shakespeare had had a sister who was just as gifted and talented as Shakespeare himself? Would that sister, whom she calls Judith, have been able in the 16th century to become a writer like Shakespeare? Woolf tells a hypothetical story in which Judith attempts to follow her brother's footsteps. Instead of being allowed to spend time reading and writing, Judith would have been beaten by her father and compelled to marry. She certainly would not have been allowed to attend school. Woolf describes Judith running away to London, where we know that Shakespeare himself had a successful career as an actor, the manager of a theatrical company, and of course a playwright. Judith, on the other hand, is unable, because of society's restrictions on women, to do any of

those things. Woolf's hypothetical story is a reminder of what women have accomplished but also an appeal for women to continue to strive for equality.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Virginia Woolf, like Mary Wollstonecraft over 130 years earlier, advocated educational opportunities for women.
- Virginia Woolf was a member of the literary coterie known as the Bloomsbury group.

EXERCISE

Like Mary Wollstonecraft over 100 years earlier, Virginia Woolf was concerned about the lack of educational opportunities for women. One method of exploring this concern is the hypothetical story she writes in the “Shakespeare’s Sister” section of *A Room of One’s Own*. What if, Woolf asks, Shakespeare, the greatest writer of the English language, had a sister who was just as talented, just as intelligent as he? Would we now be studying Shakespeare’s sister just as we study Shakespeare? Obviously, her answer is no. Societal factors in the 16th century would prevent Miss Shakespeare from becoming a writer. Her natural talent would be useless because sixteenth-century society would not allow her the opportunity to develop it.

From what you’ve learned about the Romantic Period, the Victorian Age, and the early 20th century, would a woman in these three time periods have a different experience from Woolf’s hypothetical Judith? Provide specific evidence to support your answer.

Resources

Biography

- “[Virginia Woolf](#).” Chronology. Dr. Joe Pellegrino, Georgia Southern University.
- “[Virginia Woolf](#).” Learning: Changing Language. British Library. brief biography, digital image of Woolf’s handwritten draft of *Mrs Dalloway*, and explanation of stream of consciousness.
- “[Virginia Woolf](#).” Women’s History. Gale Cengage Learning.
- “[Virginia Woolf \(1882–1941\): A Short Biography](#).” S. N. Clarke. Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain.

Bloomsbury Group

- [“Archive Journeys: Bloomsbury.”](#) Tate Learn Online.
- [The Bloomsbury Group: Artists, Writers, and Thinkers.](#)
- [“Intimate Relations.”](#) *Cambridge Life*. University of Cambridge.

Text

- [A Room of One’s Own.](#) Project Gutenberg of Australia.
- [A Room of One’s Own by Virginia Woolf.](#) eBooks@Adelaide. The University of Adelaide Library. University of Adelaide, South Australia.

Guides and Discussion Topics for A Room of One’s Own

- [Abyss Notes/Reading Guide for Virginia Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own.](#) Dr. Elisa Kay Sparks, Clemson University.
- [Virginia Woolf, A Room of One’s Own \(1929\).](#) Prof. Catherine Lavender, The College of Staten Island of The City University of New York.

Audio

- [A Selection from A Room of One’s Own.](#) *Listen To Genius!* Redwood Audiobooks. Download for personal use only; not for distribution.

Video

- [Virginia Woolf.](#) Dr. Carol Lowe, McLennan Community College.
- [“Virginia Woolf’s Broadcasts at the BBC 1937.”](#)

Images

- [“Virginia Woolf.”](#) *Great Britons: Treasures from the National Portrait Gallery, London.*

8.6 T.S. Eliot (1888–1965)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify elements of Modernism in T. S. Eliot’s poetry.
2. Compare the imagery of Eliot’s poetry to the metaphysical conceits of John Donne or other metaphysical poets of the 17th century.
3. Identify religious imagery in “East Coker” and determine its purpose.
4. Determine what the choice of images reveals about the speaker’s character in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.”

Anthologies of American literature as well as British literature contain T.S. Eliot’s work. Because Eliot is one of the great modernist poets, both countries are eager to claim him.

Biography

T.S. Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri and attended Harvard University. After an additional year of education in Paris, he went to Oxford University and then back to Harvard. In 1914, he moved to and settled in England, marrying an English woman and working as a teacher and a banker. Here he met the American modernist poet Ezra Pound who encouraged Eliot’s writing. Eliot’s first publication, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” established him as an important modernist poet. Eliot began working at Faber and Faber publishing company, eventually becoming a director. He became a naturalized British citizen in 1927.



T.S. Eliot.

by Lady Ottoline Marrell 1934

Eliot admired and helped foster a renewed interest in the 17th-century Metaphysical poets such as John Donne. Modernist poets appreciated their metaphysical conceits, striving to achieve hard images in their own writing, images that were clear and sharp due to precise, concise language.

Eliot also wrote verse dramas. *Murder in the Cathedral* recounts the martyrdom of Becket at Canterbury Cathedral in 1170. The work was first performed in the Chapter House at Canterbury Cathedral, only steps from where Becket's murder took place.

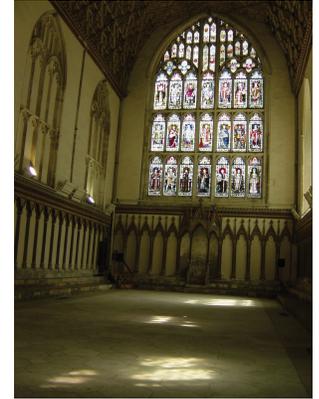
In 1948, Eliot received the Nobel Prize for literature. He remarried later in life, and on his death in 1965, his second wife worked to compile and edit his papers and manuscript drafts of his work.

Eliot's ashes are interred at East Coker Church, a small village in southwest England that was home to his ancestors.

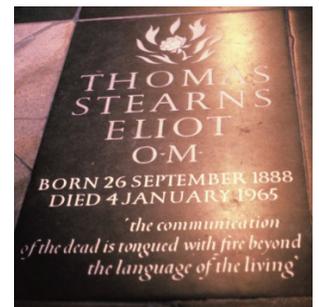
He also is honored with a commemorative stone in Poets Corner, Westminster Abbey.

Texts

- Four Quartets. available through subscription database *Chadwyck-Healey Literature Collection*. Eliot, T. S. (Thomas Stearns), 1888–1965 [from *Collected Poems 1909–1962* (1974)], Faber and Faber.
- "Prufrock and Other Observations." *Project Gutenberg*.
- "T.S. Eliot: The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock (1919)." Prof. Paul Brians, Washington State University.
- "The Waste Land." *Project Gutenberg*.



Chapter House at Canterbury Cathedral.



“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

Analyses of Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” often consist of as many questions as statements. The poem uses the modernist stream of consciousness technique, an effort to demonstrate the workings of the human mind. Knowing we are, in a sense, listening to an individual’s thoughts, leaves questions because we are not presented a consciously constructed narrative.

The title itself seems paradoxical with the pairing of the idea of a love song with a name as prosaic as J. Alfred Prufrock, a name Eliot suggested he may have remembered from the name of a furniture company in his native St. Louis.

The epigraph to “Prufrock” is from Dante’s *Inferno*. The epigraph’s speaker states that if his listener were returning to earth and therefore could repeat his story to others, he would not speak; however, since no one can return from Hell, he can speak his words. The epigraph leads readers of “Prufrock” to wonder if they are reading a dramatic monologue, in which the speaker addresses a specific listener, whether the readers are the auditors, or whether we are overhearing the workings of a human mind of which we ordinarily would not be aware. Are these words, like the epigraph speaker’s words, that are not meant to be heard by others?

This dilemma calls into question the reality of all the events of the poem. Is the speaker actually walking somewhere, or is he only rehearsing this possibility mentally? Is he imagining something that will happen, remembering something that has happened, or actually experiencing the event?

Brief Excerpts from “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

Let us go then, you and I,

When the evening is spread out against the sky

Like a patient etherised upon a table;

The first three lines of the poem provide the type of unusual, unexpected comparison reminiscent of metaphysical conceits. In this love song, with the

picture of a couple walking in the evening, the scene is compared to a patient under sedation upon an operating table, hardly a romantic image. The meter also emphasizes the incongruity of the simile: the first two lines are regular in meter, but the smooth rhythm stumbles with line 3.

There will be time, there will be time

To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;

There will be time to murder and create....

In lines 26–28, the speaker talks of preparing a face to meet other faces, of assuming a mask, a façade, to meet other people who are just as artificial, as counterfeit, as the speaker.

The references to the taking of toast and tea in a room where “women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo” suggest that the speaker is on his way to an afternoon tea attended by insincere people talking about topics intended to impress others. Here, too, however, we are left with the uncertainty of whether we are experiencing the events as the speaker does or whether the speaker is recalling or anticipating the occurrence.

The speaker imagines the crowd whispering about his inadequacies from his bald spot to his thinness until he feels like a bug specimen pinned under a scientist’s microscope. And all the time he wonders if he dares to “disturb the universe” by breaking out of the pattern of expected behavior.

I should have been a pair of ragged claws

Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

In lines 73 and 74, the speaker states he should have been a pair of claws, a crab, on the floor of the sea, silent and far away from the world, from the critical eyes, living strictly by instinct with none of the angst resulting from his current situation.

Lines 75 through 110 present the speaker wondering how things might have been, or might be in the future, different if he had the courage to force the moment from the triviality of everyday life to the important questions. At the same time, he knows he did not, or will not, have the courage to speak his convictions or to pronounce the ideas which are important to him. The following lines provide the reason:

And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,

And in short, I was afraid.

He is too afraid to step out from behind the mask he prepared, the face he shows the world, the façade of conformity that makes him act like the rest of society safely behind their masks. The meaningless ritual in which he and those around him indulge characterizes the modernist view of life. Having realized that he will never address the important questions, the speaker rationalizes his behavior with the thought that in life's drama he does not play a leading part, such as Hamlet, but only a bit part.

With the realization that he will never address the important issues of life, the speaker begins to imagine the rest of his life, sinking into an ever-more-powerless old age. The speaker claims in lines 124–126 he has heard mermaids singing.

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves....

In British folklore, mermaids are often evil omens, sirens luring sailors to their deaths. In this context, the mermaids seem to represent something beautiful denied to the speaker. On the other hand, the following lines picture the speaker at the bottom of the sea with the mermaids, again, as when he pictures himself as a crab, isolated from human contact. The sound of human voices drowns him.

Whatever the specifics of Prufrock's situation, the despair, the inability to shape his own circumstances, the lack of free will to make his desires reality all reflect the modernism of the early 20th century.

The *Modern American Poetry* website from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign provides a [summary of seminal commentary](#) on "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock."

Four Quartets: "East Coker"

Eliot wrote what would become the first of the *Four Quartets*, "Burnt Norton" and published it separately from the other three poems in a poetry collection in 1936. The other three poems, "East Coker," "The Dry Salvages," and "East Giddings" were written during World War II, but the four were not published as a whole until 1943.

In music, a quartet consists of four different voices, the title thus suggesting multiple voices in each poem, each quartet. Although the more typical form for musical quartets, particularly string quartets, is four movements, notably Haydn's quartets and Beethoven's later quartets often have five movements. Each of Eliot's poems consists of five parts.

The *Four Quartets* are often interpreted as representing the medieval idea of the four elements: air, earth, water, and fire.

The connecting theme of the *Four Quartets* is time, specifically the continuity of time and eternity and the role of human life and death in this continuity. Eliot conveys this theme through religious imagery. In "East Coker" humans are offered a chance to glimpse an ancient time, still present for those willing to see the continuity of life through eternity.

Video Clip 3

T. S. Eliot

[\(click to see video\)](#)

View a video mini-lecture on Eliot's Four Quartets.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Eliot’s poetry uses stream of consciousness techniques rather than clearly chronological narratives.
- Eliot revived interest in the metaphysical poetry of the 17th century because he valued its unusual and concrete images.
- Religious imagery provides familiar allusions for readers but in an unorthodox context and meaning.

EXERCISES

“East Coker”

1. Interpret the first line: “In my beginning is my end.”
2. In the first stanza, does the speaker refer to literal houses, or are the houses symbolic?
3. What depth of meaning is added to the poem by using lines which echo the biblical book of Ecclesiastes?
4. What is the significance of the scene in the third stanza of Part I?
5. Summarize the themes of time and of writing poetry in Parts II and III.
6. What might be the purpose of the change in verse form in Part IV?
7. What might the Good Friday imagery have suggested to Eliot’s contemporary audience?
8. Examine the function of age in Part V.
9. Interpret the last line: “In my end is my beginning.”

“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

1. In the first 35 lines, what descriptive details combine to form a picture of a less-than-pleasant environment? What does this particular environment suggest about the speaker?
2. In line 28, what is being “murder[ed] and creat[ed]”?
3. Why does the speaker imagine his life being measured out in “coffee spoons”?
4. Who is the “eternal Footman” referred to in line 85?
5. Identify the religious allusions in lines 75 through 110. What is the purpose of using religious allusions?
6. What lines depict the speaker growing old?
7. What do you suppose the mermaids represent?

Resources

General Information

- [T.S. Eliot \(1888–1965\)](#). *Modern American Poetry*. Ed. Jed Esty, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- “[T.S. Eliot, The Art of Poetry No. 1](#).” *The Paris Review*. Spring–Summer 1959. Donald Hall interviews T.S. Eliot.

Biography

- “[Biography](#).” The Nobel Prize in Literature 1948. T.S. Eliot. *Nobelprize.org*. The Official Web Site of the Nobel Prize.
- [T.S. Eliot](#). Academy of American Poets. *Poets.org*.
- “[T.S. Eliot 1888–1965](#).” The Poetry Foundation.
- “[T.S. Eliot: Biographical Timeline](#).” *Modern American Poetry*. Jed Esty, ed., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- “[T.S. Eliot’s Life and Career](#).” Ronald Bush. *Modern American Poetry*. Jed Esty, ed., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Text

- [Four Quartets](#). available through subscription database *Chadwyck-Healey Literature Collection*. Eliot, T. S. (Thomas Stearns), 1888–1965 [from *Collected Poems 1909–1962* (1974)], Faber and Faber.
- “[Prufrock and Other Observations](#).” *Project Gutenberg*.
- “[T.S. Eliot: The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock \(1919\)](#).” Prof. Paul Brians, Washington State University.
- “[The Waste Land](#).” *Project Gutenberg*.

Audio

- [T.S. Eliot](#). “The Waste Land.” HarperAudio! HarperCollins Publishers. T.S. Eliot reading sections of “The Waste Land.”
- “[T.S. Eliot](#).” The Poetry Archives. T. S. Eliot reading “Journey of the Magi.” recordings of “Extract from Four Quartets” and “The Waste Land.”
- “[The Wasteland](#).” *Project Gutenberg*.

Video

- [“Our Life in Poetry: T.S. Eliot’s ‘Four Quartets.’”](#) The Philoctetes Center for the Multidisciplinary Study of the Imagination. New York Council for the Humanities.
- [“T.S. Eliot.”](#) Dr. Carol Lowe, McLennan Community College.

8.7 Philip Larkin (1922–1985)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify characteristics of modernism in Larkin's poetry.
2. Define The Movement and its objectives.
3. Compare and contrast the meter and rhyme of Larkin's poetry to that of T. S. Eliot.
4. Compare and contrast themes of Larkin's poetry, such as time, death, and the isolation of the individual with the same themes in Eliot's poetry.
5. Describe the diction of Larkin's poetry.

Biography

Poet and novelist Philip Larkin, born in Coventry, England, graduated from St. John's College, Oxford and worked as a librarian. After his first publication in his boyhood school magazine, Larkin wrote and published poetry, novels, essays, newspaper book and jazz reviews, literary criticism, as well as editing *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse*. His acceptance of the librarian's position at the University of Hull, which he held from 1955 to 1985, coincided with the publication his poetry volume *The Less Deceived*, the first of his works to receive critical acclaim. His next significant book of poetry *The Whitsun Weddings* was not published until 1964; however, it secured his position as one of the most significant of later 20th-century British poets.

In 1984, Larkin was offered the position of poet laureate but declined, reportedly due to his dislike of publicity and, according to Anthony Thwaite, one of Larkin's literary executors and editors, in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, because he felt his "gift as a poet had come to an end."

10. A group of poets who used more traditional forms in opposition to the experimental structures of modernist poets.

Although Larkin's poetry displays a pessimistic, sorrowful tone common in modern poetry, his work evinces more traditional meter and rhyme. The British magazine *The Spectator*, in 1954, used the name **The Movement**¹⁰ to describe a group of poets

who used more traditional forms in opposition to the experimental structures of modernist poets. The Movement, including Larkin and his friend from Oxford student days and fellow writer Kingsley Amis, was criticized for its reaction against modernism in literature. Larkin's selections for *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse* garnered criticism for his perceived bias in choosing poetry in a traditional vein rather than works with modernist characteristics. Thomas Hardy, for example, whose work Larkin admired, is heavily represented in the volume.

Texts

- "Aubade." *The Poetry Foundation*.
- "Days." *The Poetry Foundation*.
- "The Whitsun Weddings." *The Poetry Archive*.
- "The Whitsun Weddings." *The Poetry Foundation*.

"Days"

Published in his highly successful volume *The Whitsun Weddings*, Larkin's short poem "Days" addresses a theme prevalent in modernist poetry: time. Indeed, the theme of time and the brevity of life commonly appears in poetry of all centuries. With a hint of the modernist trait of twisting time out of its usual linear construct, the speaker of "Days" at once questions both the actuality of the concept of a day and the purpose of a day.

"Days" is a question and answer poem, proposing two questions and answering both.

The language of "Days" is simple and colloquial, typical of Larkin's diction but without the crude edge of some of his poetry, perhaps most famously "This Be the Verse." The first question seems a simple, almost childlike one: "What are days for?" The answer, however, broaches the most profound, and at the same time the most hackneyed, of philosophical topics: "Days are where we live." Days are where all the meaning and the only meaning of our lives can exist. Both natural and manmade, the concept of a day enfolds all the thought and action that comprise human life.

The second question appears at the end of the first stanza, emphasizing the answer through its placement in a separate stanza.

The second stanza may be a second speaker, answering the first speaker's questions. Or the second stanza may more likely be the same speaker answering the

rhetorical question, perhaps using the common conversational convention of repeating a question before giving the answer. “Where can we live but days?”

The answer includes no sentimentality about how one’s days are spent, about accomplishments or relationships; there is only the brutal fact of a limited number of days allotted to each individual and then inevitable death.

“The Whitsun Weddings”

An example of Larkin’s interest in regular meter and rhyme, “The Whitsun Weddings” consists of 8 stanzas of 10 lines rhyming ababcdecde. In each stanza, lines 1 and 3 through 10 are iambic pentameter, while line 2 consists of 4 syllables with 2 stressed syllables (iambic dimeter).

In Britain, Whitsun is the name for Pentecost, the seventh Sunday after Easter. At the time this poem was written, the Monday after Whitsun was a holiday. The combination of the long weekend, the religious significance, and the springtime date made the weekend a popular one for weddings.

The speaker describes the beginning of an ordinary train journey to London on a hot spring Whitsun Saturday afternoon. Gradually he begins to notice that at each station a celebratory group crowds the platform and realizes that these are wedding parties, seeing off a newly married couple on their honeymoon journey.

With the speaker’s description of the surroundings, beauty is juxtaposed against the ugliness of the background even as the reader is led to question whether the beauty exists at all. The obvious, anticipated joy of a wedding clashes with the common and mundane. A wedding, a beginning of new life, love, and joy, is placed in the midst of everyday’s common, routine continuity.

“Aubade”

An **aubade**¹¹ is a song or poem greeting the dawn. Traditionally, an aubade portrays lovers who must part at dawn, so the song laments the anticipated separation. In Larkin’s “Aubade,” there are no lovers, only one individual, the speaker, but the poem still anticipates a separation: the speaker’s separation from existence through death. Each morning the speaker realizes that he is one day closer to death.

The poem’s five stanzas rhyme ababccdeed. In each stanza, the abab lines are regular iambic pentameter, but when the rhyme scheme deviates from the abab pattern, the meter becomes irregular. In stanza one, the disintegration of the

11. A song or poem greeting the dawn.

regular rhyme and meter reflect the speaker's descent into fear and turmoil as he contemplates the non-existence death will inevitably bring.

In the first stanza, the speaker describes the sunlight beginning to come into the room around the edges of the curtains until "then I see what's really always there." And then the speaker tells us it is "unresting death," always present but intruding into his thoughts in the quiet aloneness of dawn.

As the light strengthens, the fear of death "stays just on the edge of vision," replaced by the mundane realities of life. The fear, however, never goes away. Reiterating the idea of the first lines of the poem, the speaker admits that the presence of other people or drinking may temporarily push the fear to the sidelines of his thought, making the lonely dawn the time most susceptible to the encroaching fear.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Larkin's poetry reveals characteristics of modernism in its use of language and its exploration of time, the futility of human existence, and death.
- Larkin uses more traditional meter and rhyme, in opposition to the free verse of most modern poets, to contour the meaning of the poem.
- Larkin was listed by mid-20th-century critics as a member of The Movement because of his rejection of experimental structures favored by modernist poets.
- Larkin is noted for his colloquial, sometimes crude, diction.

EXERCISES

“Days”

1. Consider the purpose and the effect of the question and answer structure of “Days.” How would the poem affect the reader differently if the questions had been omitted and the answers offered more directly?
2. What is the purpose of the mention of the priest and the doctor in the second stanza? Why are they pictured as “running”?
3. What is the answer to the poem’s second question, “Where can we live but days”?

“The Whitsun Weddings”

1. Identify the descriptive details of the scenery the speaker notes, particularly sensory images. Do the descriptions change as the train progresses on its journey? How?
2. Based on the descriptions of the wedding parties, how would you characterize the people the speaker sees? Is there an indication of their socio-economic status?...of their attitudes about the weddings?...of the speaker’s attitude about the people? Identify character types that seem common to all the wedding groups.
3. Stanza 4 marks a change in the speaker’s awareness and interest in the wedding parties. What indicates this change? Why do you suppose he becomes more interested?
4. Stanza 6 includes the line “The women shared / The secret like a happy funeral.” What do you think could be the secret that they share? What does the descriptive phrase “a happy funeral” suggest about the occasion, about marriage, about the women’s secret? Is there a significance to making “The women shared” a brief line in the stanza?
5. Characterize the descriptions of London as the train nears the end of its journey.
6. In archetypal criticism, a journey suggests life’s journey. In the content of the last two stanzas, is there an intimation of the life awaiting the newly married couples?
7. Stanza six makes the point that each of the couples on the train remain unaware that they are sharing the same space and time as the other couples at an identical point in their lives. Why does the speaker include this observation? What does it say about the nature of time and human experience?
8. Consider the final image of the poem, the “arrow-shower / Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain.” Is this a positive image or a negative

one for the newly-weds? What are possible interpretations of the “arrow-shower”?

9. Speculate on the possible purpose of the truncated second line of each stanza.

“Aubade”

1. In stanza one, the disintegration of the regular rhyme and meter reflect the speaker’s descent into fear and turmoil as he contemplates the non-existence death will inevitably bring. Does that pattern persist through the poem’s other stanzas?
2. Describe the speaker’s view of death.
3. In stanza 3 the speaker notes that religion and reason have, in the past, tried to “dispel” the fear of death. What method, according to the speaker, did each use?
4. Why, in the last line, does the speaker compare the postman to a doctor?
5. Identify characteristics of modernism in “Aubade.”

Till then I see what’s really always there
Till then I see what’s really always
there

Resources

Background

- [Larkin 25: Commemorating the Life and Work of Philip Larkin.](#)

Biography

- “[Larkin, Philip Arthur.](#)” Anthony Thwaite. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, May 2009.
- [Motion on...Larkin.](#) Andrew Motion. *OpenLearn*. The Open University.
- [Philip Larkin \(1922–1985\).](#) *The Poetry Archive*.
- [Philip Larkin 1922–1985.](#) *The Poetry Foundation*.

Texts

- “[Aubade.](#)” *The Poetry Foundation*.
- “[Days.](#)” *The Poetry Foundation*.
- “[The Whitsun Weddings.](#)” *The Poetry Archive*.
- “[The Whitsun Weddings.](#)” *The Poetry Foundation*.

Audio

- “[The Whitsun Wedding](#).” *The Poetry Archive*.

Video

- “[Rare Larkin Tape Aired](#).” *BBC News*. England. brief video of Larkin reading from his own poetry

Images

- [Philip Larkin \(1922–1985\)](#). National Portrait Gallery.

8.8 Carol Ann Duffy (1955–)

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Locate and explain the purpose of vivid images in Duffy's poetry.
2. Describe the diction of Duffy's poetry.
3. Identify poems written in Duffy's role as poet laureate.
4. Recognize characteristics of the dramatic monologue in "Anne Hathaway."

Biography

The current British poet laureate is the first woman, and the first Scot, to hold the prestigious position, Carol Ann Duffy. Born in Glasgow, Scotland in 1955, Duffy was educated at Liverpool University and now heads the creative writing program at Manchester Metropolitan University. She was appointed poet laureate in 2009. Noted primarily for her poetry, Duffy also writes plays and children's literature.

Duffy's poetry uses direct, colloquial diction. In an article from the British newspaper *The Telegraph*, Duffy is quoted as approving of texting and social networking sites because she believes it helps young people develop their poetry skills by forcing them to be concise, condensing their ideas into fewer words, traits found in her poetry. Her poetry also uses rich, vivid imagery in the tradition of the Metaphysical poets and the modern Imagists.

Duffy's poetry is often cited as belonging to the category of post postmodern literature. She uses traditional forms such as the sonnet and the ballad as well as free forms and makes use of traditional genre such as the dramatic monologue. Her volume *The World's Wife* is a collection of dramatic monologues in which the wives of well-known historical figures are allowed to tell "their side of the story." Her poetry has a strong feminist voice, but she speaks as well on both personal and political topics, often giving voice to the oppressed and disadvantaged.

Texts

- “[Anne Hathaway](#).” *Folger Shakespeare Library*. Education.
- “[Atlas](#).” “Carol Ann Duffy: Interview.” Lorna Bradbury. *The Telegraph*. 3 Oct. 2009.
- “[Atlas](#).” “A Poem for Poetry Day.” *BBC Today*. 8 Oct. 2009.
- “[Syntax](#).” *The Poetry Archive*. text and audio
- “[The Thames](#).” “Carol Ann Duffy Reads Her Jubilee Poem.” *BBC Today*. 25 April 2012. audio only
- “[The Thames](#).” *60 Years in 60 Poems*

“The Thames”

In her position as poet laureate, Duffy created an online collection of 60 poems by 60 poets, including her own poem, “The Thames,” representing 2012, to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II’s Diamond Jubilee. [60 Years in 60 Poems](#) is a multimedia website featuring text and audio of the poems with BBC footage from key historical events and designs appropriate for each poem.

“Syntax”

The poem “Syntax” is an example of Duffy’s writing about language. Playfully rearranging the word order of archaic words “thou” and “thee,” the speaker considers how the organization of the words affects the meaning of her expressions of love. The concluding couplet, however, recognizes the danger that language sometimes fails to convey the intentions of the heart.

“Atlas”

In one of the first poems written in her role as poet laureate, Duffy addresses the contemporary issue of the environment. Picturing the mythological Atlas, the poem declaims the difficulty of maintaining the earth.

“Anne Hathaway”

From her poetry collection *The World’s Wife*, Duffy’s poem “Anne Hathaway” is a dramatic monologue in which the wife of William Shakespeare describes their intimate moments in the well-known “second best bed.” A favorite item of Shakespeare trivia is the fact that in his will, located in the [UK National Archives](#), Shakespeare leaves to his wife Anne Hathaway his “second best bed.” In warm, imaginative language, Anne Hathaway compares their lovemaking to Shakespeare’s writing. She also, in a humorous touch, accounts for her husband’s leaving her the

second best, rather than the best, bed: the best bed was reserved for guests, whose love must have been so inferior to hers that it compares only to prose, not to the drama and romance of her experiences. In the last lines, the beauty of the images gives way to a harsh picture of the widow's head as a casket, holding the living memories of her love.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Appointed in 2009, Carol Ann Duffy is the first female British poet laureate.
- Duffy's poetry uses both free form and traditional forms.
- Duffy uses direct, simple diction and employs rich, vivid imagery.

EXERCISES

"The Thames"

- 1. Identify the historical allusions in the poem composed to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II.

"Syntax"

- 1. How does the rearrangement of words affect meaning?
- 2. Identify the image of the concluding couplet. What are the possible connotations of this image?

"Atlas"

- 1. What does the use of the mythological character Atlas had to the poem's message about preserving the earth? Does the use of the character add to the emotional appeal of the poem?
- 2. The poem "Atlas" may be read as persuasive discourse. What claim is made? Is it stated or implied? What elements contribute emotional appeal?

Resources

Biography

- "[Carol Ann Duffy.](#)" *The Poetry Archive.*

- “Carol Ann Duffy: Texting and Twitter ‘Help Students Perfect Poetry.” Andrew Hough. *The Telegraph*. 6 Sept. 2011.
- “Carol Ann Duffy.” Writers. *British Council: Literature*.
- “Profile: Carol Ann Duffy.” Mark Savage. *BBC News*. 1 May 2009.

Texts

- “Anne Hathaway.” *Folger Shakespeare Library*. Education.
- “Atlas.” “Carol Ann Duffy: Interview.” Lorna Bradbury. *The Telegraph*. 3 Oct. 2009.
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- “The Thames.” *60 Years in 60 Poems*

Audio

- Selected Poems. *The Poetry Archive*.
- “The Thames.” “Carol Ann Duffy Reads Her Jubilee Poem.” *BBC Today*. 25 April 2012.