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KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Patgaon, Rani Gate, Guwahati-781017



SEMESTER 1

MA IN ENGLISH

COURSE I: ENGLISH SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY

SECTION 1: ENGLISH SOCIAL HISTORY

BLOCK 3: LITERATURE: MEDIEVAL TO NEO-CLASSICAL

CONTENTS

Unit 9: The Medieval Age

Unit 10: The Renaissance Period

Unit 11: Restoration and After

Unit 12: The Neo-classical Age

REFERENCES : For All Units

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DETAILED SYLLABUS

Unit 9 : The Medieval Age **Page : 153 - 168**

The Social Context, The Intellectual Context, Major Literary Forms: Poetry, Drama, Prose, Important Writers: Geoffrey Chaucer, William Langland, John Gower, John Mandeville, Thomas Malory

Unit 10 : The Renaissance **Page : 169 - 185**

The Intellectual Context, Impact of the Renaissance on English Literature, Major Literary Forms: Poetry, Prose, Drama, Reassessment of the term Renaissance in the 20th century

Unit 11 : Restoration and After **Page : 186 - 203**

The Intellectual Context, Major Literary Forms: Poetry, Prose, Drama, Novel, Important Writers: John Dryden, William Congreve, John Bunyan, Aphra Behn, Daniel Defoe, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, Richard Steele, Joseph Addison, Samuel Johnson, John Milton

Unit 12 : Neo-classical Age **Page : 204 - 218**

Intellectual Context, Features of the Neoclassical Age, Important Writers: John Dryden, Joseph Addison, Alexander Pope, Lord Chesterfield, Henry Fielding, Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, Edward Gibbon

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This is the third Block of Course I of the MA English Programme. In this Block, learners will be introduced to the literatures of the Medieval age, the Renaissance Period, the Restoration and the Neoclassical age. After completing this Block, learners will be able to see how the growth and development of English literature can be stated to have started with Geoffrey Chaucer, and how during the Renaissance period, English literature flourished like never before. The Renaissance period was one in which European arts like painting, sculpture, architecture, and literature reached an eminence not experienced in any age. While the literature during and following the Restoration, mirrors noticeable socio-political transition. During this period, priority was placed on the importance of 'Reason', which was considered a unique human quality that served as a guide for man. Neoclassical Literature on the other hand, refers to the habit of imitating the great authors of antiquity (notably the poets and dramatists) as a matter of aesthetic principle; and the acceptance of the critical precepts, which emerged to guide that imitation in later times. Subsequently, due to such practice, literary genres like epic, eclogue, elegy, ode, satire, tragedy, comedy, epigram etc. of ancient times started becoming extensively popular in the Neoclassical age.

Block 2: Literature: Medieval to Neo-classical contains four units, which are as the following:

Unit 9: The Medieval Age deals with the literature of the Medieval Age. The Medieval Age that started roughly from 1066 (the Norman Conquest) to the end of the 14th century, produced a variety of literature based on the understanding of the concerned writers regarding their society and culture, through an acquaintance with the impact of Feudalism and the role of the Church in various aspects of the life of the people. Therefore, while studying this unit, learners should pay particular attention to the literary and artistic pursuits as well as to the important social changes at a transitional period.

Unit 10: The Renaissance deals literature produced during the Renaissance, a term signifying "rebirth". This is a period in which European arts like painting, sculpture, architecture, and literature reached an eminence not experienced in any age. The development came late to England in the 16th century, and did not have its flowering until the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. Learners will have to examine why great playwrights like Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare had emerged during this period. John Milton is often described as the last great Renaissance poet. Thus, in this unit, learners will get an idea of how the Renaissance visibly influenced the intellectual and literary activities of the 16th and 17th century England.

Unit 11: Restoration and After deals with the literary activities during the Restoration that refers to the restoration of monarchy when Charles II was restored to the throne of England in 1660. The literature of this era mirrors noticeable socio-political transition. For example, the importance of 'Reason' was considered a unique human quality. The writers of this period were found observing Nature in their

attempts to express their beliefs. There was a strong reaction against Puritanism and an atmosphere of gaiety and cheerfulness replaced the stern morality of the previous ages. Society and Politics gained an upper hand and reflected their influence in the different literary forms.

Unit 12: Neo-classical Age deals with the literature of the Neoclassic Age. Neoclassicism refers to the habit of imitating the great authors of antiquity as a matter of aesthetic principle; and the acceptance of the critical precepts, which emerged to guide that imitation in later times. Thus, the Neoclassical authors started experimenting with literary genres like epic, eclogue, elegy, ode, satire, tragedy, comedy, epigram etc. In the field of poetry, the neo-classical ideals have been best exemplified by the poetry of Dryden and Pope. However, the learners should pay attention to the fact that the changing views of the goal of literary creation based on an extensive use of individual emotions, other than some classical rules, also marks the beginning of Romanticism.

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in “LET US KNOW” along with the text. We have kept “CHECK YOUR PROGRESS” questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. The hints for the answers to these questions are given at the end of the unit. We advise that you answer the questions immediately after you finish reading the section in which these questions occur. We have also included a few books in the “FURTHER READING” list, which will be helpful for your further consultation. The books referred to in the preparation of the units have been added at the end of the block. As you know, the world of literature is too big and so we advise you not to take a unit to be an end in itself. Despite our attempts to make a unit self-contained, we advise that you should read the original texts of the writers as well as other additional materials for a thorough understanding of the contents of a particular unit.

UNIT 9: THE MEDIEVAL AGE

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 The Social Context

9.4 The Intellectual Context

9.5 Major Literary Forms

9.6 Important Writers

9.7 Let us Sum up

9.8 Further Reading

9.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

9.10 Possible Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- locate the social and historical contexts that shaped Medieval literature in English
- identify the major literary forms that had developed in the Medieval Age
- make a reference to the important writers of the Medieval age
- assess the importance of Geoffrey Chaucer in representing the age
- discuss the significance of the Medieval age as one having considerable influence on English literature of the subsequent periods

9.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of this Block and it is to be studied in connection with Unit 1 of Block-1 of this Course. In this unit, more emphasis will be on the identifying and exploring various literary activities that mark some of the important developments in early literary history of England. The Medieval Age can be said to have extended roughly from 1066 (the Norman Conquest)

to the end of the 14th century, though scholars differ regarding the precise dates of the beginning and culmination of the period. In the history of the world, the Medieval Age is the middle period in a three period division-Classic, Medieval, and Modern. In this unit, you will be able to have some understanding of the society and culture of the Medieval Age through an acquaintance with the impact of Feudalism and the role of the Church in various aspects of the life of the people. This unit will finally hold in front of you an inclusive picture of the literary and artistic pursuits, and of the important social changes, which took place during the period signalling the transition of the 'Medieval' to the 'Modern'.

9.3 THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

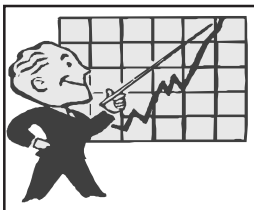
Though there is a tendency among some scholars like Jules Michelet (1798-1874), J.A. Symonds (1840-93)), and G. G. Coulton (1858-1947) to deride the Medieval Age as backward, primitive, and inhibited by dogmatic theology, yet this age was one of important social changes in which we find the medieval mingling with the 'Modern'. Even Feudalism, which was the characteristic way in which society was structured, was in a process of decay. However, to appreciate these changes, it is necessary for you to briefly look at the idea of Feudalism and the role of the Church about which you have already studied in detail.

Just as the 14th century saw the gradual disintegration of the feudal system, so also, it witnessed the decline in the power and influence of the church and the emergence of secular forces. The high ideals of simplicity and devotion to religious and scholarly pursuits began to crumble as the church gave more importance to the acquisition of wealth through donations made by people who were made to believe that they could attain salvation only through the mediation of the church and through keeping the church dignitaries satisfied by offering money and gifts. The religious orders-the monks, friars, pardoners, summoners etc. became more notable for their worldliness than their other qualities. It is interesting to note that Chaucer in his Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* provides a clear picture of similar

practices. In Chaucer's work we find how the monk does not like to spend his time within the walls of the monastery, how he hates to study and to indulge in manual labour as enjoined by Saint Augustine. Chaucer's monk loves to eat and is as fat as a lord is. The other ecclesiastical characters too provide examples of greater corruption. For example, the friar, the summoner, and the pardoner make money by dishonest practices like selling false relics. The bishops and other higher dignitaries were aware of the corruption creeping into the ecclesiastical orders but could do nothing, as they were too busy with their secular offices. With the passage of time, people like John Wycliffe raised their voices against the degenerate clergy. His followers came to be known as the 'Lollards'. Their efforts led to the translation of the Bible into the vernacular, which helped people to understand the teachings of the scriptures and reduced their dependence on the clergy. Wycliffe is regarded as 'The Morning Star' of the Reformation which, in the 16th century, brought about sweeping changes in the religious scenario. The king confiscated the wealth and land of the churches and monasteries, and disbanded the orders of monks, friars, summoners and pardoners.

Among other social changes, which can be mentioned, is the growth of towns and with it an urban culture. Along with London, a number of towns came up with population comprising of a few thousands. A town, unlike the open village, had a wall going round it, which offered it some protection from intruders. Civic spirit ran high in the towns with the people cooperating for such activities as digging of drains, repairing of roads etc. Agriculture was practised in the land outside the town walls. The inhabitants of the towns practised various arts and crafts like basket making, weaving etc. Among Chaucer's pilgrims we find a carpenter, a weaver, a dyer, a haberdasher, and a tapestry maker besides a merchant, "a sergeant of the lawe" and "a doctour of phisik" testifying to the emergence of newer classes in society. Each craft that was practised in the towns had its own guild to protect its interests and the modern trade union spirit was already there. An important development in the fourteenth century was the expansion of the cloth trade. This led to the emergence of the entrepreneur with a broader

outlook and money at his command, and he coordinated the different processes till the finished product could be brought to the best market. Thus, as early as the 14th century, one could see the beginnings of capitalism as an organising force in expanding the cloth trade. It is also to be noted that the towns had better amenities than the village and besides being the hub of different economic activities, they were great centres of culture. The guilds took upon themselves the responsibility of staging the Miracles, Morality and Mystery plays which brought people together fostering a sense of camaraderie among them.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How does Chaucer reflect on the 14th century religious setup?

Q 2: What, according to you, is the 14th century urbane culture?

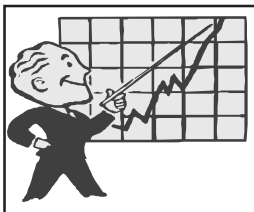
9.4 THE INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT

One of the most striking results of the Norman Conquest of 1066 was that the structure and vocabulary of the English language changed to a considerable extent. The change was so great that even Chaucer, if he had come across a manuscript of Old English poetry, would have experienced far more difficulty construing the language than with Medieval Latin, French, or Italian. Thus, you see that the literary culture of the Medieval Ages was far more international than national and was divided more by lines of class and audience than by language. Latin was still the language of learning and the Church. However, in the 11th century, French became the dominant language of secular European literary culture. The Norman Conquest finally imposed a French speaking ruling class on England following which an Anglo French linguistic and literary culture developed as part of the highest social classes. Geoffrey Chaucer was certainly familiar with poetry having roots in the Old English period. However, when he started to write his poems in the 1360s and 1370s, he turned directly to French and Italian models as well as to classical poets like Ovid. He read popular

romances in Middle English, most of which were derived from more sophisticated French and Italian sources.

Another facet of the intellectual context of the Medieval Age is that it manifested a lot of respect for the insights of ancient philosophers, most importantly Aristotle, who was a major intellectual authority in the period. Higher education was based on Aristotle or on the work of St. Thomas Aquinas. Scholasticism, which emphasised dialectical reasoning to extend knowledge by inference, was a method of learning prevalent all over Europe. Medieval philosophy was primarily theological. The main problems were the problem of evil and the problem of compatibility of divine power and human free will.

The medieval worldview was a coherent system of beliefs bearing on the social order. It was thought that Creation consisted of numberless but linked degrees of being from the four physical elements to the pure intelligence of angels. Divine will governed the whole universe. Nature was thought to be God's instrument; social hierarchy a product of Nature; subordination and unity were the natural rules for families, social institutions, and above all the state, which should be subject to a single head. The state was concerned with men's souls as much as their bodies. The godlike qualities of human beings had been deprived by the Fall, and they were periodically visited by divine wrath in the form of wars, plague, and even thunderstorms. Yet, they could enjoy some happiness in their earthly existence if they treated this world as preparation for the next and kept their bodies subject to their souls. This was believed to be the main task of human reason. Thus, you notice an interesting worldview emerging during the Medieval times.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What is the intellectual significance of the Norman Conquest of 1066?

Q 4: Briefly comment on the medieval worldview.

9.5 MAJOR LITERARY FORMS

You must have already realised that one of the important features of the literatures of the Medieval period is the devoutly Christian temperament. Although important for the development of narrative poetry like we find in case of Chaucer, this age has also seen the development of lyric poetry and drama. The following is a discussion of the major literary forms that had emerged during the Medieval Age.

Poetry:

The predominant literary form in the Medieval Age was Allegorical Poetry. An allegory is a work having hidden meaning under the surface. The underlying tone of most of the Medieval allegorical poems is religious. The allegorical outlook, in its full medieval form, implied the capacity to see a situation simultaneously under different aspects, each existing on its own level, but at the same time forming part of a larger order in relation to which its complete meaning is to be ascertained. In an allegory, the abstract was made concrete through personifications. Virtues, vices, and spiritual states were given tangible representations. Chaucer, who was very much influenced by the literatures of France and Italy, borrowed the allegorical form from France and used it in his poems. His contemporary Langland also wrote his famous *Piers Plowman* in the allegorical mode.

People in the Medieval Age were in the habit of going on pilgrimages to places of religious interest like Canterbury. The journeys to and from the centres of pilgrimage spread over many days. To enliven the journeys, people took with them professional storytellers and singers or minstrels. Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* is a compilation of tales told by the pilgrims on their way to and from Canterbury. Throughout the Medieval Age, many such tales were told not only in England but throughout Europe. Chaucer's tales were inspired by the *Decamaron* of Boccaccio. This is yet another collection of tales told by people who shut themselves up to escape from the plague which raged all over Europe in the 14th century. Though the tales, which were told by the pilgrims initially, had the didactic element, yet with the passage of time, gaiety and ribaldry came to predominate, and many people critiqued the tales as breeders of lies and corruption.

There are about sixty English medieval metrical romances. The romances dealt mainly with English history and its heroes. For example, *King Horn* and *Havelock the Dane* and the popular *Guy of Warwick* and *Bevis of Hampton* are among the best romances of the Medieval Age. Sometimes, contemporary history was drawn upon as in the case of *Richard Coeur de Lion.* This type of romance is often known as "The Matter of England." Besides these, there were certain tales in circulation and they formed the substance of these poems. Many of these tales, especially the Arthurian romances like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* are Celtic in origin. There are a number of recurrent themes in these romances, like the theme of the union of a mortal with an otherworldly being, and the theme of a succession of quests, which a knight has to undergo to prove his manhood. Another important poem is *The Pearl*. This poem exploits the device of the dream vision, more personal and private, and is notable for its aesthetic qualities.

Other than allegorical poetry and metrical romances, a large number of lyrics have also survived since the medieval times. These lyrics were intended to be sung. The best lyrics are either spring songs or songs for Christmas, but there are also lyrics on the decline of the year, the onset of winter, meditations on the uncertainty of the human lot etc. The association between words and music was never quite broken leading up to the songs of the glorious Elizabethan songbooks. There is one English poem written around 1200 called *The Owl and the Nightingale*, which falls into the category of the debate poem. The debate is between two birds; it begins as an exchange of abuse but later develops into an argument, lively and satiric. It is essentially a flying match in which the two birds are the antagonists. As such, it has an ancient ancestry, for the ceremonial flying match is a phenomenon much older than the Middle Ages and seems to have been almost universal. The poem's asset is the English vernacular. With the conversational language, the contemporary life of the people has entered the poem. The final impression is not, however, of quarrelsomeness, but of friendliness, intimacy, and sociability. Hence, you will find a plethora of allegorical and narratives poetry, metrical romances and lyric poems in the context of Medieval Poetry.

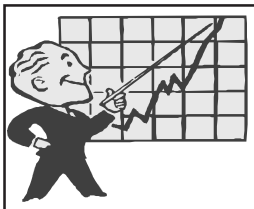
Drama:

In the Medieval Age, the rate of literacy being low, people were more prone to see and to listen than to read. Forms, which appealed to the eyes and the ears, were more appreciated than the written word, the ability to read being confined to a few clerics. In such a situation, drama was very popular. A number of Morality, Miracles, and Mystery plays were written within the precincts of the church. The plays were mostly didactic. A struggle between Good and Evil, Evil being personified in the form of the Seven Deadly Sins, was often staged. People were exhorted to shun vice and embrace virtue. The Morality plays personified the various virtues and vices and enacted the conflict between good and evil for the possession of the soul of each man; the Miracles were based on the miracles performed by saints. The Mystery cycle, on the other hand, reproduced a kind of history of humankind in relation to God from the Creation to the Last Judgement. With the passage of time, the religious fervour associated with the plays diminished. The plays moved out from the precincts of the church to the open spaces in the towns and secular elements began to creep in. The Devil became a comic character whose antics regaled the audience. It may be mentioned here that throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, apart from the dominant Christian culture, fragments of an older, pre-Christian culture–ceremonies, dances, games, etc. were still being practised, sometimes in defiance of the prohibitions of the church, as they were believed to be sacred and fundamental to life. The Mummers' Play, the Wooing Play, the Morris Dance, and the Sword Dance still survive among the folk. The fabliaux, which were ribald anticlerical tales, were also quite common among the new bourgeoisie in France and England. Chaucer turned to the fabliaux as the source for many of his best tales in the *Canterbury Tales*.

Prose:

Though the major imaginative effort of the writers in the Medieval Ages went into poetry, yet there was some development in prosaic writings too. During that time, prose was essentially a utilitarian medium. It was used to record information, to inform, to instruct, and to exhort. Nevertheless, it was a medium in which a variety of styles was available. Middle English

prose survive in various dialects, the range of subject matters being saints' lives, sermons and homilies, doctrinal treatises, scientific or quasi scientific manuals, chronicles, romances, and letters both official and personal. Notable examples of Middle English prose writings are *The Book of Margery Kempe,* an autobiography of a Norfolk bourgeoisie woman Margery Kempe (1373—1438), the sermons of John Lydgate (1370—1451), and *The Ancrene Riwle* written by an anonymous author in the early 13th century. It was written for three noble women who had become anchoresses, and was revised soon after for a larger community. It is a manual designed to guide them in the life they had chosen. Other than these, Julian of Norwich (1342 – 1416) wrote *The Long Text*, which is a theological exploration of the meaning of 'visions'. While her *Sixteen Revelations of Divine Love* (1393) is believed to be the first book in the English language written by a woman.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What are the different types of poetry that had emerged during the Medieval Age?

Q 6: Trace the development of drama and prose in the medieval times?

Q 7: What is a metrical Romance? Give Examples.

9.6 IMPORTANT WRITERS

The most important writer of the Medieval Age is undoubtedly Geoffrey Chaucer. He adopted modes, themes, and conventions of French and Italian medieval poetry to English poetry for the first time and gave it a new flavour. Chaucer is often referred to as "the father of English poetry" because of his contributions to the genre. However, the following is an attempt to recollect some of the important medieval authors without whose reference a discussion of Medieval Literature remains incomplete.

GEOFFREY CHAUCER :(1343—1400)

Chaucer is perhaps the greatest poet of his time. His early poems *Roman de la Rose*, *The Book of the Duchesse* and *The Hous of Fame* are influenced by the medieval French romances, allegories of courtly love and the dream vision poetry. Dante, Petrach and Boccaccio are the Italian poets who most influenced Chaucer. The memorable result of his contact with Boccaccio is the poem *Troylus and Criseyde*, which was half translated and half adapted from Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*. Chaucer's poetry grows out of allegory towards a larger, freer realism. His *The Canterbury Tales* is a portrait of the 14th century England with its different social classes, and their characteristic preoccupations. The tales are widely divergent and in conformity with the milieu, the characters come from. The characters are morally and socially representative; at the same time, they have highly individual characteristics, which distinguish them from other characters. However, most of the tales are based on traditional tales, old romances, and the fabliaux or merry tales.

Chaucer not only experimented with different literary forms like allegory and romance and introduced forms unknown to his country—the roundel, the virelai, and the ballade, but also contributed to English versification. He introduced a new stanza form composed of seven alliterative lines which he used in *The Canterbury Tales.* He sought to express in English all the graces and refinements he found in the poetry of France. Chaucer's contribution extends to the English language. During his time, there were at least four major dialects in circulation in different parts of England. Out of them, Chaucer chose for his literary activities the East Midland Dialect which was spoken in and around London. With the passage of time and the emergence of printing, the East Midland Dialect acquired the status of a standard language from which modern English has descended. Chaucer's greatness lies in the fact that he established English as the language of literature at a time when the dominant literary languages in England were French and Latin.



LET US KNOW

You all should note that Chaucer's *The General Prologue* does not simply portray a closed social order. It also reveals how this order was in the process of breaking down at a historically significant period in English history. Most of Chaucer's characters are by no means content to stay in their proper places but are engaged in the pursuit of wealth, status, and respectability. Thus, the conflict between the old and the new, between tradition and ambition is evident throughout the whole poem.

WILLIAM LANGLAND: (1332 – 1386)

Langland was another important literary figure of the period. His fame rests on *The Vision of Piers Plowman,* a Christian narrative poem written in allegorical form. It is a complete survey of human life under the aspects of good and evil. The poem combines universality of reference with an evocation of Malvern Hills and its surroundings in which Langland was born and brought up. Langland, like Chaucer, was concerned with the evils of contemporary society and presented in the poem an active representation of Christian virtues. The poem bears testimony to the poet's ability to handle narrative in verse. The alliterative verse quite effectively enacts the experience embodied in the poem. In *Piers Plowman,* Langland very beautifully manifests a concern with the corruption in the secular society and the clergies and its impact on the common masses. In the narrator's search for 'true' Christianity and salvation is found introspection and a condemnation of the established church systems. The significance of the poem is also seen in the fact that it was lauded by the thinkers of the Lollard Movement as well as by Wycliffe, who initiated the Reformation movement.

JOHN GOWER: (1330 – 1408)

Gower is another very important contemporary of Chaucer and Langland. His reputation rests on three long poems *Speculum Meditantis*, *Vox Clamantis*, and *Confessio Amantis*, written in French, Latin, and English respectively. These poems are well known for their moral and political

themes. His verse has the same social and cultural milieu as that of Chaucer. His best known work *Confessio Amantis* which written in English. It is a typical medieval collection of tales in which Gower combines the roles of a courtly love poet and a Christian moralist. Following Gower, morality began to heavily invade the poetry of courtly love, whereas in earlier literature, the allegory of courtly love, the allegory of the Seven Deadly Sins and moral allegory are distinct. Each of the tales in *Confessio Amantis* exemplifies one of the Seven Deadly Sins. Many of the tales appear to have come originally from Ovid and are among the innumerable tales, which were in circulation in this great age of story-telling that had become part of the medieval tradition, both written and oral. It is said that Gower's reputation had been eclipsed by that of Chaucer. But, the important thing is that he was very popular during his days and he exerted a heavy influence on the Elizabethans.

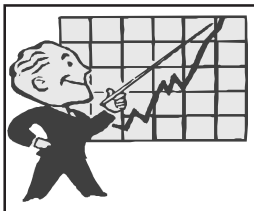
SIR JOHN MANDEVILLE:

The name of Mandeville, whose identity is anonymous, is attached with a famous compilation of a French book entitled *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* between 1357 and 1371. This French work was very popular, and it was translated into several European languages, including English. In the Preface to the English version of the book, it is stated that the author was Sir John Mandeville, a knight, who crossed the sea in 1322 and travelled in many strange regions. Mandeville is one of the earliest fictitious narrators in English literature. It is a series of unconnected descriptions and information as Mandeville describes the terrains, flora and fauna and inhabitants of countries he visited. The interesting point is that Christopher Columbus might have used it as a point of reference.

SIR THOMAS MALORY:(1405—1471)

Malory was an English writer, best known for his long prose work *Le Morte D'Arthur* taken from the epilogue of Caxton, the first printer of the book. Although Malory's identity is uncertain, Caxton said that the book had been written by Sir Thomas Malory. *Le Morte D'Arthur,* like the travels of Mandeville, is a compilation of 8 tales in 21 books. The French Arthurian romances are drawn upon to create a prose romance of great length and

detail. However diverse its sources, the book is written with a uniform dignity and fervour that express the very essence of romance and chivalry. It is a skilful blend of dialogue and narrative and is full of colour and life, while the style has a transparent clarity and a poetic sensitivity, which make Malory our first great, individual, prose stylist. Remote in spirit from the everyday concerns of its age, the *Le Morte D'Arthur* stands as another important stream of development in English prose in the Medieval Age.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: Make a list of the important authors of the Medieval period.

Q 9: In what way, do Chaucer and Langland represent the Medieval age in their poetry?



9.7 LET US SUM UP

By this time, I am sure, you have gained some ideas of the various literary activities during the Medieval age. The gradual collapse of feudalism with its hierarchical social organisation and the emergence of a more egalitarian order, the increasing secularisation of society with and the decline in the power of the church, the coming of an urban culture with the growth of towns and the appearance of newer classes like merchants and the trading classes, are some of the newer tendencies of the period to which the writers often responded satirically. You must have understood that the most distinguishing feature of the literature produced during this period is that it is markedly Christian, and the writers dealt with the gap between the Christian ideal and the reality in this imperfect world. As represented by Chaucer's greatest work *The Canterbury Tales,* this age shows how the ideals of religious order are set against the reality of everyday disorder. You have learnt that along with poetry, prose writings also developed in the Medieval age as you can find through the works of Gower, Mandeville and Malory.



9.8 FURTHER READING

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Sanders, Andrew. (2004). *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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9.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: Chaucer very successfully represents the 14th century religious order… …accumulation of wealth became more important than religious pursuits… …the monks, friars, pardoners, summoners etc. became infamous for their worldliness… …the friar, the summoner, and the pardoner made money selling false relics.

Ans to Q No 2: Growth of towns gave birth to an urban culture… …along with London, a number of other towns came up… …civic spirit ran high in the towns.

Ans to Q No 3: The Norman Conquest brought noticable changes into the structure and vocabulary of the English language… …it imposed a French speaking ruling class on England… …this was followed by an Anglo French linguistic and literary culture.

Ans to Q No 4: It is a coherent belief system… …divine will governed the whole universe… …nature was thought to be God's instrument… …and the social hierarchy was thought to be a product of Nature.

Ans to Q No 5: Allegorical poetry having religious undertones… ...long narrative poem like Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and Boccaccio's *Decamaron… …*metrical romances like Sir Gawain and the Green Knight…. …lyric poetry… …debate poems.

Ans to Q No 6: Prose writing in the medieval period was used to record, inform, and to instruct… …the subject matter includes lives of saints, sermons, doctrinal treatises, chronicles, romances, letters and so on… …*The Ancrene Riwle* is an excellent example of Medieval prose… …drama gained popularity through Morality, Miracle, and Mystery plays… …these plays were mostly didactic in nature.

Ans to Q No 7: A kind of poem that deals with themes of love, rites of passage, chivalry, adventure and interpersonal relationships… …knights, fair maidens and epic journeys appear frequently in such poems… …*King Horn* and *Havelock the Dane* and the popular *Guy of Warwick* and *Bevis of Hampton* are the best romances of the Medieval Age… …recurrent themes like the theme of the union of a mortal with an otherworldly being, theme of a succession of quests which a knight has to undergo to prove his manhood and so on.

Ans to Q No 8: For the answer, you are advised to re-read section 9.6 carefully.

Ans to Q No 9: In his *The Canterbury Tales* Chaucer portrays the 14th century English world of varied social classes and their preoccupations… …he portrays a closed social order which was in the process of breaking down… …the conflict between the old and the new was quite evident… …Langland's *Piers Plowman* is an allegory on human life under the aspect of good and evil… …like Chaucer, Langland is also concerned with the evils of contemporary society.

9.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: "Great changes, therefore, were taking place in Chaucer's day in the structure of society."(Trevelyan). Elaborate with reference to Chaucer's work.

Q 2: How does Chaucer's Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* represent the religious set up of his time?

Q 3: Discuss the role of the Church in the social, cultural, economic, and political life of the Medieval period.

Q 4: How did the newly emergent towns contribute to the cultural life of medieval times?

Q 5: Explain the important aspects of medieval poetry with particular reference to the different types of poetry that emerged in that age.

Q 6: How did the important writers of the Medieval age respond to the social and cultural context of the time? Explain with examples.

Q 7: Why is it that Chaucer is often referred to as the 'Father of English Poetry'? Discuss in detail.

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UNIT 10: THE RENAISSANCE

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 The Intellectual Context

10.4 Impact of the Renaissance on English Literature

10.5 Major Literary Forms

10.6 Reassessing the term Renaissance in the 20th century

10.7 Let us Sum up

10.8 Further Reading

10.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

10.10 Possible Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- explain the intellectual contexts of the literature produced in the time of the Renaissance
- discuss some of the most common characteristics of the Renaissance literature
- identify the literary forms that emerged in England during the Renaissance
- name the important literary figures who were influenced by the Renaissance
- examine the term Renaissance in the context of the 20th century critical discussions

10.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will get to read about English literature produced in and around the Renaissance. The term Renaissance, means “rebirth” in English. It is the name commonly applied to the period of European history following the Medieval Age. It is usually said to have begun in Italy in the late

14th century and continued, both in Italy and other countries of Western Europe, through the 15th and 16th centuries. This is a period in which European arts like painting, sculpture, architecture, and literature reached an eminence not experienced in any age. The development came late to England in the 16th century, and did not have its flowering until the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. Sometimes, John Milton (1608-74) is described as the last great Renaissance poet. Therefore, in the English literary tradition, the Renaissance implies that reawakening of learning which changed men's outlook to a great extent. In this unit, we will try to discuss the impact of the Renaissance on the intellectual and literary activities of the 16th and 17th century England in some detail.

10.3 THE INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT

While discussing the intellectual contexts of the Renaissance, we should also discuss some of the implication of the Renaissance in England.

Firstly, the Renaissance meant the death of medieval scholasticism, which had for long been keeping human thought in bondage.

Secondly, it signalled a revolt against spiritual authority – the authority of the Pope. The 'Reformation', though not directly a part of the 'revival' of learning, was a companion movement in England.

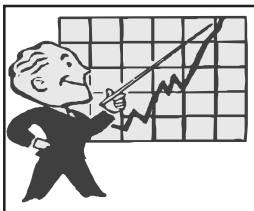
Thirdly, the Renaissance implied a greater perception of beauty and polish in the Greek and Latin scholars. This beauty and polish were sought by the Renaissance men of letters to be incorporated in their native literature.

Lastly, the Renaissance marked a change from theocentric to the homocentric conception of the universe. During the Renaissance, human values came to be recognised as permanent, and they were to be enriched and illumined by the heritage of antiquity. It is important to note that the impact of the Renaissance was evident on all the spheres of English literature. The Renaissance is often seen as the emergence of 'New Learning' because it approached the great classical works of Greece and Rome for its own sake, rather than for its use of Christianity. At the same time, the value of human beings as responsible 'individuals' to face the affairs of the society was restored. Soon, there emerged an interest in

imaginative literature as the minds of the people were steered by stories brought from 'new' lands. Subsequently, the reordering of society for happiness through laws and education became the goal. Along with the resurgence of the 'individual', there could also be seen recognition of human being's fallibility, weakness and limitations imposed by uncertainties.

The early thinkers, whose contributions made the intellectual contexts of the Renaissance more remarkable, are Montaigne and Bacon. Montaigne's discussions on the probing of human nature and Bacon's deliberations on "Knowledge as Power" in *Advancement of Learning* are two other significant developments that might have influenced the intellectual contexts of the Renaissance in England. Along with these, the emergent classical scholarship meant a direct contact with the achievements of classical culture. Soon there developed a new concept of civilization. Humanism became scholarly, stylistic, and ethical.

As you have been informed already, one of the most significant events that mark the flourish of the English Renaissance is the introduction of the Printing Press by William Caxton which replaced hand-made manuscripts with mass produced books. Subsequently, there emerged a large reading public who accelerated the multiplication and circulation of books. The Printing Press also made room for the translations of the mighty authors of Greece and Rome for the English audience and readers. Caxton became instrumental in publishing from Westminster, books like Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur.* The so-called humanistic revival sometimes resulted in sterile imitations of ancient works and styles, and a rigidly authoritarian rhetoric and literary criticism. In 1528, Baldassare Castiglione published *II Cortegiano* ("The Courtier"), to cultivate the idea of the Renaissance aristocracy. This was one of the most admired and widely translated of the many Renaissance 'courtesy books' which were meant to train the man of the court. Niccolo Machiavelli provided lessons on statecraft through his *The Prince* which became one of the leading texts for the preparation of a future king to rule. You should note that the famous Renaissance playwrights like Christopher Marlowe in his play *The Jew of Malta* and William Shakespeare in many of his plays including the history plays, directly or indirectly refers to this work by Machiavelli.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What were the implications of the phenomenon called Renaissance in England?

Q 2: Refer to some of the works contributing to the intellectual context of the Renaissance?

Q 3: How did Montaigne and Bacon contribute to the Renaissance?

10.4 IMPACT OF THE RENAISSANCE ON ENGLISH LITERATURE

Critics opine that modern literature starts with the Renaissance, and from about 1600 onwards, the language resembles the language we use today. Perhaps, the most significant trait of the literatures of this period is that the new stress on the idea of individuality and inwardness as is reflected in the soliloquies in Shakespeare's tragic plays. If you read about the relationship between the Renaissance and literature, you find that literature of this period is very rich and complex as the society was changing in some fundamental ways. The gaps between the religious ideals and the changing demands of the newly emergent society were becoming wider. Therefore, basically what we find in Renaissance literature is the tension between a traditional order and the disruption of that order. In recent times, critics have also tried to see how women were excluded from the dominant political order of the time. However, there were exceptions like the Countess of Pembroke, the sister of Phillip Sidney, who made her voice heard. There are however some important developments of the Renaissance which greatly affected the literatures of the period. You will do well if you concentrate on the following developments.

1. The Renaissance scholars of the classics, often called the Humanists, revived the knowledge of the classical Greek and Roman languages and literatures with a view to opening up the richness of the historical past, and to exploring ideas, materials, literary forms, and styles prevalent in them. Subsequently, these were made available to the

English writers. However, the spread of new ideas, discoveries, and types of literature during the Renaissance was made possible also by the new technology of Printing brought to England by William Caxton.

2. The Reformation movement had shaken the foundation of the rigid institutionalism of the Roman Catholic Church. This is an early form of Protestantism, which is strongly grounded on the individual's inner experience of the spiritual struggle and salvation. Subsequently, Protestantism came to be seen as an extreme manifestation of "Renaissance individualism".
3. Christopher Columbus' exploration of the world, the continents and the native populations, and the settlement by the Europeans in new lands, gave new raw materials to the literary imagination. One of the best examples of this is William Shakespeare's last play *The Tempest.* This play's main concern over the treatment of the native inhabitants by Prospero and others is perhaps derived by Shakespeare from a contemporary account of a shipwreck near Bermuda and other writings about voyages to the New World. More important for English literature, is also the way economic exploitation of the new world put England at the centre, and how a reaction to the prosperity of the English encouraged the development of a vigorous intellectual and artistic life.
4. Studies on the idea of the cosmos was another important development of the time of the Renaissance which had heavily influenced the literary cultures of England. When you will read about Milton's *Paradise Lost,* you will also get to read about the idea of the cosmos, which during that time, was divided between the Ptolemaic and the Copernican theory of the cosmos—the first taking the earth as stationary around which rotated the successive spheres of the moon and the various planets, and the second taking the sun as the centre.

The first and the earliest impact of the Renaissance was found in the humanistic literature that developed in England as exemplified by Thomas More's *Utopia*. This work emphasized the importance of individual men apart from their social rank or power. At the same time, the newly aroused

enthusiasm for classical scholarship resulted in the production of several theological and secular works, such as John Colet's *An Exposition of St Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, Thomas Elyot's *The Governour*, Sir John Cheke's *The Heart of Sedition* and Sir Thomas Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique*. A revival of classical studies had already developed in Italy with the rediscovery of Latin writers like Catullus and Lucretius who could steer the imagination of the Italians and who contributed to a new kind of aesthetic culture noticeably different from the Middle ages of Europe.



LET US KNOW

Some of the major literary figures in the English Renaissance are:

Francis Bacon, Thomas Dekker, John Fletcher, John Ford, Sir Thomas Wyatt, Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe, Phillip Massinger, Thomas Middleton, Sir Thomas More, Thomas Nashe, William Shakespeare, Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, John Webster, Ben Jonson, John Donne, John Milton.

You will do well if you read about them and their works in one of the good books of history of English literature as stated in the reading list.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What, according to you are the main characteristics of the Renaissance literature in England?

Q 5: How are the Humanists related to the Renaissance?

Q 6: Mention briefly the four major literary developments during the Renaissance.

10.5 MAJOR LITERARY FORMS

Since it is not possible to provide you a detailed picture of the different writers and their works, I suggest that you go through history of English literature books like Andrew Sanders' *The Short Oxford History of English Literature* or David Daiches' *A Critical History of English Literature* for getting

a firm hold over the authors and their works that come under the influence of the English Renaissance. During the Renaissance, there emerged rich and varied literary forms in England. These can be classified in the following ways.

POETRY:

The spirit of the age is perhaps best reflected in dramatic poetry. Blank Verse as a mode of presentation was firmly established in England. Blank Verse introduced a freedom in terms of metrical arrangements. Iambic Pentameter was made less formal than rhythmic poetry. More and more emphasis was laid on the way a poet could create a pattern, further used extensively by Marlowe and Shakespeare. The members of the "University Wits" like George Peele and Christopher Marlowe had already made Blank Verse a chosen style to compose their dramas. However, the real temper of the age was suited to the lyrical mood, and so the abundance of lyric poetry, like the sonnet, became a marked achievement of the 16th century England. You should know that sonnet writing in England begins with the efforts of Wyatt and Surrey only to be taken up by none other than William Shakespeare in later times. Then, the lyrical impulse is carried out further by John Donne.

Wyatt and Surrey became the first reformers of English poetry and style. However, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne and Milton are some of the greatest Renaissance poets. Their most favoured modes are epics and lyrics, and their central themes are both secular and divine love. Spenser's deviation from the Chaucerian tradition helps in defining the poetry of the Renaissance period to a great extent. Although Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1596) has much in common with Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (1386), in their use of allegory and romance, there is a marked difference. While Chaucer comically observes the disorder of love and experience, Spenser tries to impose order on everything. This attempt made by Spenser has direct allegiance to the Renaissance. If we further compare Spenser's sonnet sequence *Amoretti* (1595) with Shakespeare's sonnets (1609), we find that Spenser presents the impression of idealised love, while Shakespeare admits more of the bitter realities of existence. Such

comparative analysis will help you understand life and experience of a transitional phase under the influence of the Renaissance.

You will get another experience of Renaissance Poetry as you read the poems of John Donne and John Milton. In Donne's poetry, you find that he delights in the puzzling over the paradoxes of experience although the ultimate faith in God is quite secure. The strains and tensions of life do not lead Donne to despair. His poetry is largely an intellectual game representing the concerns of the age. However, unlike Donne, John Milton writes in a far more serious manner. While uttering the purpose of his *Paradise Lost* being the justification of the ways of God to men, he actually indicates a real problem. He was well aware of the fact that a few decades ago, God's order was taken for granted and nobody had ever felt the need to justify God's action. A major factor for Milton in this situation was perhaps his experiences of the Civil War of 1642-51, which had emphasised the basic difference between society's order and God's order.



LET US KNOW

Look at some of the themes in Renaissance Poetry as exemplified by different works and concerns:

Spenser's ***Shepheardes Calender*** (1579)—signified the 'Pastoral' setting

Spenser's ***Amoretti*** (1595)—provided the impressions of Idealised love

Shakespeare's **Sonnets** (1609)—presented the bitter realities of existence

Renaissance poetry often dealt with how the old Christian Universe got replaced by the concerns of the modern secular society, how the court rather than the church became important for everyday life. Many of the Renaissance poets tried to express how individuals were caught between the demands of their conscience and desires that resulted in a noticeable conflict between ideas and values.

PROSE:

During the time of the Renaissance, English prose too flourished. Due to the introduction of the printing press, prose became the common vehicle of amusement and information. The most remarkable element in prose is expressed in the literary romances of Sir Philip Sidney and the works of the University Wits. Such romances have their inspiration mainly from the tales of the great classical masters like Boccaccio, Cinthio, Bandello and so on. They represent the impact of the Renaissance on the English mind caused by the contact with classical literature. At the same time, it appears to be an obvious continuation of medieval romances. Among them, Lyly's *Euphues* and Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*are worth- mentioning. You also find that a number of books were written on politics, history and travels. For example, the prose writings of Thomas Malory (his *Morte D'Arthur*), Erasmus (his *The Praise of Folly*), Thomas More (his *Utopia*) and Niccolo Machiavelli's (his *The Prince*) are significantly responsible for heralding the beginning of the Renaissance. Out of these, Thomas More's *Utopia* is often considered the 'true prologue to the Renaissance'. Other than these, Bacon's *Essays* also bring the mind of Bacon and his wisdom into firm contact with the common readers.

Another facet of Renaissance prose writing is the birth of literary criticism, which indicates the realisation of the need to establish principles of writing. The literary criticism was concerned mainly with the status and value of poetry. For example, Stephen Gosson attacked poetry as immoral in his treatise *The School of Abuse*. Sidney replied to Gosson in his famous *An Apology for Poetry* (1595) which stressed the value of poetry. In Sidney's view, imaginative literature is a better teacher than philosophy and history. Literary critics of this era emphasised the importance of classical models. For example, William Webbe, in *A Discourse of English Poetry* attempted the first historical survey of poets and poetry, and Puttenham's *The Art of English Poesie* is the first systematic consideration poetry as an art. In addition to the above-mentioned prose works, there were pamphlets, theological works, sermons, translations, travels and such writings as Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. These works helped in founding the tradition of prose writing for the future.

DRAMA:

You should note that with the coming of the Renaissance, the medieval mystery and morality plays lost their previous status. Subsequently, there is a sweeping advancement toward regular comedies, tragedies and history plays. There was an attempt to introduce classicism into drama. Perhaps, the first English regular tragedy is *Gorboduc* written by Sackville and Norton, and the first comedy is *Ralph Roister Doister* by Nicholas Udall. Such works greatly imitated the tradition of classical tragedy and comedy. For example, *Gorboduc* is a slavish imitation of Senecan tragedy. Let me tell you in this context that the English dramatists did not come under the spell of the ancient Greek dramatist like Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes, but under the Roman dramatist Seneca, Plautus and Terence. The theme of blood and revenge of Seneca became very popular among the English dramatists. Later on, the "The University Wits" struck a note of independence in their dramatic style. They refused to copy Roman drama as lavishly as the writers of *Gorboduc* and *Ralph Roister Doister*.

Let us now pause for a while to discuss the "University Wits" and their contribution to Renaissance drama. You should remember that the dramatic works of many of the members of the "University Wits" clearly represent the ideals of the Renaissance. The term "University Wits" is applied to a group of English men of letters who flourished in the Elizabethan age under the impact of the Renaissance. The group was more or less constituted by some young scholars from Oxford and Cambridge. The members of the group were highly cultivated literary men who took to writing drama as their profession. They are George Peele (1558-98), Robert Greene (1558-92), Thomas Nash (1567-1601), Thomas Lodge (1558-1625) Thomas Kyd (1558-94) and Christopher Marlowe (1564-93). As the literary historian Edward Albert has pointed out, their plays had the following points in common:

1. There was a fondness for heroic themes
2. Their fondness for heroic themes needed great fullness and variety, splendid descriptions, long speeches, the handling of violent incidents and emotions.

3. The style in which they wrote their drama was also 'heroic'. The aim was to achieve strength, magnificent epithets, and powerful declamation. In the plays of Marlowe, the result is quite impressive. In this connection, it is to be noted that the best medium for such expression was blank verse, which was sufficiently elastic to be adapted to any method.
4. Their themes were usually tragic in nature, for they paid little heed to what was considered the lower species of comedy. The general lack of real humour in the early drama is one of its most prominent features.

While discussing the role played by the "University Wits", you must also acknowledge their influence on the succeeding dramatists of England including Shakespeare. For example, Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* directly influenced the writing of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* a few years later. However, it was none other than Christopher Marlowe who stands in the forefront in representing the Renaissance ideals in his dramas. I must tell you that Marlowe is rightly called the true child of the Renaissance as the protagonists of his most popular plays like *Dr. Faustus, The Jew of Malta* and *Tamburlaine the Great* show the spirit of the Renaissance.

After the "University Wits", the English drama regained its strength in Shakespeare. Shakespeare's compassionate understanding of the human lot has perpetuated his greatness and made him one of the leading representative figures of English literature of the whole world. His comedies like *As You Like It* (1599) and *Twelfth Night* (1600) depict the endearing as well as the ridiculous sides of human nature. His great tragedies — *Hamlet* (1601), *Othello* (1604), *King Lear* (1605), *Macbeth* (1606), penetrate deep into the human soul. In Shakespeare's last plays like *The Tempest* (1611), you can see the picture of the English maritime adventures, which is another facet of the Renaissance ideals of discovering new lands.



LET US KNOW

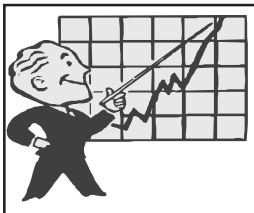
The Four Periods of the English Renaissance:

Early Phase: (1500-58) It relates to the heavy cultural influence of Italian Renaissance on English Culture and Society. Often this phase is called the preparatory stage.

The Elizabethan Period: (1558-1603) It refers to the period of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I from 1558-1603. This period is signified by rapid developments in English commerce, maritime power, and nationalist feeling followed by the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. This period saw the contributions of authors like Sir Philip Sidney, Christopher Marlowe, Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, Sir Walter Raleigh, Francis Bacon, Ben Jonson and others. These authors produced excellent works in prose and poetry.

Jacobean Period: (1603-1625) It refers to the reign of James I from 1603 to 1625 after Queen Elizabeth I. This period is significant for the prose works of Bacon, John Donne's sermons and poetry, Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy,* and the King James' translation of the Bible. This is also the time for William Shakespeare's greatest tragedies and tragicomedies.

The Caroline Period: (1625-1649) It refers to the reign of Charles I from 1625 to 1649. This was the time of the English Civil War fought between the supporters of the king known as "Cavaliers" and the supporters of Parliament known as "Roundheads". The most important literary figure of this period is John Milton.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: What are the main elements in Renaissance poetry?

Q 8: Make a list of the common elements among the "University Wits"?

Q 9: Mention some of the Renaissance prose works.

10.6 REASSESSING THE TERM RENAISSANCE IN THE 20TH CENTURY

You will find that many attempts have been made to define the term "Renaissance". For example, M H Abrams has described it as the birth of the modern world out of the ashes of the Dark Ages; as the discovery of the world and man; and as the time of the emergence of individualism in human life, thought, religion, and art. Moreover, during what we tend to call "the Renaissance," it is possible to identify a number of events and discoveries, which clearly effected radical and distinctive changes in the beliefs and manners of the people of the upper and the intellectual classes.

However, during 1940s, a number of historians replaced the term "Renaissance" with "early modern" to designate the period from the end of the Middle Ages until the late seventeenth century. They seek to highlight the period as a transitional one leading to the modern world. The notion of calling this period "The Renaissance" is itself a relatively modern invention. In fact, the term Renaissance was popularised by the historian **Jacob Burckhardt** in the 19th century. Instead of being a 'rebirth', the Renaissance is sought to be viewed, in its innovations and intellectual concerns, as a precursor to our present century. The different innovations made during this period may be regarded as the opening up of the relatively closed and stable world of the great civilization of the later Middle Ages, when most of the essential and 'permanent truths' about God, man, and the universe were considered to be adequately known. The full impact of many developments in the Renaissance did not make its presence felt until the Enlightenment in the later 17th and 18th centuries. But, the fact that they occurred in this period indicates the vitality, the restless curiosity, and the imaginative power of many scholars, thinkers, artists, or adventurers of this period.

One impulse in later 20th century criticism, i.e. in New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, is to look at texts in their historical contexts. You must be informed that E.M.W. Tillyard in his book *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1943) presented a cosmic world order that was believed to have governed human institutions and natural phenomena in the Elizabethan

age. The literary texts produced in this period were seen as an expression of a sense of order. But, most interestingly, where Tillyard found stability, the New Historicist and Cultural Materialists, while presenting their views on the literature of the Renaissance, found instability, difference and division. They made the point clear that in Tillyard's book there is no mention of the women and the poor, and the lower class people. Subsequently, they re-read the literature and history of the Renaissance period and displaced an essentially coherent and orderly view of the society with a sense of incoherence and argument. You will read more about New Historicism and Cultural Materialism during the course of this MA English Programme.



LET US KNOW

The idea of the English Renaissance has faced intense criticism by many cultural historians. Some have even contended that the "English Renaissance" has no real connection with the artistic achievements of the Italian artists like Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, closely identified with the Italian Renaissance. They tend to argue that, since the time of Chaucer, England had already produced a wide range of rich literatures marking its influence on the writings of the future generation of English writers.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: In what way can we call the English Renaissance 'early modern'?

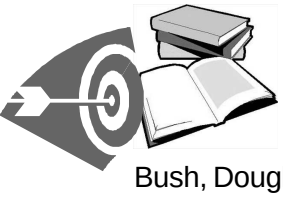
Q 11: Write briefly about how the thinkers of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism have discussed Renaissance literature.



10.7 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you have learnt that the Renaissance in England is marked by huge cultural changes and many technological advances, the most important of which is the spread of printing. Many of the concerns in

literature of this period are derived from efforts to explain emergent patterns in society and culture using different literary forms. You must have understood by now that it was also a time when the distinctions between the 'secular' and the 'religious' had clearly been recognised. In order to understand some of these tensions, we only need to look at the various works of literature and how they were consumed during a historically significant time. It was a time when the Holy Roman Empire was still considered an ideal view of history. What men could make of themselves by cultivating arts and science, represented a revolution of thought. The economic and social fabric of society were also changing. The rise of the middle class finally contributed to the evolution of a free society unlike in the time of Feudalism. Soon, there emerged a money-economy that was to transform the whole world in the subsequent times. However, a study of the different writers of this period makes it clear that intellectually the Renaissance contributed a lot to the developments of English Poetry, Prose and Drama.



10.8 FURTHER READING

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10.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: Death of medieval scholasticism… …revolt against spiritual authority… ...a greater perception of beauty and polish in the Greek

and Latin scholars… …a change from theocentric to the homocentric conception of the universe.

Ans to Q No 2: Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*… …Montaigne's *Essays*… …Bacon's A*dvancement of Learning… …*Baldassare Castiglione's *II Cortegiano* etc.

Ans to Q No 3: Montaigne's discussions on the probing of human nature and Bacon's deliberations on "Knowledge as Power" in *Advancement of Learning* are two other significant developments that might have influenced the intellectual contexts of the Renaissance in England.

Ans to Q No 4: Renaissance literature is rich but complex… …the English society had undergone changes in some fundamental ways… … The gap between the religious ideals and the demand of the newly emergent society was widening… …Renaissance literature basically reflects the tension between a traditional order and the disruption of that order.

Ans to Q No 5: The Humanists revived the classical Greek and Roman languages and literatures… …this helped in spreading the ideas, materials, literary forms, and styles steeped in them… …Caxton's printing press gave further impetus to it.

Ans to Q No 6: The Humanists revived the classical Greek and Roman literatures and opened up their richness … …the Reformation movement had shaken the foundation of the rigid institutionalism of the Roman Catholic Church… …the discovery of new lands gave new raw materials to the literary imagination… …contemporary discussion on the idea of the cosmos helped a writer like Milton.

Ans to Q No 7: Poetry reflects the spirit of the age... …Blank Verse became popular… …Iambic Pentameter became less formal… …lyric poetry like the sonnet reflected the temper of the age… …after Shakespeare, the lyrical impulse is carried out by John Donne.

Ans to Q No 8: They were fond of heroic themes and style… …they liked splendid descriptions, long speeches, the handling of violent incidents and emotions… …they wrote heroic drama in blank verse… …their themes were usually tragic.

Ans to Q No 9: Lyly's *Euphues... …*Malory's *Morte D'Arthur… …*Erasmus's *The Praise of Folly*, … …More's *Utopia,* Machiavelli's *The Prince… …* Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy… …* William Webbe's *A Discourse of English Poetry… …*Puttenham's *The Art of English Poesie… …* Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* (1595) and so on.

Ans to Q No 10: During 1940s, many thinkers wanted to replace the term "Renaissance" with 'early modern'… …they highlighted the Renaissance as a transitional period leading to the modern world… … for them Renaissance meant innovations in intellectual concerns that resemble those of the modern times.

Ans to Q No 11: New Historicisist and Cultural Materialist thinkers placed a text in their historical contexts… … they found that Tillyardhad not made any mention of the women, the poor, and the lower class people while discussing the Elizabethan world… …hence, Renaissance literature has to be re-read.



10.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What are the main developments in English Renaissance literature? Elaborate with examples?

Q 2: What were the major literary forms that developed during the Renaissance period? Discuss.

Q 3: Write in detail about the prose literature of the Renaissance period.

Q 4: Write a note on the development of English drama during the Renaissance with particular reference to Marlowe.

Q 5: What do you know about the "University Wits"? Discuss their contribution to English drama.

Q 6: Do you agree that the spirit of the Renaissance is best reflected in poetry? Explain with adequate examples.

Q 7: Why is it that during the 1940s, some historians replaced the term 'Renaissance' with 'Early Modern'? Discuss.

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UNIT 11: RESTORATION AND AFTER

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 The Intellectual Context

11.4 Major Literary Forms

11.5 Important Writers

11.6 Let us Sum up

11.7 Further Reading

11.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

11.9 Possible Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- describe the basic characteristics of the Restoration age
- explain the intellectual context of the period
- identify the major literary forms that emerged in the Restoration period
- name the important and influential writers of the period and make a survey of their literary works

11.2 INTRODUCTION

You must have already read that the Restoration refers to the restoration of monarchy when Charles II was restored to the throne of England in 1660. Subsequently, great changes entered the social and political life of the English people. The literature of this era mirrors noticeable socio-political transition. During this period, priority was placed on the importance of 'Reason', which was considered a unique human quality that served as a guide for man. Thus, this age is also roughly called by many as the 'Age of Reason'. Literature of this period was considered a tool for the advancement of knowledge. The writers were found observing Nature in their attempts to express their beliefs. There was a strong reaction

against Puritanism and an atmosphere of gaiety and cheerfulness replaced the stern morality of the previous ages. Society and Politics gained an upper hand and reflected their influence in the different literary forms. There was also a rapid advancement in science with emphasis on absorption and details of investigation. This unit thus introduces you to the various issues of the literature of the Restoration and the succeeding periods.

11.3 THE INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT

The Restoration Age is the first phase of what we usually call the Neo classical Period in English literature. This period expands from 1660 to 1785. The other two phases are the Augustan Age and the Age of Sensibility. The Restoration Age (1660-1700) is marked by the urbanity, wit, and licentiousness of court life, in contrast to the seriousness and sobriety of the earlier Puritan regime under Oliver Cromwell. The theatres reopened after ten long years of ban. This is the great age of Restoration 'Comedies Of Manners popularised by Sir George Etherege, William Wycherley, William Congreve, and John Dryden. The second phase, namely the Augustan Age (1700-1745), is signified by the writings of the leading writers like Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, and Joseph Addison who deliberately imitated the literary forms and subjects, decorum, and urbanity seen during the reign of the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus around 27 BC to 14 A.D. While, the Age of Sensibility is marked by a stress on new cultural attitudes, theories of literature, and types of poetry at around 1740s. In this age, there can be seen a turn from neoclassical "correctness" and the emphasis on judgment and restraint to an emphasis on instinct and feelings. Thus, you find that the literature of the Restoration Age and the subsequent times became instrumental in bringing lot of noticeable changes that influenced the writings of the authors.

The authors of the Restoration Age, turned to classical writers—to the Greek, Roman and Latin writers in particular, for guidance and inspiration. The writers of this period strove for harmony and precision, and imitated Homer, Cicero, Virgil and Horace. A brilliant set of writers had arisen in France, actuated by classical methods that excited a profound influence upon literature. Charles II had spent most of his exile in France, and being

attracted to its literature, he did his best to enforce the ideals in English Literature. The literary tendencies of the Restoration period were deeply influenced by the French writers who strove to repress all emotion, and use only precise and elegant methods of expression. Stress was laid on the value of form rather than originality of ideas. Expression was more important than the matter or thought for which correctness, accuracy, clarity, and lucidity became the watchwords of literature. The new spirit that emerged following the Restoration was above all critical, intellectual and analytical, where imagination and emotion were substituted with wit, intellect and rationality. A new spirit of realism and search for fact replaced the old Elizabethan love for patriotism and creative vigour. Love for romance gave way to love for realism. This developed a perfection of form, unbroken by pauses and thoughts of passion or imagination. It was an age of understanding, an age of Enlightenment, which was governed by a set principles and rules, laid down by the classical Greek and Roman writers like Homer, Virgil, Horace and Aristotle. This classicism was fostered and encouraged by the political needs of the age.

During the Restoration Age, the neoclassical ideals of logic, order, restraint and decorum gained momentum. With the emphasis on 'Reason' some poetic qualities of the English language such as imagery and idiom disappeared. There was a tendency to deal with manners and superficialities rather than elemental things and larger issues of life. By reflecting the vices and foibles of the society literature became an interpretation of life involved with the political and social circles, while the coffee-houses became the most powerful element to foster literary discussions. Within these circumstances, satire was the most important literary tool that was utilised by many of the writers of the age. The prevalence of satire, which resulted from the union of politics and literature, is another important characteristic.

So, you find that the Restoration is seen as a prolonged critical period intervening between three periods of English literature. All tendencies that developed during the Restoration Age became more pronounced in the Augustan Age or The Age of Sensibility. The critical spirit prevailed and literature was produced not by free creative effort but by conscious and

deliberate understanding of the conditions of the society. Thus, you will find that the 18th century shows a continuation of the social and literary forces seen during the Restoration. The most important part of the literature of this period was an interest in society and institutions rather than in the individual.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Why is the Restoration Age called the "Age of Reason"?

Q 2: What do you mean by the Restoration spirit?

Q 3: State some of the major tendencies of Restoration literature.

Q 4: Mention the three stages of the Neoclassical period.

11.4 MAJOR LITERARY FORMS

The Restoration Age marked a new advance in the field of poetry, prose and drama. There is a severance of ties with the Elizabethans both in matter and style of literature. The social and political conditions were congenial for the growth of different forms of literature.

POETRY:

The poetry of this age was distinguished by classical or neo-classical traits like balance, exactness, ardour and polish. Lyrical poetry suffered a decline although the most favourite form of lyrical utterance was the ode. Satire was cultivated with great assiduity and poetry became didactic dominated by intellectual vigour, irony and wit. Heroic couplet was adopted as the medium of expression in poetry in preference to blank verse, which was a favourite with the Elizabethans. Poetry began to be written according to rules and regulations borrowed from the ancients and the French. Realism was a marked feature representing the picture of a corrupt court and society. The appeal of poetry was to the intellect and reason. Besides Dryden, who was the best of the lyrical poets, we have the Earl of Rochester and Sir Charles Sedley who wrote lyrics dealing with love in an artificial manner. Other poets had neither the flights necessary for lyric nor the genius for writing lyrical poetry. The lyric almost disappeared after Dryden. Dryden

towers predominantly in this class of poetry. His two odes on the anniversary of *St Cecilia's Day* and *The Alexander's Feast* and his famous ode on the death of Mrs. Anne Killigrew are some of the best exponents. Alexander Pope too wrote a few odes one being *On St. Cecilia's Day* in imitation of Dryden's ode.

It is also interesting to note that several circumstances combined to make this age bound in satirical writing. It was a period of bitter political and personal contention, easy morals and subdued enthusiasms, of sharp wit and acute discrimination. For these reasons, satire acquired a new importance and sharper edge. Satire of this age is personal and vindictive and its effect is more incisive. Satire can be described as a literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking amusement, contempt, scorn and indignation. The main function of satire was to acknowledge a problem in society, and attempt to reform the problem in a comical manner. Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* is the best example of political satire while his *Mac Flecknoe* shows the personal satire type. *The Rehersal*, *Hudibras* and *The Dunciad,* are famous examples of satire written during this period. Pope developed the epistolary form of satire in his *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot.* The seed of satire was laid by Dryden, but it reached its pinnacle in the hands of Pope.



LET US KNOW

Heroic Couplet:

In the Neoclassical Age, the change in the style of poetry could be seen in the development of the heroic couplet, which had previously been used by Chaucer with great ability. The heroic couplet consisted of two lines of rhyming pentameters. The end of a 'heroic' couplet coincides with the end of a sentence. It is called heroic because it was the usual form for epic verse in English celebrating heroic exploits. This form attained a perfect finish and acquired great success in the hands of Dryden and Pope. *Mac Flecknoe, The Rape of the Lock* and *An Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot* are excellent examples where writers have successfully used the heroic couplet.

PROSE:

In the field of prose, this age makes remarkable achievements. There is no doubt about the fact that prose of this period was directed towards the purpose of practical life. Prose as a medium of expression was best suited for plain narrative, argumentative exposition and handling of critical subjects. The style is plain, lucid and clear, without aiming at grandeur or extravagance. The emotional temperament of prose declined in the Restoration period. Dryden was one of the great pioneers of modern prose writing in English. His force, vigour and rationality are directly visible in his prose works. The Diarists and Memoir writers of whom Samuel Pepys played a prominent role were the other prose writers. A multitude of practical interests, arising from changing socio-political conditions demanded expression not in books, but in pamphlets, magazines and newspapers. This led to the emergence of the Periodical Essays, which became popular with both readers and writers. It appeared at regular intervals in the form of journals and had an inherent social purpose. It aimed at improving manners and morals of the people by reflecting the life and society. Daniel Defoe published the *Review, which* appeared twice a week, but it met its end in 1712. Richard Steele then founded the *The Tatler* in 1709, which was followed by *The Spectator Papers* in 1711. Joseph Addison and Richard Steele are regarded as the founders of the Periodical Essays. Prose acquired utility and permanence preparing the way for writers who stood on the threshold of modern prose. Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels,* Richard Steele's *The Tatler,* Steele's and Addison's *The Spectator Papers* are best examples of satires in prose.

DRAMA:

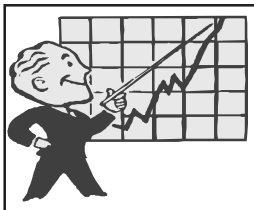
Drama took a new form after the lapse of twenty years. In 1660, theatres reopened and drama was revived. There was a complete break from Elizabethan tradition. The dramatists of this age criticised the old Elizabethan plays and Shakespearean comedies and tragedies. These dramatists turned to French dramatists for inspiration and guidance. Pascal, Bousuet, Fenelon, Malherbe, Corneille, Moilere were the dramatists who inspired Restoration drama. In the field of comedy, the Restoration

dramatists, headed by George Etherege and William Congreve, pioneered the **Comedy of Manners**, reflecting gaiety, foppery, insolence and intrigue of an aristocratic group that came into prominence due to changes in the political sphere. The plots of these plays were loosely constructed having scattered scenes and situations. The characters are types, and share some of the eccentricities and oddities of Ben Jonson's humours. The dramatist's keen interest in the social achievements and follies of the society is communicated through these plays. Congreve's *The Way of the World* is regarded as a classic of English comedy because of its artistic excellence. In the field of tragedy, dramatists cultivated Heroic tragedy with themes of epic magnitude and super heroes and heroines. The purpose was didactic with love and honour being the driving force of tragedy. The Heroic couplet was used as the medium of expression.

NOVEL:

Novel was still in its formative stage in the 17th century. However, in the later part of century, the English novel took a new turn under the influence of the French novelists. It was seen to be the product of the emerging middle class and the representation of their ideals and sensibilities. Novels mainly depicted social relationship, and the realism and contemporaneity helped the readers identify themselves in the social world of which they were integral part. The antidote to the drab and austere life was found in the romances of France which came to be known as the Heroic Romances of the 17th century, and which often dealt with the suffering characters adventuring in remote lands. The vogue of Heroic Romances took a new turn in the direction of Realism and practical problems of Middle class society. This change from romance to realism, from roguery to morality was mainly brought about by John Bunyan, William Congreve, Aphra Behn and Daniel Defoe. These writers exercised a profound and deep influence in the development of English fiction. Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678-1684) is a memorable portrayal of the psychological states of the pilgrims against the hostility and incomprehensibility of the contemporary world. Congreve's *Incognita* (1692) is a prose tale that combines romantic action with mock-heroic comments. This work represents the growing interest of the reading

public in prose fictions. In Aphra Behn's two important works *Oroonoko* and *The Fair Jilt* (both published in 1698) one can easily access the romantic actions of the characters in the contemporary society. While in Daniel Defoe, we find that the interest in combining social and material reality with the complexities of human personality helped him create fictions that fully represented all the aspects of the 17th century from morality to roguery, from politics to economics. Thus, you find that in this period, novel as a genre of literature was gradually taking its shape to realistically represent the society and its people.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Do you think that satire is the most important type of poetry that developed during the Restoration period?

Q 6: What is Heroic couplet? Name two poems where this form has been used.

Q 7: What was the aim of the Periodical Essay? Who were the main exponents of this genre?

Q 8: What do you mean by 'Comedy of Manners'?

Q 9: Briefly state the characteristics of the Neo classical age.

Q 10: Mention the significance of Restoration Prose works with examples.

11.5 IMPORTANT WRITERS

The following is list of important writers whose contributions made the literature of the Restoration period a remarkable source for the 17th and 18th century life and society.

JOHN DRYDEN: (1631 – 1700)

Dryden was an influential English poet, critic, translator, and playwright who dominated the literary life of Restoration England. He was the representative literary figure of his age. He left his indelible imprint on various branches of literature. He is recognised as the greatest transitional

poet who serves as a link between the Renaissance and the Classical age. As a writer, Dryden gained maturity very slowly. It was as a Metaphysical poet that he first began. From 1663 to 1681, Dryden earned his livelihood by writing plays. His first play *The Wild Gallant* (1663) was a failure. *The Rival Ladies* and *The Indian Emperor* established his reputation as a playwright. When the Plague broke out, he shifted to Charlton and wrote *Annus Mirabilis* a narrative poem describing the terrors of the great fire in London.

In 1661, he wrote his first great satire *Absalom and Achitophel* where he exposed the relations between Monmouth and Shaftesbury. In the same year, he satirizes Thomas Shadwell in *Mac Flecknoe.* His satires are masterpieces of political vigour, personal animosity and anti-puritan spirit. He paved the way for Alexander Pope who used satire more exquisitely. After these two political satires, Dryden wrote two theological poems *Religio Laici* (1662) and *The Hind and the Panther* (1665). He produced five more plays, which were translations of Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Juvenal and Homer. In his works, we have the reflection of both good and evil tendencies of the age. Dryden is known as a great artist in verse as well as in prose, but his reputation lies on his artistic excellence. As a literary artist, he endeavoured to find better literary forms, better vocabulary, better constructions and better style. He handled with dexterity the heroic couplet and gave English verse actuality and directness. Dryden exercised a great influence on the poets of the nineteenth century. His quality is artistic and literary but not very imaginative as we find in Romantic literature that followed.

John Dryden was the major poet critic, as well as one of the major dramatists of his time. The names of the other poets includes the satirists Samuel Butler and the Earl of Rochester. Other notable writers in prose, in addition to Dryden, were Samuel Pepys, Sir William Temple, the religious writer in vernacular English John Bunyan, and the philosopher John Locke. Aphra Behn, the first English woman to earn her living by her pen and one of the most inventive and versatile authors of the age, wrote poems, highly successful plays, and *Oroonoko,* the tragic story of a noble African slave, an important precursor of the modern day novel.

WILLIAM CONGREVE: (1670 – 1729)

Congreve was an English playwright and poet. He was the greatest prose comedy writers of the later Restoration period. In his comedies, he dealt with the upper class people with a view to exposing the fops and gallants, dandies and coquettes. His plays which treated the subjects of love, bargaining and intrigues, are satiric portraits of contemporary society. Congreve presents a serious outlook of life, and gives equal importance to sentiment and feeling while maintaining a balance between reason and sentiment. His excellence lies in his witty dialogue, which exemplifies his intellectual brilliance. His most satiric play *Love for Love* produced in 1695 is reminiscent of the Jonsonian Comedy of Humours. His *The Way of the World* produced in 1700, is a masterpiece of witty and sparkling dialogue, replete with sense and satire. The play represents the flowering of Restoration comedy. Congreve develops a tone that is radically different from that of earlier dramatists and handles his material with perfect balance and control, using a language that is lucid, concise and pointed, showing an excellent ear for rhythm and cadence.

JOHN BUNYAN: (1628 – 1688)

Bunyan was a Christian writer and preacher. He was a religious man and had great reverence for the Bible. His first book *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* is a spiritual biography where he relates his spiritual history, mean birth, wicked childhood and youth with intense fervour. Bunyan's next work *The Pilgrim's Progress* was published in 1678. It is an allegory that takes the form of a dream by the author, where a noble man goes on a journey from this world to Paradise. This book is loved for its tale as well as for its style and has enjoyed much popularity. It is remarkable for the beauty and simplicity of language, author's sense of humour and feeling for the world of nature. The extraordinary appeal which it makes is shown by the fact that it has been translated into 108 languages. Bunyan's third book *The Life and Death of Mr. Bradman* was published in 1680. It is the counterpart of his *The Pilgrim's Progress* where he describes the journey of the soul from this world to Hell. His last book is the *Holy War* which appeared in 1682. It is an allegory of a soldier's life. Bunyan is an imaginative

writer who has succeeded in writing a long prose allegory, filling it with the absorbing interest of a real human story. His vivid and plain style of writing is another remarkable feature of his works.

APHRA BEHN: (1640 – 1689)

Behn is a prolific female writer of the English Restoration. She cultivated the friendship with different playwrights. She also wrote novels, poems and pamphlets. Her most popular works included *The Rover*, *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*, and *Oroonoko*. Behn was such a writer who accepted the taste and attitudes of her day. Her first work comprising a series of letters was an attempt to exploit a contemporary scandal and it excited a great sensation in London in1682. Her best stories came out in a single volume *Three Histories: Oroonoko, The Fair Filt* and *Agnes de Castro.* She seasoned her narratives with facts, real or spurious, with familiar names and places, and played with the reader's sense of curiosity, surprise, wonder, suspense, dread, pity and indignation. Her prose style was emotional and inflated.

DANIEL DEFOE: (1661—1731)

Daniel Defoe was an English trader, writer, journalist, and pamphleteer. He is known for being one of the earliest exponents of the novel form, as he helped to popularise the form in Britain and along with Richardson. Daniel Defoe was the first great novelist who introduced the new technique of realism. He was a pioneer among the writers who invented narrative with a sense of reality and introduced the technique of circumstantial evidence. He presents his accounts in such a way as if he is a witness to all the incidents and events he has narrated. Defoe introduced verisimilitude in narration and made his characters verify one another's testimony. His greatest work *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is a book of adventure loved by all. Realism and morality comes to the forefront in this novel. Defoe's message to the middle class is to be patient, industrious and honest. In short, *Robinson Crusoe* humanises adventure and makes it a thing of realism and morality. His other popular work is *Moll Flanders* which is often regarded as a female counterpart of *Robinson Crusoe.* Defoe had contributed a lot to the idea of English novel by introducing realism and

morality. He reconstructed prose fiction and made the novel an independent art form.

ALEXANDER POPE: (1688 – 1744)

Pope was an 18th century English poet, best known for verse satires and the translation of Homer. Pope was the most important figures in the 18th century poetry. He exemplified all the essential qualities of the classical school of poetry. The evolution of Pope's poetic career is generally divided into four periods. In the first, he wrote his *Pastorals, Windsor Forest, Essay on Criticism* and *The Rape of the Lock.* In the second period we get his *Translations of Homer*. In the third, which is the best period of Pope' life, we have the *Dunciad* as well as his *Epistles.* In the forth period, Pope wrote the philosophical *Essay on Man* and *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot.* He introduced in his poetry the qualities of terseness, condensation, exactness, correctness, precision and finish. Pope is generally regarded as one of the great masters of poetic technique. He excelled in expressing his thoughts in the most terse and neat manner. Pope made poetry a vehicle for the satirical exposure of the foibles and weaknesses, using it as an instrument for attacking his enemies. His satires are trenchant and direct. He ranks high among the satirists of England and is often placed in similar rank with Dryden. His poetry lacked imagination but he used the heroic couplet with skill and introduced to English poetry the diction and language of the ancients. He sought to model his style in conformity with the ancient writers of Greece and Rome. Pope is the only poet who has pictured the society of his time.

JONATHAN SWIFT: (1667 – 1745)

Swift was an Anglo-Irish satirist, essayist, political pamphleteer, poet and cleric. He is remembered for works such as *Gulliver's Travels*, *A Modest Proposal*, *A Journal to Stella*, *The Battle of the Books*, and *A Tale of a Tub*. Swift is probably the foremost prose satirist in the English language. The interesting point is that he originally published all of his works under pseudonyms—such as Lemuel Gulliver, Isaac Bickerstaff, M.B. Drapier. However, all his writings bear the stamp of his unique personality. *A Tale of the Tub* is one of the best and most characteristic of Swift's writings. It is a

brilliant satire on Roman Catholics and Calvinists. *Gulliver's Travels,* published in 1726, is by far the most famous of all his works. Its charm lies in its air of artless authenticity. This is a satire which is more scathing and universal, the last book being the most powerful indictment of humanity ever penned. Swift was highly original and practical. He was indifferent to fame publishing very little in his own name. His style was perfect, clear, precise, exact and absolutely free from rhetorical devices.

RICHARD STEELE: (1672 – 1729)

Steele was an Irish writer and politician, who co-founded with Joseph Addison the magazine *The Spectator*. He took major initiatives in enhancing the periodical publication in the 18th century. He launched *The Tatler* in 1709 with an aim of mingling instruction with amusement. He decided to reform morals by laughing at frivolities. As a writer, Steele is remarkable for his versatility in conceiving humorous types of characters. For the wide range of his experience with which he adapts himself to his subject matter, he remains famous. His humour is broad and less restrained with a touch of pathos that is reminiscent of Oliver Goldsmith. Steele worked in close alliance with Addison.

JOSEPH ADDISON: (1672 – 1719)

Addison was an English essayist, poet and playwright. He is remembered alongside his long-standing friend, Richard Steele, with whom he founded the magazine entitled *The Spectator in 1711*. To the readers of the succeeding generations, Addison appeals more as an essayist. His contribution was to the flourish of the periodical essay is worth mentioning. Along with social and moral reform, the aim of *The Spectator Papers* was to represent a faithful picture of the eighteenth century. The instruments used by Addison were humour and satire. He knew how to use ridicule without being virulent or violent. He raised a vehement attack on the vanities and vices of the time in a moderate and gentle manner. Addison's prose style is lucid and precise as that of Jonathan Swift. Addison may be said to have created and wholly perfected English prose as a powerful instrument for expressing social thought.

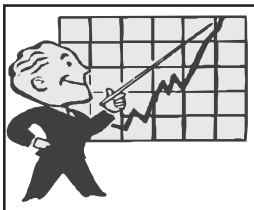
DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON: (1709—1784)

Popularly known as Dr. Johnson, Samuel Johnson made lasting contributions to English literature. He was a poet, essayist, moralist, literary critic, biographer, editor and lexicographer. He was a devout Anglican and is often described as "arguably the most distinguished man of letters in English history". He began his career writing reports of the debates in the Parliament. In 1744, he published *Life of Richard Savage* and in 1747 he announced his plan of writing his famous dictionary. The dictionary *A Dictionary of the English Language* was published in 1755. This was followed by *The Rambler*, a paper modelled on the *Spectator*. Johnson began writing his masterpiece *The Lives of Poets* in 1777. It remains one of the best books of biographical criticism in English. It is transparently honest and is full of common sense exemplifying its author's immense knowledge of life. He is remembered chiefly as a conversationalist and is also the subject of "the most famous single work of biographical art in the whole of literature": James Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson*.

JOHN MILTON: (1608 – 1674)

Milton was an English poet, polemicist, and civil servant for the Commonwealth of England under Oliver Cromwell. He is best known for his epic poem *Paradise Lost*. Milton's work can be divided into three periods. **The first period** covers his poetry up to 1640. In his period, he wrote "Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity", "On Shakespeare", "On Arriving at the Age of Twenty three", "L'Allegro" (The Happy Man) and "II Penseroso" (The Serious Man), the masque *Comus*, the pastoral elegy "Lycidas", and a number of sonnets including the famous autobiographical sonnet "Twenty Third Birthday". Milton's **second period**, which begins from 1638 to 1660, is one of prose writing. The most important political prose writing can be seen in pamphlets like *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, Areopagitica or A speech for the liberty of unlicensed printing, The Image Breaker, First Defence of the English People (written in Latin), The Second Defence of the People of England* and so on. Milton's **third and last period** significantly, coincides with the 14 years of the Restoration from 1660 to 1674. This was the period in which blind Milton finished *Paradise Lost.*

So, you find that Milton was a polemical writer and he wrote at a time of religious flux and political upheaval in England. Hence, naturally his poetry and prose addressed various urgent and contemporary issues.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: Make a list of the important authors of the Restoration age?

Q 12: Who in your opinion serves as the link between the Classical and the Restoration age?

Q 13: What significance does Daniel Defoe's name carry?

Q 14: Comment on the role played by Steele, Addison and Swift as writers of their age.



11.6 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you must have seen that a critical spirit dominated both the Restoration and the succeeding periods. Most interestingly, imagination and emotion were substituted by wit, intellect and rationality. You have read that it was an age of understanding, an age of enlightenment, which was governed by a set of rules, laid down by the classical writers. The age is also known as the Neoclassical age as there is a great allegiance to the classical masters of Greece and Rome. This age was also influenced by French writers. It was an age of prose and reason. Satire was perhaps the most favourite form employed by the writers of this period. The Heroic Couplet took the place of blank verse in poetry. Restoration dramatists founded the Comedy of Manners. Precision, neatness, order and rationality was emphasized, and form was considered more important than content. In the field of prose writing, the Periodical Essay gained tremendous popularity during this age. The important writers of this period are: Dryden, Congreve, Pope, Swift, Bunyan, Defoe, Steele, Addison and Johnson. You will do well if you consult some more books available in the Further Reading list, and try to get a better understanding of this age.



11.7 FURTHER READING

Abrams, M. H. (2003). *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (7th Edition). Singapore: Thomson Asia Pte Ltd.

Daiches, David: (1984). *A Critical History of English Literature*. Vol. III, Allied Publishers Private Ltd, Delhi.

Ford, Boris. (1982). *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature* (From Dryden to Johnson), Penguin Books Ltd. Harmmondsworth, England.

Sanders, Andrew. (2002). *A Short Oxford History of English Literature*. Oxford University Press: London.

11.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: It was mainly because human 'Reason' was considered a unique quality that served as a guide for man… …there was a new interest in the classical ideas of logic, order, restraint and decorum… …satire was the tool employed by the writers of this period.

Ans to Q No 2: The Restoration spirit was critical, intellectual and analytical… …imagination was substituted by wit, intellect and rationality… …patriotism got replaced by realism and search for fact.... …correctness and neatness of expression was emphasised.

Ans to Q No 3: Restoration literature dealt with human manners and superficialities… …literature interpreted political and social circles… …satire became an important literary tool helping to unite politics with literature… …these were also the tendencies seen in the Augustan Age or The Age of Pope.

Ans to Q No 4: Restoration Age…. …Augustan Age… …Age of Sensibility.

Ans to Q No 5: Yes… …the circumstances of the age led to writing satirical poetry… …the bitter political and personal contention, sharp wit and acute discrimination gave new impetus to the satires… ....the main function of satire was to acknowledge a problem in society which

needed reform… …Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* and *Mac Flecknoe,* Pope's *The Dunciad* are the famous examples of satire.

Ans to Q No 6: It is style of writing poetry… …it consists of two lines of rhyming pentameters… … called 'heroic' because it was the common form for epic… …Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe* and Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* are two of the famous examples.

Ans to Q No 7: The aim of the Periodical Essay was to improve manners and morals of the people by reflecting life and society… …Richard Steele and Joseph Addison were the most famous practitioner.

Ans to Q No 8: Comedy of Manners reflected the gaiety, foppery, insolence and intrigue of an aristocratic class… …they presented characters who are more like types… …the playwright shows a keen interest in addressing the follies of the society… …Congreve's *The Way of the World* and George Etherege's *She Would If She Could* are two excellent examples.

Ans to Q No 9: The authors exhibited a strong sense of traditionalism… …literature became the perfection of skills… …human beings became integral to social organizations… …arts reflected representative characteristics and widely shared experiences… …law of measure and the acceptance of limits of one's freedom was willy-nilly accepted.

Ans to Q No 10: Prose was directed to the purpose of practical life… …it was a medium of expression for plain narrative, argumentative exposition and handling of critical subjects… …Dryden used powerful prose, Samuel Pepys wrote diary… …pamphlets, magazines and newspapers emerged to address multiple interests… …Periodical Essays emerged.

Ans to Q No 11: John Dryden… …William Congreve… …John Bunyan… …Aphra Behn… …Daniel Defoe… …Alexander Pope… …Jonathan Swift… …Richard Steele… …Joseph Addison… …Dr. Samuel Johnson… …John Milton

Ans to Q No 12: He was John Dryden… …as an artist he endeavoured to find better literary forms, better vocabulary, better constructions and better style… …he handled the heroic couplet with dexterity.

Ans to Q No 13: He is the first novelist who introduced realism and circumstantial evidence… …he introduced verisimilitude in narration… …his novel *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* reconstructed prose fiction and differentiated the novel as an independent art form.

Ans to Q No 14: For the answer, section 11.5 is to be referred.



11.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the main characteristics of the Restoration Age.

Q 2: Write a note on the development of prose following the Restoration of Monarchy.

Q 3: Discuss the main forms of poetry that emerged during the Restoration period with particular reference to two important poets.

Q 4: Write a note on the changes in the field of drama in the Restoration Age.

Q 5: Discuss the main features of Dryden and Pope as satirists.

Q 6: What was Daniel Defoe's contribution to the development of modern English narratives?

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UNIT 12: NEO-CLASSICAL AGE

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Learning Objectives

12.2 Introduction

12.3 Intellectual Context

12.4 Features of the Neoclassical Age

12.5 Important Writers and Their Works

12.6 Let us Sum up

12.7 Further Reading

12.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

12.9 Possible Questions

12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- enlist the general tendencies of the Neo-classical Age
- trace the intellectual inspirations that led to the development of Neo Classicism
- identify the major literary forms that flourished during the Romantic age
- make special mention of the major Neo classical writers and their works
- appreciate the literary achievements of the Neoclassical Age

12.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with the Neoclassic Age in England that spans the 140 years or so after the Restoration (1660). Historians have often tried to 'define' the term neoclassicism, as though it denoted a single essential feature, which was shared by all the major writings of the age to varying degrees. However, the course of literary events during the age and the varied definitions of Neo classicism that are available are either so vague or so specific in addressing the great range and variety of the literary

phenomena. One useful way that you can adopt is to specify the salient attributes of literary theory and practice used and shared by a number of important Neo classical writers, which also serve to distinguish them from many outstanding writers of the Romantic Period. Thus, in this unit, you will be briefed on the intellectual contexts of the Neoclassical Age, its salient Features, the important writers and their works.

12.3 INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT

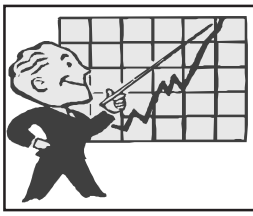
[Adapted from the Oxford Companion to English Literature]

Neoclassicism, as you must have understood by now, refers to the habit of imitating the great authors of antiquity (notably the poets and dramatists) as a matter of aesthetic principle; and the acceptance of the critical precepts which emerged to guide that imitation in later times. Medieval writers had often used classical works for models, but Petrarch in the 14th century was the first to do so because he considered it to be the only way to produce great literature. Thus, literary genres like epic, eclogue, elegy, ode, satire, tragedy, comedy, epigram etc. of ancient times started becoming extensively popular. At the beginning of the 16th century, the recovery of the previously neglected Aristotle's *Poetics* provoked an attempt to establish rules for the use of the ancient genres. The Italian theoretician **Lodovico Castelvetro** (1505–1571) and French scholar **Joseph Justus Scaliger** (1540–1609) imprisoned the notion of 'imitation' within a rigid framework of rules, following which the flexibility of ancient practice offered little precedent. The most famous of their inventions was the observance of the dramatic unities of time, place, and action that won great support in France where a new generation of playwrights in the 1620s and 1630s was eager to attract a more educated public.

Up to the last quarter of the 17th century, Neo-classicism had little influence in England. The imitation of classical models was less common than on the Continent and, except for Samuel Johnson, no important writer paid strict attention to the rules the humanist critics had formulated. Dryden also produced *All for Love* (1677) and Addison his *Cato* (1713), which has

been called the only correct Neo-classical tragedy in English; but the fashion, was outdated. The usual excuse for the rules was that they helped writers to be true to nature. Pope famously wrote—"Those RULES of old *discover'd,* not *devis'd,* Are *Nature* still, but *Nature methodiz'd"*. Implicit in his view was the assumption that 'nature' consisted in what was generally true. However, this assumption, advanced first by Scaliger and echoed by Dr Johnson later, had never commanded unquestioning support. What is natural came to be seen no longer as an absolute, but as 'historically conditioned'.

You should note that the changing views of the goal of literary creation provoked by Boileau's translation (1674) of the Longinian **Treatise of the Sublime** finally undermined Neo-classicism most decisively in the context of the 18th century. It is interesting to note that the cult of sublimity—which is mostly seen as the preference to the greatness of emotion, finally replaced the wish to produce a just representation of general reality. This tendency also marks the beginning of Romanticism about which you will read in the next Block.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Briefly describe the contexts of Neo classicism.

12.4 FEATURES OF THE NEOCLASSICAL AGE

[Adapted from MH Abram's Glossary]

Based on the account mentioned in the previous section, the following list of ideas and characteristics that were shared by the authors such as John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Joseph Addison, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, and Edmund Burke between 1660 and the late 1700s; may serve as an introductory sketch of some of the prominent features of Neoclassical Age:

(1) The authors mentioned exhibited a strong sense of traditionalism against radical innovation, which was evident from their great respect for writers of ancient Greece and Rome. Because they were thought to have

achieved excellence, and established enduring models of literary works in all the major literary *genres.* Hence the term “neoclassic” was used. (It is from this high estimate of the literary achievements of classical antiquity that the term “classic” come to be applied to any later literary work that is believed to have achieved excellence and set a standard.)

(2) Literature was conceived to be primarily an ‘art’; that is, a set of skills, which, though it requires innate talents, must be perfected, by long study and practice, and consists mainly in the deliberate adaptation of known and tested means to the achievement of foreseen ends upon the audience of readers. The neoclassic ideal, founded especially on Horace’s Roman *Ars Poetica* (first century B.C.), is the craftsman’s ideal, demanding finish, correction, and attention to detail. Special allowances were often made for the unerring freedom of what were called natural geniuses such as Homer or Shakespeare who are extremely rare. So, the representative neoclassical writer commonly strove for “correctness”, stylistic “decorum”, and the established “rules” of art.



LET US KNOW

The neoclassic “rules” of poetry were theoretically the essential properties of the various *genres* (such as epic, tragedy, comedy, pastoral) that have been abstracted from classical works whose long survival has proved their excellence. Such properties, many critics believed, must be embodied in modern works if they too are to be excellent and to survive. In England, however, many critics were doubtful of some of the “rules” accepted by Italian and French critics, and opposed their strict application—such as the *three unities* in drama.

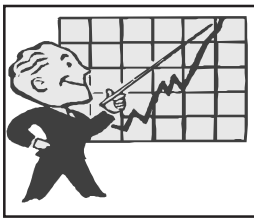
(3) Human beings as an integral part of a social organisation were regarded as the primary subject matter of literature. Poetry was held to be an *imitation* of human life—in a common phrase—”a mirror held up to nature.” And, by the human actions it imitates, and the artistic form it gives to the imitation, poetry is designed to yield both instruction and aesthetic

pleasure to the people who read it. Not “Art for Art’s sake”, but “Art for Humanity’s sake”, became a central ideal of Neoclassicism.

(4) Both in the subject matter and the appeal of art, emphasis was placed on what human beings possess in common—representative characteristics and widely shared experiences, thoughts, feelings, and tastes. “True wit” Pope said in a much-quoted passage of his *Essay on Criticism,* is “what oft was thought but ne’er so well expressed.” That is, a primary aim of poetry is to give new and consummate expression to the great commonplaces of human wisdom, whose prevalence and durability are the best warrant of their importance and truth.

(5) The neoclassical writers viewed human beings as limited agents who ought to set themselves only accessible goals. Many of the great satiric and didactic works of the period, vehemently attacked human “pride”, or presumption beyond the natural limits of the species, and enforced the lesson of the golden mean (the avoidance of extremes) and of humanity’s need to submit to its restricted position in the cosmic order—an order sometimes envisioned as a natural hierarchy, or *Great Chain of Being.* The poets admired extremely the great genres of epic and tragedy that showcased human beings’ limitations in the scheme of things.

From these characteristics, it must be clear to you that Neo classicism was also a way of life.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 2: Note down the characteristics of Neo classical literature.

12.5 IMPORTANT WRITERS AND THEIR WORKS

[Adopted from Edward Albert’s History]

In this section, we shall try to look at some of the greatest Neo classical writers, and try to get some information on their important works.

John Dryden (1631-1700):

John Dryden is often considered one of the greatest Neo classical writers. For forty years, he continued to produce an abundance of literary

works of every kind—poems, plays, and prose works. One of his earliest important work of the pre-Restoration (1659) period is a laudation of the recently dead Oliver Cromwell. At the Restoration, however, he changed his views, attaching himself to the fortunes of Charles II and to the Church of England. This loyalty brought its rewards in honours and pensions, so that for many years Dryden was easily the most considerable literary figure in the land.

Dryden began his career with poetry. His first published poem was a series of 'heroic' stanzas on the death of the Protector Oliver Cromwell (1659). Then, in 1660, he published *Astraea Redux,* in celebration of Charles I's return. Although the poem represents a complete reversal of the poet's political opinions; it is nevertheless a noteworthy literary achievement. Another of his early poetical work is *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), which gives a spirited account of the Great Fire and the war with the Dutch in the previous year. Then, for more than fifteen years, Dryden devoted himself almost entirely to the writing of plays. However, in around 1680, both political and personal events drove him back to the poetical medium. Political passions over the "Exclusion Bills" were at their height, and Dryden appeared as the chief literary champion of the monarchy in the famous satirical allegory *Absalom and Achitophel* (1691). Next year, he produced another political poem, *The Medal,* which called forth an answer from an old friend of Dryden's, Shadwell. A new poetical development was manifest in *Religio Laid* (1682) and *The Hind and the Panther* (1687). The first poem was written in support of the English Church; the second, written after the accession of James, is an allegorical defence of the Roman Catholic faith. Though it is small in bulk, Dryden's lyrical poetry is of much importance. The longest and the best-known lyric is his *Song for St Cecilia's Day* (1687) and *Alexander's Feast* (1697).

Dryden had been one of the most famous of the English playwrights. His first play *The Wild Gallant* (1663) was a comedy with a complicated plot. After that, he turned to tragedy, which fall into two main groups: (a) *The Heroic Play, and* (b) *Blank-verse Tragedies.* The first is a new type of the tragedy that became prominent after the Restoration, and of which Dryden

is one of the earliest and most skilful exponents. The chief features of the new growth are the choice of a great heroic figure for the central personage; a succession of stage incidents of an exalted character, which often, as Dryden himself realised, became ridiculous through their extravagance; a loud, declamatory style; and the rhymed couplet. Plays like *The Rival Ladies* (1663), *The Indian Emperor* (1665), *Tyrannick Love* (1669), *The Conquest of Granada* (in two parts, 1669 and 1670), and *Aureng-zebe* (1675) show the heroic kind at its best and worst. While Dryden's second group of plays start with his next play *All for Love, or The World well Lost* (1678), and this is often considered to be his dramatic masterpiece. For subject he chose that of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra.* His other blank verse plays are *Don Sebastian* (1690), *Cleomenes* (1692), and *Love Triumphant* (1694).

Dryden's versatility as a writer is apparent when we observe that in his prose works too. His *Essay of Dramatick Poesie* (1669) is his longest single prose work and a major piece of English literary criticism. It is in the form of a discussion between four characters, one of whom is Dryden himself, and treats, with an openness of mind and a lack of dogmatising which are new in criticism, most of the major topics which interested contemporary dramatists. Among them were the question of rhyme or blank verse in drama; the comparison between French and English drama; and the possibility of making a judicious compromise between the strict observance of the classical unities and the greater freedom of the English dramatic tradition. Moreover, the essay is the first attempt to evaluate the work of the Elizabethan dramatists and especially of Shakespeare.

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745):

Swift was born in Dublin. In 1686, when he was 19, he left Trinity College, and in 1689, entered the household of his famous kinsman Sir William Temple, following whose advice he took holy orders. After Temple's death in 1699, he obtained other secretarial and ecclesiastical appointments. His real chance as a writer came in 1710, when the Tories overthrew the Marlborough faction and came into office. To them Swift devoted the powers of his pen, became a political star of some magnitude. He might have become a bishop, but it is said that Queen Anne objected to his *A Tale of a Tub* and

had doubts about his orthodoxy. His last years were passed in silence and lunacy.

Swift's poems were mostly recreations: odd verses (sometimes humorously doggerel) to his friends; squibs and lampoons on his political and private enemies. His first noteworthy book was *The Battle of the Books* (1704). The theme of this work is the dispute between ancient and modern authors. This book is full of wit and brilliant in its imaginative power and the incisiveness of its thought.

From a literary point of view, the next important period of his life was from 1710, when he deserted the Whigs for the Tories, to 1714, when the latter party fell from power. Several of them were written for *The Examiner,* a Tory journal, and the best known are *The Conduct of the Allies* (1711), *Some Remarks on the Barrier Treaty* (1712), and *The Public Spirit of the Whigs* (1714). To this period also belongs the *Journal to Stella,* which is a kind of informal private logbook written by him and sent regularly to Esther Johnson.

Then followed some miscellaneous political work, aimed at the improvement of the lot of the oppressed and poverty-stricken Irish, and then his longest and most famous book, *Gulliver's Travels* (written between 1720 and 1225, and published 1726. However, the terrible savagery of *A Modest Proposal for preventing the children of poor people from being a burden to their parents* (by selling them as food for the rich) should not blind us to the great range of his work.

Joseph Addison (1672-1719):

Addison was an English essayist, poet, playwright and politician. He went to Oxford, where he became a Fellow of Magdalen College. Soon, he made his mark as a serious and accomplished scholar, and attracted the notice of the Whig leaders who marked him out as a future literary prop of their faction. Then, the misfortunes of the Whigs in 1703 reduced him to poverty. In his Latin verses, Addison attained early distinction. Then *The Campaign* in 1704 gave him a reputation as one of the major authors of the age. In 1713, he produced the tragedy of *Cato.* Addison also attempted an opera, *Rosamond* (1707), which was a failure. Addison is most famous for

his essays as he regularly contributed to Steele's journal *The Tatler* that appeared thrice weekly. Then, Steele began a daily newspaper called *The Spectator.* Addison rapidly contributed as many as 274 essays to *The Spectator*.

Sir Richard Steele (1672-1729):

Like Addison, Steele was educated at Oxford. Then he became a Member of Parliament, and wrote for the Whigs. But, his political ambition left him expelled from the House of Commons. Then, he became a Tory and quarrelled with Addison on private and public grounds. He also issued a number of periodicals. Steele wrote some prose comedies such as –*The Funeral* (1701), *The Lying Lover* (1703), *The Tender Husband* (1705), and *The Conscious Lovers* (1722). They followed in general scheme the Restoration comedies. However, Steele earned better recognition as an essayist. He started the journal *The Tatler* in 1709, *The Spectator* in 1711, and several other short-lived periodicals, such as *The Guardian* (1713), *The Englishman* (1713), *The Reader* (1714), and *The Plebeian* (1719). Steele's aim in his essays was didactic as he desired to bring about a reformation of contemporary society manners, and is notable for his consistent advocacy of womanly virtue and the ideal of the gentleman of courtesy, chivalry, and good taste.

Alexander Pope (1688-1744):

Pope was an 18th century English poet, best known for his satirical verse, as well as his translation of Homer. Also famous for his use of the 'heroic couplet', he is one of the most frequently quoted writers after Shakespeare. Pope's earliest important work was his *Pastorals.* By 1709, he also became an established poet who used heroic couplet so nicely. In 1711, appeared his *An Essay on Criticism* in heroic couplets. In 1712, was published the first version of *The Rape of the Lock,* one of the most brilliant poems in the English language in which Pope mocked at two families estranged by the act of Lord Petrie's cutting off a lock of hair from the head of Miss Arabella Fermor. The poem combines with its humorous, epic treatment of the trivial theme a delicate fancy and a good deal of satire on the weaknesses of the fair sex and on society manners in general. After

that, Pope became well known, and he completed the task of translating the *Iliad* in 1720. It was followed by a translation of the *Odyssey* in 1725 and 1726. His success brought upon him jealousy and criticism, and led to many quarrels, notably with Addison. Still, more criticism was evoked by his edition of Shakespeare, published in 1725. He was vehemently criticised by Theobald, in *Shakespeare Restored* (1726). Theobald's criticism encouraged him to write the poem *The Dunciad,* which appeared anonymously in 1728, and again in 1742, with the addition of a 4th book and the dethronement of Theobald in favour of Colley Cibber. In this poem, modelled on Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe,* Pope mocks at a host of minor writers whose attacks had been making his life a misery.

In between 1731 and 1735, Pope published a series of philosophical poems, including *To Lord Bathurst, Of the Use of Riches, Of the Knowledge and Characters of Men, Of the Characters of Women,* and, most famous of all, *An Essay on Man,* in which he discussed Man's place in the universe. The years 1733 to 1737 mark Pope's last important period of production. In them appeared his *Imitations of Horace,* in which, using the Latin satirist as his model, Pope launched his attacks in a series of poetical epistles on the greed and corruption of his day, and especially of the Whig party then in power. His famous *Prologue to the Satires,* better known by its other title, *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot* (1735), contains some of his most brilliant and finished work.

Lord Chesterfield (1694-1773):

Chesterfield belonged to the famous Stanhope family. He was a man of illustrious wit and fashion, and held high political offices. He is an example of the aristocratic amateur in literature, and he wrote elegant articles for the fashionable journals, such as *The World.* His *Letters to his Son,* published in 1774 shortly after his death, caused a great furore. No doubt, they affect the tired cynicism of the man of the world, but that does not prevent them from being keen and clever, and underneath their bored indifference to morality, they reveal a shrewd judgment of men and manners.

Henry Fielding (1707-1754):

Fielding was an English novelist and dramatist best known for his rich, earthy humour and satirical prowess, and is famous for the novel *Tom*

Jones. A younger son of an ancient family, Fielding was born in Somersetshire, was educated at Eton and studied law at Leyden. Lack of funds stopped his legal studies for a time; he took to writing plays for a living, but the plays were of little merit; then, having married, he resumed his studies and was called to the Bar. After some time in practice, he was appointed a magistrate the post of which brought him a small income. His magisterial duties provided him with some first-hand experience of the different types of human criminality, which was of much use to him in his novels. In 1742 appeared *Joseph Andrews.* His later works are *A Journey from this World to the Next* (1743) and *Jonathan Wild the Great* (1743). *Jonathan Wild* is the biography of the famous thief and 'thief-taker' who was hanged at Newgate. *Tom Jones* (1749) is his greatest novel. His last important novel is *Amelia* (1751).

Samuel Johnson (1709-84):

Often referred to as Dr. Johnson, Samuel Johnson was an English writer who made lasting contributions to English literature as a poet, essayist, moralist, literary critic, biographer, editor and lexicographer. The son of a bookseller Johnson pronounced Tory views he inherited and steadfastly maintained. From his birth, he was afflicted with a malignant skin disease, which all through his life, affected his sight and hearing, and caused many of the physical peculiarities. After being privately educated, he proceeded to Oxford, where he experienced the miseries and indignities that are the lot of a poor scholar cursed with a powerful and aspiring mind. From the obscure position of a publisher's hack, he became a poet of some note by the publication of *London* (1738), which was noticed by Pope; his *Dictionary* (1747-55) advanced his fame; then somewhat incomprehensibly, he appears in the limelight as one of the literary dictators of London, surrounded by a circle of brilliant men. He has been immortalised by James Boswell in his *The Life of Samuel Johnson.*

Johnson also wrote some poems which are of not great merit. His first poem, *London* (1738), written in the heroic couplet, is of great and sombre power. His only other poem is *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749). He also wrote *Irene,* a solemn, ponderous, undramatic, blank verse tragedy.

But, Johnson's claims as a writer must rest on his prose. In 1744, appeared *The Life of Savage,* his penurious poet friend, who had recently died in gaol. It was later incorporated in *The Lives of the Poets.* Then, in 1747, he began to work on his *Dictionary of the English Language.* This was his greatest contribution to scholarship. While working on this project, he also wrote periodical essays for *The Rambler* (1750-52), and during 1758-60, he was contributing a series of papers, under the title of *The Idler,* to the *Universal Chronicle, or Weekly Gazette.* Johnson's preface to his *Shakespeare* (1765) is a landmark, not only in Shakespearian scholarship, but in English criticism as a whole. His last work was *The Lives of the Poets* (1777-81), planned as a series of introduction to the works of fifty-two poets.

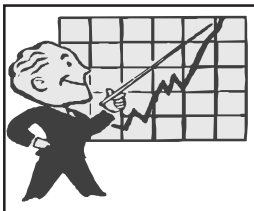
Oliver Goldsmith (1730-74):

Goldsmith was an Irish novelist, playwright and poet, who is best known for his novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), his pastoral poem *The Deserted Village* (1770), and his plays *The Good-Natur'd Man* (1768), and *She Stoops to Conquer* (1771). His first poem, *The Traveller* (1764), deals with his wanderings through Europe. His only other poem of any length is *The Deserted Village* (1770). Goldsmith's miscellaneous poems are important, for they include some of his characteristic humorous and pathetic writing. He wrote two prose comedies, both of which rank high among their class–*The Good-natur'd Man* (1768) and *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773). In addition, Goldsmith produced a great mass of hack-work, most of which is worthless as historical and scientific fact, but all of which is enlightened with the grace of his style and personality. Some of these works are *An Inquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe* (1759), his first published book; *The History of England* (1771); and *An History of Earth and Animated Nature,* a kind of text-book on natural history, which was published posthumously.

Edward Gibbon (1737-94):

Gibbon was an English historian, writer and Member of Parliament. His most important work, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was published in six volumes between 1776 and 1788 and is known

for the quality and irony of its prose, its use of primary sources, and its open criticism of organised religion. His first projected book, *A History of Switzerland* (1770), was never finished. Then, appeared the first volume of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776). At nearly regular intervals of two years, each of the other five volumes was produced, the last appearing in 1788. His *Autobiography,* which contains valuable material concerning his life, is his only other work of any importance and it is written with all his usual elegance and suave, ironic humour.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Name some important works of John Dryden.

Q 4: How did Dryden contribute to the world of drama?

Q 5: Describe the contributions of Addison and Steele to essay writing.

Q 6: How did Theobald's criticism encouraged Pope to write his famous poem *The Dunciad*?

Q 7: Which are the greatest works of Johnson?



12.6 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you must have formed some ideas on what the term Neoclassicism means. You have been briefed on the intellectual context of the Neoclassical Age, its salient Features, important writers and their works. You have learnt that Neoclassicism refers to the habit of imitating the great poets and dramatists of antiquity as a matter of aesthetic principle; and the acceptance of the critical precepts, which emerged to guide that imitation. As students of English Literature, you will do well if you try to see the features of the Neo classical Age in contrast with those of the Romantic Age. Your understanding of the major concerns of the works produced by the different Neo classical writers at different times shall help you to consider the importance of the Neo classical age in the context of the 17th century.



12.7 FURTHER READING

Abrams, M. H. (1999). *A Glossary of Literary Terms.* (Seventh Edition). Thomson Learning.

Albert, Edward. (1979). *History of English Literature*. (Fifth Edition), Oxford University Press.

Drabble, Margaret. (ed). (2000). *The Oxford Companion to English Literature.* Oxford University Press.

12.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: Neoclassicism refers to the habit of imitating the great poets and dramatists of antiquity… … literary genres like epic, eclogue, elegy, ode, satire, tragedy, comedy, epigram etc. of ancient times stared becoming the models ... …Lodovico Castelvetro and Joseph Justus Scaliger imprisoned the notion of 'imitation' within a rigid framework of rules for literary productions.

Ans to Q No 2: The authors exhibited a strong sense of traditionalism against radical innovation… …literature was conceived as a set of skills which must be perfected by long study and practice… …human beings are part of a social organisation… …in the subject matter and the appeal of art, emphasis was placed on shared experiences, thoughts, feelings, and tastes… …human beings as limited agents.

Ans to Q No 3: Astraea Redux… …Alexander's Feast… …Absalom and Achitophel… …Religio Laid… …The Hind and the Panther… …Song for St Cecilia's Day… …Annus Mirabilis

Ans to Q No 4: Dryden wrote a comedy *The Wild Gallant* (1663)… …then, he turned to tragedy which fell into two main groups: *The Heroic Play* and *Blank-verse Tragedies… …* Plays like *The Rival Ladies* (1663), *The Indian Emperor* (1665), *Tyrannick Love* (1669), *The Conquest of Granada* and *Aureng-zebe* (1675) show the heroic kind… … *All for*

Love, or The World well Lost (1678), is his masterpiece based on Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra.*

Ans to Q No 5: Addison regularly contributed essays to Steele's journal *The Tatler… …* Steele began a daily newspaper called *The Spectator… …* Steele earned better recognition as an essayist… …his aim in the essays was didactic as he desired to bring about a reformation of contemporary society manners, advocacy of womanly virtue, gentlemanly courtesy, chivalry, and good taste.

Ans to Q No 6: Theobald in *Shakespeare Restored* (1726) vehemently critiqued Pope's work on Shakespeare… …in reply, Pope wrote the poem *The Dunciad… …*In this poem, modelled on Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe* Pope turns to the minor writers whose attacks had been making his life a misery.

Ans to Q No 7: *The Life of Savage… …The Lives of the Poets… … Dictionary of the English Language.*



12.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What are the general tendencies of English Neo Classicism? Discuss.

Q 2: Enumerate some of the predominant literary forms that emerged during the Neo- classical Age?

Q 3: Write a comprehensive note on the Neo classical writers with special reference to Dryden and Pope.

Q 4: Identify the most dominant forms of Neoclassical Poetry and explain their significance with suitable examples.

Q 5: What are the main concerns of the Neo-classical Prose writing? Elaborate with examples.

Q 6: Provide an account of Neo classical drama with particular emphasis on their themes and techniques.

Q 7: Discuss critically the contributions of Dryden and Pope to Neoclassical poetry.

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REFERENCES (FOR ALL UNITS)

Books:

Abrams, M. H. (1999). *A Glossary of Literary Terms.* (7th Ed). Singapore: Thomson Learning.

Albert, Edward.(1975). *History of English Literature*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Bush, Douglas. (1993). *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century*, *1600-1660***.** Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Daiches, David. (2001). *A Critical History of English Literature*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers.

Drabble, Margaret. (ed). (2000). *The Oxford Companion to English Literature.* Oxford University Press.

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