

## The History of English Literature

### 1. Old English Period (450-1066):

- \*the invasion of the Germanic tribes (the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes)
- \*oral literature
- \*The poetry is written in vernacular Anglo-Saxon, known as Old English, such as *Beowulf*, "The Wanderer," "The Seafarer"

### 2. Middle English Period (1066-1500):

- \* Norman Conquest causes the change of language
- \* the age of Geoffrey Chaucer, of John Gower, and of William Langland
- \* the alliterative revival: many works in this period are written in alliterative meter
- \* Works: Church works, medieval romance, miracle mystery, and morality plays, folk ballads, and religious poems
- \* Products: Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Langland's *Piers Plowman*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, *Second Shepherd's Play*, and

*Everyman*

### **3. The Renaissance -- Elizabethan Age and Jacobean Age (1558-1625)**

\*Christian humanism

\*the Reformation

\*works: sonnet, drama (tragedy, comedy, tragicomedy),  
prose, essay, poetry, epic

\*major authors: Sir Philip Sidney, Christopher Marlowe,  
Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, Sir Walter  
Raleigh, Francis Bacon, Ben Johnson, etc.

\*other works include King James translation of the *Bible*,  
and Erasmus's works

### **4. The 17th Century in England (1625-1660)**

\*The English Civil War between the "Cavaliers"  
and the "Roundheads"

\*Cavalier poets: Richard Lovelace, Sir John Suckling,  
Thomas Carew, Robert Herrick

\*metaphysical poets: John Donne, Andrew Marvell,  
George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Richard Crashaw

\*other major works: John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, *Samson  
Agonistes* and "*Lycidas*," Robert Burton's *Anatomy of  
Melancholy*, Hobbe's political treatise *Leviathan*

- \*Commonwealth Period is known as the Puritan Interregnum  
(under the Puritan leader Oliver Cromwell)
- \*the close of the theater in 1642

## **5. The Neoclassical Period (1660-1785):**

- \*neoclassicism
- \*the age of Enlightenment
- \*the age of satire
- \*traits: the emphasis on reason, universal laws, rules of poetry, common sense, decorum, grace, craft, social opinions, imitation or translation of the classical works (such as Homer's epics)

### **1) Age of Dryden (1660-1700)**

- \* The Restoration
- \* works: comedy of manners, satire, and heroic drama
- \*authors: Sir George Etherege, William Wycherley and William Congreve write the comedy of manners (also called Restoration comedy), such as *The Way of the World*; John Dryden and Samuel Butler are satirists; John Bunyan (the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*) is a popular allegorist

### **2) Age of Pope (1700-1745)**

\*The Augustan Age

\*ideals -- moderation, decorum, and urbanity

\*leading writers: Alexander Pope (he composes *The Rape of the Lock*, *An Essay on Criticism*, *An Essay on Man*, *The Dunciad*), Jonathan Swift (the author of "A Modest Proposal"), Joseph Addison and Richard Steele (they write periodical essays), Daniel Defoe (he composes *Robinson Crusoe*)

\*works: poetry, journalism, and novels

### **3) Age of Johnson (1745-1785)**

\* Age of sensibility

\* works: Robert Burns's poems, the works of Oliver Goldsmith, Edmund Burke, James Boswell, Thomas Gray ("The Graveyard School"), William Cowper and many novelists, such as Samuel Richardson (epistolary novel, such as *Pamela*, and *Clarissa*), Henry Fielding (he writes *Joseph Andrews*), Tobias Smollett, and Lawrence Sterne

\*the growing sympathy for cultural primitivism, the shift of taste and thought

## **6. The Romantic Period (1785-1830):**

\*Background: the French Revolution, the American

Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution

\*begins with William Wordsworth's and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*, and ends with Sir Walter Scott's death

\*Traits: poetic innovation and revolution, the emphasis on creativity, originality, and imagination, individualism, the stress on passion, feeling and emotion, the emphasis on the primitive, and on nature and landscape

\*poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful Feelings" (Wordsworth)

\*poets: Robert Burns, William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, George Gordon, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats

\*Prose writers: Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, Thomas De Quincey, and Mary Wollstonecraft (the first feminist writer in English literature)

\*Novelists: Jane Austen (the author of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, *Sense and Sensibility*), Mary Shelley (she composes a gothic novel called *Frankenstein*), and Sir Walter Scott (he composes historical novels, such as *Ivanhoe*, *Waverley*)

## **7. The Victorian Period (1832-1901):**

\*Most writings in this period deal with the religious,

- social, economic and intellectual issues of the age
- \*rapid urbanization, the growth of economy and the growing class tension, and massive poverty
  - \*Charles Darwin's theory of evolution (*The Origin of Species*) and the theory of natural selection (the survival of the fittest or the survival of the strongest)
  - \*the conflict between religion and science
  - \*Poets: Alfred Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning, and Matthew Arnold, Edward Fitzgerald, and George Meredith
  - \*prose writers: Thomas Carlyle, John Henry Cardinal Newman, John Stuart Mill, John Ruskin, Matthew Arnold, and Walter Pater
  - \*Novelists: Charles Dickens (his famous novels include *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Great Expectations*, *Hard Times*), William Thackeray (the author who composes *Vanity Fair*), Charlotte Bronte (she composes *Jane Eyre*) and Emily Bronte (the author of *Wuthering Height*), George Eliot (her famous novels include *The Mill on the Floss* and *Middlemarch*), George Meredith (he writes *The Egoist*), Anthony Trollop, Thomas Hardy (his famous novels include *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *Jude the Obscure*, and *Under the Greenwood Tree*), and Samuel Bulter
  - \*Pre-Raphaelites: It is an artistic movement in 1848; its

aim is to return to the truthfulness, simplicity, and the spirit of devotion before the time of the high Italian Renaissance. The writers of this movement include Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Morris, and Algernon Charles Swinburne

\*Aestheticism (the writers of the Aesthetic Movement include Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde)

\*Decadence (the writers of the Decadence include Algernon Charles Swinburne and Oscar Wilde)

## **8. Modern Period (1901-1945):**

\*modernism

\*persistent and multidimensional experiments in subject and form, and style

\*fiction -- stream-of-consciousness novels (James Joyce and Virginia Woolf)

\*Poetry -- imagism

\*play -- 1) Irish National Theatre and the Irish Literary Revival (William Butler Yeats, John Millington Synge)  
2) The Theatre of the Absurd (Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*)

\*the new forms of construction in verse, prose, and sentence structure

\*Avant-garde movement: violate the accepted

conventions

\*novelists: James Joyce (he is an Irish writer who composes *Dubliners*, *Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man*, *Ulysses*), Virginia Woolf (she writes *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*), D. H. Lawrence (the author who composes *Sons and Lovers*, *Women in Love*), Joseph Conrad (he writes *Lord Jim*, *Heart of Darkness*), E. M. Forster (his famous novels include *A Room with a View*, *Howard's End*, *A Passage to India*), George Orwell (the author who composes *Animal Farm*, *1984*), Graham Greene, Doris Lessing

\*Poets: Thomas Hardy, A. E. Housman, Wilfred Owen, T. S. Eliot, William Bulter Yeats, W. H. Auden, and so on

\*playwrights: George Bernard Shaw (he writes *Pygmalion* <*My Fair Lady*>, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* ), and so on

## **9. Contemporary period (1945-the present):**

\*metafiction

\*postmodernism

\*postcolonial literature

\*minority discourse

\*authors: Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, Salman Rushdie (*The Satanic Verses*), and so forth