

INTRODUCTION TO HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE | NOTES

Literary Period	Highlights & Trends
Anglo-Saxon or Old English Period (450–1066)	<p>Heroic Tradition: poetry focused on hero's bravery</p> <p>Elegiac Tradition: writers mourned the passing of earlier, better times.</p>
Anglo-Norman or Middle English Period (1066–1500)	Chronicles, Poetry, Drama, Religious and Didactic writing.
Renaissance Period or Age of Shakespeare (1500–1660)	<p>Rediscovery of classical philosophy</p> <p>Focus on 'Humanism' and 'Puritanism'.</p> <p>Major Forms: poetry and drama.</p>
Neoclassical Period or the Enlightenment Age (1660–1798)	<p>Revival of classical art and culture of ancient Greece and Rome,</p> <p>Focus on order, accuracy, and structure.</p> <p>Poetic Trends: Use of allusions, heroic couplet and strict meter and rhyme.</p>
Romantic Period (1798–1837)	<p>Romantic Movement in Poetry</p> <p>Gothicism in literature.</p>
Victorian Period (1837–1901)	<p>Literary Trends & Movements: Symbolism, Utilitarianism, Oxford Movement, Romantic Protestantism. Age of Prose & Novel.</p> <p>Main Focus: individually, morality note, conflict between religion and science, human beings than nature.</p>
Modern and Contemporary Period (1901–Today)	<p>Literary Trends: structuralism, deconstruction, poststructuralism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, and magic realism.</p> <p>Main Focus: horrors of war, genocide, life experiences, real-life themes, alienation, transformation, consumption & relativity of truth</p>

Anglo-Saxon or Old English Period (450-1066 AD)

- Angles and Saxons were the ancestors of the English race. After the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the early 5th Century, three Germanic tribes—the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes—saw an opportunity to fill in the power gap and started migrating to Britain.
- The language brought by these Anglo-Saxon settlers together with some Latin and Celtic words became Old English.
- **Poetry:** Heroic poetry elements, Christian ideals, Synecdoche, Metonymy. and Irony. (*After embracing Christianity, the Anglo-Saxon poets began to write religious poetry. Thus, the majority of Anglo-Saxon poetry encompasses religion*)
- **1st English writer: Cædmon.** His only surviving work is 'Cædmon's Hymn.'
- **Decline** of Anglo-Saxons after Norman Conquest of 1066. After the defeat of Harold, the last of Saxon kings, by William

Anglo-Norman or Middle English Period (1066-1500 AD)

- **Norman conquest** brought a radical change in English culture, law, language, and character. English became the language spoken only by the poor and powerless. While Norman-French became the language of the rich. Anglo-Saxons' hostility towards the Norman elites also turned into national unity.
- **Romance:** In contrast to the courage, seriousness, and savagery of the Anglo-Saxon literature, the Normans introduced romantic tales of love and adventure in literature. This made the Anglo-Norman period to be chivalric rather than a heroic one.
- **Mystery and Miracle:** Mystery plays were based on subjects taken from the Bible while the Miracle plays depicted the lives of saints. chronicles became a well-established form of writing.
- **Chronicles** recorded the history of kings.

- **Father Of English Literature: Geoffrey Chaucer** (1343 to 1400). His most famous work is *Canterbury Tales*.
- **Decline:** After Chaucer there came a decline in English poetry for about 100 years. The period from 1400 to the Renaissance was bereft of quality literature.

Renaissance Period (1500–1660) a.k.a The 'Golden Age' !

- **Renaissance** actually started Italy by Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch. However, it became popular in Europe during the Elizabethan Period. The darkness of the middle ages was replaced by the enlightenment and 'Revival of Learning'.
- Focus: humanism, enhanced sensitivity to aesthetics and beauty, classical philosophy, love, art, rediscovery of external universe
- **ELIZABETHEAN PERIOD:**
 - **Rise of dramatists** like William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Lyly, George Peele, Thomas Kyd, Robert Greene etc. Main themes of Elizabethan dramas were - revenge themes, internal conflicts, good versus evil, melodramatic scenes, hero-villain protagonists, tragic-comedy, presence of supernatural beings such as ghosts and witches
 - **Father of English Drama: William Shakespeare** . His famous works include - The Merchant of Venice, Richard II, Henry IV, King John, Henry V, Part I and II, Much Ado About Nothing, The Training of the Shrew, As You Like It, The Merry Wives of Windsor, and Twelfth Night, Anthony and Cleopatra, Winter's Tale, The Tempest etc.
 - **'Child of Renaissance': Christopher Marlowe** (1564-1593). Also called "the Father of English Dramatic Poetry." His works include - The Jew of Malta., The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus, Edward II etc.
 - **William Tyndale : 'The Father of English Prose'**
- **PURITAN AGE (1600-1660)**

- **John Milton**(1608-1674) wrote Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes
- Other writers: Francis Bacon, Milton, Robert Burton, Jeremy Tayler, Sir Thomas Brown and Clarendon.
- Puritan movement in literature is also called the **second Renaissance** because of the **revival of man's moral nature**

Neoclassical Period (1660-1798)

- **RESTORATION PERIOD or the Age of Dryden** (1660-1700)
 - Puritans finally defeated and **monarchy was restored in England**, and Charles II came back to England from his exile in France and became the King. All restraints and discipline were casted away, and a tide of indecency and frivolity swept the country. Since Charles II and his followers had enjoyed a gay life during their exile in France, they introduced same foppery and looseness in England as well.
 - Also known as the **Age of Dryden** because Dryden was the most significant literary figure of the age. He wrote Doctrinal Poems, Political Satires, and The Fables
 - **Realism** and preciseness were the main features of literature.
- **AUGUSTAN PERIOD or the Classical Age (1700-1798):**
 - Called **Age of Reason or the Age of Good Sense**: precision and realism were carried to further perfection.
 - Famous writers include - Defoe, Richardson, Smollet, Fielding, and others
 - **Mother of English Literature: Francis Burney**
 - Classical Age is further divided into two distinct periods—the Age of Pope (1700-1744) and the Age of Johnson (1744-1784)
 - **Age of Pope**: Alexander Pope, Matthew Prior, John Gay, Edward Young, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Joseph Addison etc.

- **Age of Johnson:** Dr. Samuel Johnson, James Thomson, William Blake, Thomas Gray, William Cowper, William Collins, and George Crabbe, Samuel Johnson, Edmund Burke, and Edward Gibbon.

Romantic Period (1798-1837)

- Most flourished period! Star women authors!
- **Romanticism:** Romantic poets proved that if the trivial aspects of nature and the common things of life are treated in the right way, they could be as interesting and significant as the grand aspects of nature and life.
- **Gothic Literature:** elements such as supernatural, gloomy settings and bizarre situations. E.g.: Frankenstein by Mary Shelly
- Famous writers: Jane Austen, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Shelley, Keats, and Byron

Victorian Period (1837–1901)

- Unique amalgamation of two opposites—Romanticism and Classicism
- Background setting: Industrialisation, colonialism, social and economic unrest
- **Early Victorian Period (1837-1870):** Robert Browning, Alfred Tennyson, Charles Dickens, Matthew Arnold, Carlyle, Thackeray and Ruskin
- **Later Victorian Period (1870-1901):** Christiana Rossetti, Charles Swinburne, George Eliot, William Morris, Thomas Hardy, Oscar Wilde, Pater and others. In poetry, Morris, Swinburne and Rossetti

Modern Period (1901-1945)

- **Themes:** Serious topics like World Wars political unrest, racism , end of colonialism, socialism etc.
- Famous writers: Karl Marx, Engles, Ruskin, Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, WB Yeats, TS Eliot, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Adlous Huxley, D. H. Laurence etc.
- **Father of Modern Drama: Henrik Ibsen**

Contemporary Period (1945–Today)

- **Setting:** End of World War II, post-colonialism, Cold war, political and economic unrest, mental health, feminism, LGBTQ representation, post-globalisation world, etc.
- **Rise of Sci-fi and Fantasy literature:** Harry Potter, Lord of Flies and others. Also several other genres like crime, thriller, mystery.
- Diversified group of writers, not just from England or Europe but from rest of the world. E.g.: Haruki Murakami, Ocean Vuong, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri etc.