

CHAPTER 5

History and Schools of English Poetry

(From 500 to 1900)

In almost everything there are no sharp demarcations; things change imperceptibly and merge into one another; but for purposes of study we have to divide and demarcate. So be it! We divide the history of Poetry into:

The Anglo-Saxon period (circa 500-1066)

(From the beginning of the colonisation of England by the Angles, Saxons and Jutes, to the Norman conquest)

One of the oldest literary products of this period and undoubtedly the masterpiece of old English secular verse is *Beowulf*, an epic poem, which is thought to have reached England from the Scandinavian North and to have been adopted and Christianised about the year 700 by an Anglo-Saxon Homer. The scenes of the poem are laid in Denmark and Sweden and the poem tells of the deeds of the brave hero Beowulf, who crossed from Sweden to Denmark to help his nephew, King Hrothgar. Hrothgar's royal palace, called Heorot, was continuously visited by a cruel monster, Grendel, who seized and devoured one of his courtiers every night. Beowulf succeeded in slaying this monster and also his mother, who had come to avenge her son's death. After this, Beowulf returned to his country, and, now an aged king, slayed a dragon, but died as a result of his wounds.

The main theme of this poem is the struggle between good and evil, a theme that is to be found in many literary products of later times.

As can be seen from the lines quoted below there is no rhyme, but there is rhythm, effected by four main stresses in a line and frequent alliteration.

It is certain that these verses were sung to the accompaniment of a harp.

From: BEOWULF

Grendel seizes and devours one of Beowulf's men who are left in charge of Hrothgar's hall. Beowulf fights Grendel, who after losing an arm, flies and dies in the fens. The next night Grendel's mother avenges her son by carrying off Aeschere.

Beowulf mapelode, bearn Ecgpeowes:

'Ne sorga, snotor guma! selre bis aeghwaem

paet he his freond wrece ponne he fela murne;

ure aeghwylc sceal ende gebidan

worolde lifes; wyrce se pe mote

domes aer deape! paet bi dryhtguman
unlifgendum aefter selest
Aris, rices weard; uton rape feran,
Grendles magan gang sceawigan!

Which means in Modern English:

Beowulf spoke, son of Ecgtheow.
Sorrow not, wise warrior! It is better for each
To avenge his friend than greatly to mourn;
Each of us must needs await the end
Of life in the world; let him who can achieve
Fame ere death! That is best for a noble warrior,
When life is over,
Rise up, guardian of the realm; let us go quickly
Hence to behold the track of Grendel's kinswoman.

Other poems of this period have come down to us and we also find Christian poetry by the side of pagan.

The Middle English period (1066-1500)

The beginning of the English Middle Ages, a period called the Middle English period, is marked by the Norman Conquest in 1066. As a result, French became the official language of the court and nobility and remained so until the latter part of the 14th century. French words crept into the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary to such an extent that it has been calculated that one third of the words now used by the English people are derived from French.

Narrative verse was written in this period. Such poems are called romances. In England it was the legends built up round the figure of the British hero, King Arthur, which particularly attracted the poets. These romances were tales of love and chivalry, meant to entertain their readers. The poets at the time were more interested in stories of brave knights and of heroes who cut off hands and limbs, and stories of transformations and enchantments than in the characters of the personages of their poems. One of the best examples of such a romance is *Gawain and the Green Knight*. Like Beowulf, it is written in alliterative verse, but at the end of each strophe there is a refrain consisting of two short rhyming lines, which is already perhaps an indication of French influence. In this poem there is even a slight hint of character development, distinguishing it from the other romances.

The greatest story-teller of the time as well as the greatest poet is **Geoffrey Chaucer** (1340?-1400). He was certainly influenced by French mediaeval poetry and afterwards by Italian. He translated one of the typically French romances, *Le Roman de la Rose*. Its influence is clearly evident in his early poems; in his later work he is influenced by the Italian poets Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch. He may even have met the last two on his diplomatic missions to Italy.

But in 1387 he began his greatest work *The Canterbury Tales*. It is a frame-story, in which the frame is the pilgrimage of some 30 people from all walks of life to the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket in Canterbury. The stories within the frame are the tales told by each pilgrim at the suggestion of the host of the Tabard Inn in Southwark, south of the river Thames, where the pilgrims meet. The tales are meant to shorten the long hours on horseback. The actual stories are preceded by a long prologue, in which the pilgrims are catalogued and described.

Chaucer was unable to finish this work. In the prologue the host suggested that each pilgrim should tell two tales on the outward and two on the homeward journey. But the company never reaches Canterbury and only 23 of the 30 pilgrims get their turn.

From the prologue we give a few of Chaucer's own lines on the Prioress, followed by a translation:

THE PRIORESS

Ther was also a Nonne, a Prioressse,
That of hir smylyng was ful symple and coy;
Hire gretteste ooth was but by Seinte Loy;
And she was cleped madame Eglentyne.
Ful weel she soong the service dyvyne,
Entuned in hir nose ful semelv,
And Frenssh she spak ful fair, and fetisly,
After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,
For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe.
At mete wel ytaught was she with alle:
She leet no morsel from hir lippes falle,
Ne wette hir fyngres in hir sauce depe;
Wel koude she carie a morsel and wel kepe
That no drope ne fille upon hire brest.
In curteisie was set ful muchel hir lest.
Hir over-lippe wyped she so clene
That in hir coppe ther was no ferthyng sene
Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte.

Ful semely after hir mete she raughte,
And sikerly she was of greet desport,
And ful plesaunt, and amyable of port,
And peyned hire to countrefete cheere
Of court, and to been estatlich of manere,
And to ben holden digne of reverence.

THE PRIORESS (translation)

There also was a Nun, a Prioress;
Simple her way of smiling was and coy.
Her greatest oath was only 'By St. Loy!'
And she was known as Madam Eglantyne.
And well she sang a service, with a fine
Intoning through her nose, as was most seemly,
And she spoke daintily in French, extremely,
After the school of Stratford-atte-Bowe;
French in the Paris style she did not know.
At meat her manners were well taught withal;
No morsel from her lips did she let fall,
Nor dipped her fingers in the sauce too deep;
But she could carry a morsel up and keep
The smallest drop from falling on her breast.
For courtliness she had a special zest.
And she would wipe her upper lip so clean
That not a trace of grease was to be seen
Upon the cup when she had drunk; to eat,
She reached a hand sedately for the meat.
She certainly was very entertaining,
Pleasant and friendly in her ways, and straining
To counterfeit a courtly kind of grace,
A stately bearing fitting to her place,
And to seem dignified in all her dealings.

The Ballad

After Chaucer's death not much poetry was produced deserving the name. The only exception must be made for the popular ballad.

In subject and form the ballads are very simple. They arose among the people for whom they were really meant and they were handed down orally from one generation to another. It is not to be wondered at that many of them were lost and those that have come down to us often show distinct signs of wear and tear. In the 18th century **Thomas Percy**, bishop of

Dromore, collected the extant ballads, which he published in 1765 under the title *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. At the time this collection had a considerable influence on English poets as we shall see.

The subjects of these poems included feuds between families attended by bloody fighting, the adventurous lives of outlaws in the forest and true love thwarted but in the end usually rewarded, and stories of ghosts haunting the friends or enemies they had left behind.

LORD RANDALL (There are several versions)

‘Where have you been all the day, Randall, my son!
Where have you been all the day, my pretty one.’
‘I’ve been to my sweetheart’s, mother;
Oh, make my bed soon,
For I’m sick to my heart and I fain would lie down.’

‘What did she feed you, Randall my son!
What did she feed you, my pretty son!’
‘Eels boiled in broth, mother;
Oh, make my bed soon,
For I’m sick to my heart and I fain would lie down.’

‘Oh, I fear you are poisoned, Randall, my son.’
‘Oh, yes, I am poisoned, mother;
Oh, make my bed soon,
For I’m sick to my heart and I fain would lie down.’

‘What will you leave your mother, Randall, my son!
What will you leave your mother, my pretty one!’
‘A dead son to bury, mother;
Oh, make my bed soon,
For I’m sick to my heart and fain would lie down.’

‘What will you leave your sweetheart, Randall, my son!
What will you leave your sweetheart, my pretty one!’
‘A rope to hang her, mother;
Oh, make my bed soon,
For I ‘m sick to my heart and I fain would lie down.’

The English Renaissance (1500-1660)

The Early Tudors

John Skelton (1460-1529) was a priest and tutor to Prince Henry (later Henry VIII). Skelton was a learned man and a humanist, but as a poet he continued - and ended - the medieval tradition. Much of his poetry was satirical, and it was written in a rapid, ragged and lively verse degenerating at times into the doggerel:

TO MISTRESS MARGRET HUSSEY

Merry Margret,
As midsummer flower,
Gentle as falcon¹
Or hawk of the tower:
With solace and gladness,
Much mirth and no madness,
All good and no badness;
So joyously,
So maidenly,
So womanly
Her demeaning
In everything,
Far, far passing
That I can indite,
Or suffice to write
Of Merry Margret
As midsummer flower,
Gentle as falcon
Or hawk of the tower.
As patient and as still
And as full of good will
As fair Isaphill²,
Coriander³,
Sweet pomander,
Good Cassander⁴,
Steadfast of thought,
Well made, well wrought

¹ Can a falcon be gentle?

² Daughter of the king of Spain who vowed never to change her clothes or take a bath until the revolt in the Netherlands was crushed.

³ Coriander is not sweet-smelling

⁴ Cassandra, the daughter of the King of Troy was notorious for her prophecies of doom.

Far may be sought
Ere that ye can find
So courteous, so kind,
As Merry Margret,
This midsummer flower,
Gentle as falcon
Or hawk of the tower.

The Renaissance, which had found its origin in Italy, was introduced into English letters by those young Oxford Scholars who had travelled through Italy. They had studied the manuscripts of the masterpieces that the Greek scholars had taken with them on their flight to Italy after the fall of Constantinople in 1453.

Thomas More, well-known for his book, *Utopia*, became the leader of a little academy of these young scholars. This English Renaissance began in the first half of the 16th century under the Tudors.

Among these young scholars were the so called **Courtier Poets: Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517-1547)**, who became such great admirers of the Italian Renaissance poets that they started writing poems in the Italian (Petrarchan) form and in particular introduced the Italian sonnet. It became so popular that we find many sonnets in the various collections of poems of this age.

REMEMBRANCE (Sir Thomas Wyatt)

They flee from me, that sometime did me seek
With naked foot, stalking in my chamber.
I have seen them gentle, tame, and meek,
That now are wild, and do not remember
That sometimes they put themselves in danger
To take bread at my hand; and now they range
Busily seeking with a continual change.

Thanked be fortune it hath been otherwise
Twenty times better; but once, in special,
In thin array, after a pleasant guise,
When her loose gown from her shoulders did fall,
And she me caught in her arms long and small,
Therewith all sweetly did me kiss
And softly said, 'Dear heart, how like you this?'

It was no dream; I lay broad waking:

But all is turned, through my gentleness,
Into a strange fashion of forsaking;
And I have leave to go of her goodness,
And she also to use newfangledness.
But since that I so kindly am served,
I would fain know what she hath deserved.

Edmund Spenser (1552-1599), one of the most important poets of this period wrote a sonnet-sequence, called *Amoretti*.

from: AMORETTI

One day I wrote her name upon the strand,
But came the waves, and washed it away.
Again I wrote it with a second hand,
But came the tide, and made my pains his prey.
'Vain man,' said she, 'that doest in vain assay
A mortal thing so to immortalize;
For I myself shall like to this decay,
And eke my name be wipèd out likewise.'
'Not so,' quod I; 'let baser things devise
To die in dust, but you shall live by fame:
My verse your virtues rare shall éternize,
And in the heavens write your glorious name.
Where, whenas Death shall all the world subdue,
Our love shall live, and later life renew.

This poet is even better known for an allegorical narrative poem, *The Faery Queen*, which has as its subject King Arthur's Court and in which the knights represent the virtues in their dangerous struggles with vice.

This poem is written in a stanza form invented by Spenser and imitated by many poets of the 18th and 19th centuries.

from: THE FAERY QUEEN

A gentle knight was pricking on the plain,
Yclad in mighty arms and silver shield,
Wherein old dints of deep wounds did remain,
The cruel marks of many a bloody field;
Yet arms till that time did he never wield.
His angry steed did chide his foaming bit,
As much disdainng to the curb to yield:
Full jolly knight he seemed, and fair did sit,

As one for knightly jousts and fierce encounters fit.

The Elizabethans and Early Stuarts:

The tradition of the courtier poets was carried on during Elizabeth's reign by **Sir Philip Sidney** (1554-1586) for he was a gentleman, a soldier, a courtier and a poet. But the figure that dominated the end of Elizabeth's reign and the reign of James I was **William Shakespeare** (1564-1616). The son of a tradesman, he attended grammar school at Stratford-on Avon, but did not go to a university. At eighteen he married, and little is known about his life till 1592 where he turned up in London where he was an actor and a budding playwright. He turned out to be a great playwright, but he was also a great poet. He wrote two long narrative poems called *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. He also wrote many *sonnets*, of which 154 have reached us. Shakespeare's fame rests mainly on his powerful, original imagery, as well as his psychological insights. It is no wonder that he is the most quoted author, in the English language, after the Bible.

The following is one of Shakespeare's best-known sonnets.

SONNET XVIII

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day!
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And Summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd,
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimm'd:
But thy eternal Summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

(Notice the similarity in theme between this sonnet and that of Spencer's *Amoretti*, given above)

Metaphysical poetry

In the first decades of the 17th century there was a group of poets that bridged the gap between the Elizabethans and the poets writing after 1660. These poets are usually known as the Metaphysical Poets. They disliked the smooth sweetness of most Elizabethan verse and its clichés in language and thought. They wished to say something new in a new form.

Their poems have the tendency of being learned and intellectual, simple in diction, complex in feeling and skilful in the use of elaborate images and comparisons, called conceits.

Their poetry seems quite modern to us in spite of more than three centuries' distance in time.

The best-known of these poets are **John Donne** (1573-1631), **George Herbert** (1593-1632), **Robert Herrick** (1591-1674) and **Andrew Marvell** (1621-1678).

The following poem is from a collection of poems, *Songs and Sonnets*, written by John Donne.

THE GOOD-MORROW

I wonder by my troth, what thou and I
Did, till we lov'd! were we not wean'd till then!
But suck'd on country pleasures, childishy!
Or snorted we in the seven sleepers' den?
'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desir'd, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

And now good-morrow to our waking souls,
Which watch not one another out of fear;
For love all love of other sights controls,
And makes one little room an everywhere.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let maps to others, worlds on worlds have shown,
Let us possess one world. each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;
Where can we find two better hemispheres
Without sharp North, without declining West!
What ever dies, was not mixt equally;
If our two loves be one, or thou and I
Love so alike that none do slacken, none can die.

TO HIS COY MISTRESS (by Andrew Marvell)

Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, Lady, were no crime.
We would sit down and think which way
To walk and pass our long love's day.

Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
Shouldst rubies find: I by the tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the Flood,
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow;
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast;
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart;
For, Lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate.
But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found,
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song: then worms shall try
That long preserved virginity,
And your quaint honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust:
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.
Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may,
And now, like amorous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour
Than languish in his slow-chapt power.
Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Through the iron gates of life:
Thus, though we cannot make our sun

Stand still, yet we will make him run.

Influence of the Bible

An important event in English literature, which also had a considerable influence on the English language, was the publication of the so-called *Authorised Version of King James' Bible* in 1611. Many idiomatic expressions and sayings have been derived from this monumental work, which was undertaken by Anglican divines on a suggestion made in 1604 and supported by King James I.

Certainly influenced by the Bible is another monumental work written by **John Milton** (1608-1674). Between 1658 and 1663 he wrote his *Paradise Lost*, an epic poem in 12 books. As he says himself in the first lines, it is written "to justify the ways of God to man." The subject is the Fall of the Angels and the temptation and the Fall of man. He wrote it in blank verse.

Some twenty-six lines of this work are given below.

from: Book I (ll. 1-26)

INVOCATION

Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
That shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed,
In the beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth
Rose out of Chaos: or if Sion hill
Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flow'd
Fast by the oracle of God; I thence
Invoke thy aid my advent'rous song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' Aonian mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.
And chiefly Thou, O Spirit! that dost prefer
Before all temples th' upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for thou know'st; Thou from the first
wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss
And mad'st it pregnant; what in me is dark

Illuminate, what is low raise and support;
That to the height of this great argument
I may assert Eternal providence,
And justify the ways of God to men.

Towards the end of his life Milton became blind. He expressed his resignation in the following well-known sonnet.

ON HIS BLINDNESS

When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide,
Lodg'd with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve there with my Maker, and present
My true account, lest He returning chide;
'Doth God exact day-labour, light denied!'
I fondly ask: but Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, 'God doth not need
Either man's work, or His own gifts: who best
Bear His mild yokes they serve Him best: His state
Is kingly; thousands at His bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
They also serve who only stand and wait.'

The Neo-classic Period (1660-1800) (The age of Reason or the Augustan Period)

After the Stuarts had been restored to the throne in 1660 with the accession of Charles II, the poets of this time lost the freshness of the Elizabethan and early Stuart period. Lyrical poetry was hardly written at all. Poets admired the Classic Literature of the Greeks and Romans which they considered perfected at the time of Augustus Caesar. Just as their king, they consulted the French taste in everything. The dramatists of this period imitated Molière and Corneille slavishly, but vulgarised it to suit the taste of a licentious king and court.

Blank verse was discarded and rhyme was introduced. The majority of the dramas were written in a couplet which was called the heroic couplet after the term heroic drama. The heroic couplet consisted of two iambic pentameters rhyming aa bb cc dd etc.

One of the greatest writers at the time was **John Dryden** (1631-1700), who wrote what we may call social poetry. In his poems he used Biblical scenes and characters to attack his enemies, political or otherwise.

In the *Story of Absalom and Achitophel*, he satirises Monmouth (the illegitimate son of Charles II) and his revolt against his uncle James II. Israel's monarch in the poem is of course Charles II.

From ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL

In pious times, ere priestcraft did begin,
Before polygamy was made a sin;
When man on many multiplied his kind,
Ere one to one was cursedly confined;
When nature prompted, and no law denied
Promiscuous use of concubine and bride;
Then Israel's monarch, after heav'n's own heart,
His vigorous warmth did variously impart
On wives and slaves, and, wide as his command,
Scattered his maker's image through the land.

Apart from this kind of poems Dryden also wrote a number of plays. In his poems he proved that the heroic couplet was especially adapted to satirical purposes.

Dryden became a literary dictator, and in the early half of the next century **Alexander Pope** (1688-1744) was even more of one. Pope was essentially a poet and almost limited himself to the heroic couplet, which he used with great success both in satire and in philosophical poetry.

The age of Pope, in fact, is often called the **Age of Reason**, as everything in art, and in poetry especially, was subjected to strictly prescribed rules. Pope and his contemporaries are famous for their glittering style, but they lack imagination and are absolutely indifferent to Nature.

Many of Pope's couplets, in which a general thought is wittily but tersely expressed, have become household words in the English language. Here are a few of the most famous of them:

A little learning is a dangerous thing.
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring.

True wit is nature to advantage dressed.
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed.

't Is with our judgments as our watches, none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.

Words are like leaves; and where they most abound,
Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of Mankind is Man.

Here are some other lines often quoted:
To err is human, to forgive divine.

For fools rush in where angels fear to tread.

This long disease, my life.

Pope's best known poem is a mock heroic epic which he wrote when he was 24, called *The Rape of the Lock*.

From THE RAPE OF THE LOCK

The Baron has fallen in love with the beautiful Belinda, and, admiring her lovely hair, is intent on having one of those silken locks for himself. While she is sipping her coffee, the Baron sees an opportunity. What he needs now is a pair of scissors.

But when to mischief mortals bend their will,
How soon they find fit instruments of ill!
Just then, Clarissa drew with tempting grace
A two-edged weapon from her shining case:
So ladies, in romance, assist their knight,
Present the spear, and arm him for the fight.
He takes the gift with reverence and extends
The little engine on his fingers' ends;
This just behind Belinda's neck he spread,
As o'er the fragrant steam she bends her head.

The meeting points the sacred hair dis sever
From the fair head, for ever, and for ever!
Then flash'd the living lightning from her eyes,
And screams of horror rend th' affrighted skies.
Not louder shrieks to pitying Heaven are cast,
When husbands or when lap-dogs breath their last;
Or when rich China vessels, fall'n from high,
In glitt'ring dust and painted fragments lie!

The dawn of Romantic poetry

As has already been mentioned, Dryden and especially Pope were indifferent to nature; they were not (or little interested in) the workman, the peasant or the child either.

In the early part of the 18th century, however, there were a few poets who managed to free themselves from the conventional language of these poets, from their versification (heroic couplet) and returned to metres that had been used by Spencer, Shakespeare, Milton and their contemporaries. At the same time they took much interest in Nature, which inspired them to express their own feelings.

The first man to do so was **James Thomson** (1700-1748), who was a Scotsman, loved nature and was interested in the lives of humble people. His greatest poem *The Seasons* (1730) is written in blank verse in the style of Milton. His language is still conventional, though. In his poems we see that he has observed nature closely and that he appreciated life in the country.

Another well-known poem of Thomson's is *The Castle of Indolence*, written in Spenserian stanza.

A poet of this time, who also felt for nature, was **Thomas Gray** (1716-1771). He became famous as a scholar after studying classical languages at Cambridge, and wrote a few other poems before completing his most famous one, *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*. This poem expresses a melancholy that we often find in 18th century poetry. In this poem nature is treated as a background to human life. As in Thomson's poems, we find neo-classical features e.g. the use of personification.

From: ELEGY WRITTEN IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tower
The moping owl does to the moon complain
Of such as wand'ring near her secret bower,
Molest her ancient solitary reign.

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a mould'ring heap,
Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,
The swallow twitt'ring from the straw-built shed,
The cock 's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
Or busy housewife ply her evening care:
No children run to lisp their sire's return,
Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.

Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke:
How jocund did they drive their team afield!
How bowed the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile,
The short and simple annals of the poor.

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave.
Awaits alike the inevitable hour.
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

Nor you, ye Proud, impute to these the fault,
If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise,
Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault
The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

Can storied urn or animated bust
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath!
Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of death!

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands, that the rod of empire might have swayed,
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre.

But knowledge to their eyes her ample page
Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll;
Chill Penury repressed their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of the soul.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Some village Hampden, that with dauntless breast
The little tyrant of his fields withstood;
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife
Their sober wishes never learned to stray;
Along the cool sequestered vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

Yet even these bones from insult to protect
Some frail memorial still erected nigh,
With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture decked,
Implores the passing tribute of a sigh

William Cowper (1731-1800). The first line of Cowper's first great work *The Task*, published in 1785, is *God made the country and Man made the town*. This lengthy poem was written in blank verse. We find all kinds of things treated in it, ranging from a description of the English landscape to conditions in Europe.

Cowper was a melancholy man as can be seen from many of his poems.

From THE TASK

In his side he bore,
And in his hands and feet, the cruel scars.

With gentle force soliciting the darts,
He drew them forth, and heal'd, and bade me live.

From MY MARY

And should my future lot be cast
With much resemblance of the past,
Thy worn-out heart will break at last-
My Mary!

Robert Burns (1759-1796) was the son of a humble farmer. Robert combined work in the fields with writing poems. A number of these poems was written in English, but compared with those in his native Scots tongue, the former are thin stuff. In Burns's poems we find many of the elements of Romanticism: a keen sense of liberty, an effusion of personal emotions, a rich imagination, a real sympathy for the poor and humble people and a great love of nature and animals. In all these poems he expresses his emotions unashamedly. No wonder that many of his poems have been set to music.

MY HEART'S IN THE HIGHLANDS

My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here;
My heart's in the Highlands a-chasing the deer;
Chasing the wild deer, and following the roe -
My heart's in the Highlands wherever I go.

Farewell to the Highlands, farewell to the North!
The birth-place of valour, the country of worth.
Wherever I wander, wherever I rove,
The hills of the Highlands for ever I love.

Farewell to the mountains high covered with snow!
Farewell to the straths and green valleys below!
Farewell to the forests and wild-hanging woods!
Farewell to the torrents and loud-pouring floods!

My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here,
My heart's in the Highlands a-chasing the deer;
Chasing the wild deer, and following the roe -
My heart 's in the Highlands wherever I go.

William Blake (1757-1827) was an engraver by profession and as such he printed and illustrated many of his poems.

As a poet he is at best in his simple lyrical poems e.g. in his *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *Songs of Experience* (1794), which are companion pieces. In the *Songs of Innocence* he describes the condition of childhood, a state of purely spontaneous happiness, but in the *Songs of experience* this happiness is destroyed by the knowledge of death and disaster.

The aforementioned poets are sometimes called the **Transitionals**, because they represent a transitional stage between the Neo-classicists and the Romantics.

THE TYGER (from Songs of Experience)

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry!

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes!
On what wings dare he aspire!
What the hand, dare seize the fire!

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart!
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand! & what dread feet!

What the hammer! what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain !
What the anvil! what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see!
Did he who made the Lamb make thee!

Tyger, Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry!

The Romantic Revolution (1800-1830)

The great outburst of Romantic poetry began in 1798, when two young men, **William Wordsworth** and **Samuel Taylor Coleridge**, published a collection of poems, which they called *Lyrical Ballads*. It was a landmark in the history of English literature and had an enormous influence. For it was the first conscious protest against the ideals of classicism and the product of the romantic spirit: a harmonious blending of sensibility and imagination into one creative impulse.

From this date onwards the poets relied on inspiration from within, finding their own means of expression for their individual insights rather than regarding poetry as "what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed." This individuality was kindled by the French Revolution, which proclaimed the rights of man and the abolition of class distinctions, doctrines welcomed by Young England.

As a young man of 20, William Wordsworth (1770-1850), who had been brought up in the Lake District in the north-western part of England, visited Revolutionary France and had admired the glorious prospect of a new society. On his second visit in 1791, when he actually joined the Girondists, he grew attached to a girl, named Annette Vallon, who bore him an illegitimate child. The lovers were parted by the storms of the French Revolution and Wordsworth left France, disillusioned by the excesses in cruelty of the revolutionaries and the rise of Napoleon.

What was left of his revolutionary sentiments was the conviction that man in the lower ranks of society also has his dignity and deeper feelings. This is the reason why he chose his subjects from incidents in the lives of humble people.

He and his friend and neighbour, Samuel Taylor Coleridge agreed to produce a book of poems written to a recipe or programme; Coleridge was to write about the supernatural and Wordsworth was to direct the reader's attention to "the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us". The outcome of this agreement was the publication of "Lyrical Ballads". In the second edition of this collection Wordsworth announced that he wanted to bring his "language near to the language of men".

Another characteristic of his poetry is his deep reverence for the child, because, according to him, nature is a living soul which enters all created things. In her he sees Man's shortest way to God, to whom the child with its simple faith is nearest.

Wordsworth's most creative period was from 1796 to 1806. But his creativity waned and after 1816 it was clear that he was lost to poetry of a high order.

IT IS A BEAUTEOUS EVENING

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free;
The holy time is quiet as a Nun
Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
Is sinking down in its tranquillity;
The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the Sea:
Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder - everlastingly.
Dear Child! dear Girl! that walkest with me here,
If thou appear untouched by solemn thought,
Thy nature is not therefore less divine:
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;
And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine
God being with thee when we know it not.

Wordsworth's daily companion and the man with whom he wrote Lyrical Ballads, **Samuel Taylor Coleridge** (1772-1834) aimed at something different in poetry. He wanted to renew poetry by conjuring up a sense of mystery. He succeeded in creating an unreal atmosphere, not of this world, but wholly supernatural, which all the same has the power to keep us spell-bound. His finest contribution to the Lyrical Ballads is *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. It is a long narrative poem, told with the simple directness of an old ballad.

Coleridge's life was an unhappy one and so was his marriage. As a result of this and other unhappy circumstances and ill-health he took to opium.

After one of his opium dreams he wrote down what he remembered of it. The result was *Kubla Khan*.

In 1816 he entered the house of a surgeon, James Gillman, and remained under the latter's patient care till the end of his life.

KUBLA KHAN

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round:

And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
 Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
 And here were forests ancient as the hills,
 Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.
 But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
 Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
 A savage place! as holy and enchanted
 As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
 By woman wailing for her demon-lover!
 And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
 As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
 A mighty fountain momently was forced:
 Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
 Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail
 Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:
 And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
 It flung up momently the sacred river.
 Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
 Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
 Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
 And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:
 And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
 Ancestral voices prophesying war!
 The shadow of the dome of pleasure
 Floated midway on the waves;
 Where was heard the mingled measure
 From the fountain and the caves.
 It was a miracle of rare device,
 A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

A damsel with a dulcimer
 In a vision once I saw:
 It was an Abyssinian maid,
 And on her dulcimer she played,
 Singing of Mount Abora.
 Could I revive within me
 Her symphony and song,
 To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
 That with music loud and long,
 I would build that dome in air,
 That sunny dome! those caves of ice!

And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

Coleridge's brother-in-law **Robert Southey** (1774-1843), who shared the romantic ideals of Wordsworth and Coleridge, is chiefly remembered on account of a few poems such as *The Battle of Blenheim* and *The Well of St-Keyne*, but also because Lord Byron wrote a fiercely satirical poem, *The Vision of Judgement*, which was a reply to Southey's poem of the same name.

THE WELL OF ST. KEYNE

A Well there is in the west country,
And a clearer one never was seen:
There is not a wife in the west country
But has heard of the Well of St. Keyne.

An oak and an elm-tree stand beside,
And behind doth an ash-tree grow
And a willow from the bank above
Droops to the water below.

A traveller came to the Well of St. Keyne;
Joyfully he drew nigh,
For from cock-crow he had been travelling
And there was not a cloud in the sky.

He drank of the water so cool and clear,
For thirsty and hot was he,
And he sat down upon the bank
Under the willow-tree.

There came a man from the house hard by
At the Well to fill hir pail;
On the Well-side he rested it,
And he bade the Stranger hail.

‘Now art thou a bachelor, Stranger! ‘ quoth he,
‘For an if thou hast a wife,
The happiest draught thou hast drank this day
That ever thou didst in thy life.’

‘Or has thy good woman, if one thou hast,
Ever here in Cornwall been?
For an if she have, I’ll venture my life
She has drank of the Well of St. Keyne.’

‘I have left a good woman who never was here,’
The Stranger he made reply.
‘But that my draught should be the better for that,
I pray you answer me why!’

‘St. Keyne ‘, quoth the Cornish-man, ‘many a time
Drank of this crystal Well,
And before the Angel summon’d her,
She laid on the water a spell.

‘If the Husband of this gifted Well
Shall drink before his Wife,
A happy man thenceforth is he,
For he shall be Master for life.

‘But if the Wife should drink of it first, . . .
God help the Husband then!’
The Stranger stooped to the Well of St. Keyne,
And drank of the water again.

‘You drank of the Well I warrant betimes?’
He to the Cornish-man said:
But the Cornish-man smiled as the Stranger spake,
And sheepishly shook his head.

‘I hasten’d as soon as the wedding was done,
And left my Wife in the porch;
But i’ faith she had been wiser than me,
For she took a bottle to Church.’

These three poets: Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey are sometimes called **The Lake District Poets**, may be because they lived in the Lake District, which is one of the loveliest districts of England. It is thought that it was the wonderful scenery of the Lake district which turned their minds to Romanticism.

George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824). This colourful poet's poetry is so closely connected with the circumstances of his life, that any discussion of his poems must inevitably be a description of his life too.

Born with a clubfoot, but on the other hand vigorous, handsome and muscular, Byron was always haunted by his deformity. He felt it set him apart from the rest of mankind, a feeling which probably made him a cynic.

After some happy years at Harrow, he went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he published his first collection of poems *Hours of Idleness*. When these poems received a hostile notice in the *Edinburgh Review*, he replied with the lively satire that he entitled *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. Here, in heroic couplets, he vehemently attacked a few contemporary authors, among them Wordsworth, and of course The Edinburgh Review itself as well.

In 1809 he set out on a long journey to Portugal, Spain, Albania, Greece and Turkey. On his travels he produced the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* written in Spenserian stanzas. On publication it made him famous overnight. His fame became even greater when he produced a number of oriental tales.

In 1815, after a tumultuous time in London he married Annabella Marchbanks, but separated from her the next year after a scandal involving an incestuous relationship with his half sister. This shocked English society so deeply that Byron felt that he was not fit for England anymore or England not fit for him and he left his country, never to return.

His travels led him through Belgium, Germany, Switzerland and Italy, where he spent several years of his life and met the poet Shelley. The 3rd and 4th cantos of *Childe Harold* were the outcome of these travels.

Of his other works we would mention *The Prisoner of Chillon* and *Don Juan*, a comic epic in ottava rima.

The last years of Byron's life were entirely devoted to the cause of the Greek struggle for freedom against the Turks. He died at Missolonghi.

A few stanzas from: DON JUAN

In Seville was he born, a pleasant city,
Famous for oranges and women - he
Who has not seen it will be much to pity,

So says the proverb - and I quite agree;
Of all the Spanish towns is none more pretty,
Cadiz, perhaps - but that you soon may see: -
Don Juan's parents lived beside the river,
A noble stream. and call'd the Guadalquivir.

His father's name was José - *Don*, of course,
A true Hidalgo, free from every stain
Of Moor or Hebrew blood, he traced his source
Through the most Gothic gentlemen of Spain;
A better cavalier ne'er mounted horse,
Or, being mounted, e'er got down again,
Than José, who begot our hero, who
Begot - but that's to come - Well, to renew:

His mother was a learned lady, famed
For every branch of every science known -
In every Christian language ever named,
With virtues equall'd by her wit alone:
She made the cleverest people quite ashamed,
And even the good with inward envy groan,
Finding themselves so very much exceeded
In their own way by all the things that she did.

Her memory was a mine: she knew by heart
All Calderon and greater part of Lope
So that if any actor miss'd his part
She could have served him for the prompter's copy;
For her Feinagle's were an useless art,
And he himself obliged to shut up shop - he
Could never make a memory so fine as
That which adorn'd the brain of Donna Inez.

Her favourite science was the mathematical,
Her noblest virtue was her magnanimity;
Her wit (she sometimes tried at wit) was Attic all,
Her serious sayings darken'd to sublimity;
In short, in all things she was fairly what I call
A prodigy - her morning dress was dimity,
Her evening silk, or, in the summer, muslin,
And other stuffs, with which I won't stay puzzling.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) was born the son of a Sussex squire. He was educated at Eton, went up to Oxford, but was expelled for writing a short pamphlet called *The Necessity of Atheism*. In this pamphlet he openly declared that he did not believe in the existence of God.

At the age of 19 Shelley married Harriet Westbrook, a pretty sixteen year old girl, but when he discovered she did not understand philosophy and could not “feel poetry” either, he left her and fell passionately in love with another girl, Mary Godwin. He even suggested to Harriet that the three of them might establish a romantic trio, of which Harriet should adopt the rôle of a sister. Harriet refused, and committed suicide by drowning herself in the Serpentine, a lake in Hyde Park, London. In 1818 Shelley left England, never to return.

This poet’s ideas were revolutionary. He wanted to change the order of society. He had a profound faith in the perfectibility of mankind and believed in liberty for the underdogs and hope for the oppressed.

Revolution was for him the beginning of a new life, a liberation from the bonds of Church, State and Society. Love was the factor of all human progress and according to him only love could reform the world.

These ideas are reflected in most of his poems. In his lyric drama, *Prometheus Unbound*, he sings of the triumph of mankind over tyranny. Like Wordsworth he believes that divinity inhabited all things. He saw life as an eternal process of growth and decay, summer changing into winter, life ending in death. But death is always followed by rebirth. These ideas will be found in his famous poem, the *Ode to the West Wind*. His sonnet *Ozymandias* is considered by many critics to be his most successful short poem.

OZYMANDIAS

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
‘My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!’
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay

Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

In 1822 Shelley drowned during a storm in the Bay of Spezzia, while sailing there. When his body had been washed ashore, a volume of **John Keats's** poems was found to be stuffed into one of his coat-pockets. This brings us to the next romantic poet, John Keats (1795-1821). The son of a London livery-stable keeper. Keats did not have the advantage of an education such as Shelley's and Byron's.

He was already writing verse at the age of 17, but did not publish a collection of poems until 1817. This work showed the influence of Wordsworth and Shelley, whom he had met at the house of Leigh Hunt. The last mentioned had influenced him in his first poetic attempts.

In 1818 he published *Endymion*, the first line of which, "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever", is known to everybody. This line states his message to men and so do the two lines in his *Ode on a Grecian Urn*

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty - that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

This beauty he sought in nature, art and mankind. He was not interested in religion, his belief in beauty being the only religion he had.

Keats is best-known for his odes and sonnets and for that beautiful gem, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, in imitation of the old ballads.

LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI

"O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
alone and palely loitering!
The sedge is wither'd from the lake,
and no birds sing.

O what can ail thee, knight-of-arms,
so haggard and so woe-begone!
The squirrel's granary is full,
and the harvest's done.

I see a lily on thy brow
With anguish moist and fever dew;
And on thy cheek a fading rose
fast withereth too."

"I met a lady in the meads,
full beautiful - a faery's child,

Her hair was long, her foot was light,
and her eyes were wild.

I made a garland for her head,
and bracelets too, and fragrant zone
She looked at me as she did love,
and made sweet moan.

I set her on my pacing steed
and nothing else saw all day long,
For sideways would she lean, and sing
a faery's song.

She found me roots of relish sweet,
and honey wild and manna dew,
And sure in language strange she said,
'I love thee true!'

She took me to her elfin grot,
and there she wept and sigh'd full sore;
And there I shut her wild, wild eyes
with kisses four.

And there she lulled me asleep,
and there I dream'd - Ah! woe betide
The latest dream I ever dream'd
On the cold hill's side.

I saw pale kings and princes too,
pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
Who cried - 'La belle Dame sans Merci
hath thee in thrall!'

I saw their starved lips in the gloam
with horrid warning gaped wide,
And I awoke and found me here
on the cold hill's side.

And this is why I sojourn here
alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake,

and no bird sings.”

In some of his sonnets Keats is concerned with death, and indeed he began to suffer from consumption, the illness of which his mother and his brother had died. Advised by his physician to try a warmer climate, he went to Italy dying prematurely at Rome, in 1821.

These last three poets: Byron, Shelley and Keats are often referred to as the **Satanic Poets**, because all three were atheists with loose moral standards. They all left England and died abroad.

Poetry in the Victorian age (1830-1900)

This is the age of the Industrial Revolution, when social injustices were felt deeply. It is also the age of Charles Darwin and his *Origin of the Species* which led many to have religious doubts. It was also during Queen Victoria's reign that the British Empire reached its highest peak. The novel was the principal literary product of this age, and it reflected all the social changes; but poetry stayed very much under the romantic spell, with some philosophical thoughts here and there.

Alfred Tennyson (1805)-1892), son of a Lincolnshire parson, started writing poetry at the youthful age of 18, when he had gone up to Trinity College, Cambridge. He even published a collection of poems, when he was 22, having already won a Cambridge prize for a poem.

In 1830 and 1833 he followed it up with new volumes of poetry, which met with so much adverse criticism that it silenced the young poet for nine years. Then new volumes appeared, which included *The Lady of Shalott*, his first experiment with Arthurian legend.

His thoughts on life and death and immortality are recorded in his collection of elegies on the death of his friend Arthur Hallam, which he entitled *In Memoriam* and published in 1850. It expresses a view on a problem which occupied the minds of many people of his time: the conflict between religion and science, presumably stirred by Darwin's theory of evolution.

His last long work was *Idylls of the King*, a collection of twelve legends about King Arthur and the Round Table, written in blank verse. Everything Tennyson wrote was clothed in pleasing language. Having a fine ear for word-music, he managed to effect a splendid harmony of sound and sense.

The *Idylls of the King* made him a household word. He was even known to flower girls and poor weavers in the street.

In 1884 he received a peerage and lived on, honoured and courted until his death.

From IN MEMORIAM

Dark house, by which once more I stand
Here in the long unlovely street,
Doors, where my heart was used to beat
So quickly, waiting for a hand.

A hand that can be clasp'd no more -
Behold me, for I cannot sleep,
And like a guilty thing I creep
At earliest morning to the door.

He is not here; but far away
The noise of life begins again,
And ghastly thro' the drizzling rain
On the bald street breaks the blank day.

Robert Browning (1812-1889) is the other great figure of Victorian poetry, though quite different, in outlook and style, from Tennyson.

Unlike him, Browning was optimistic and philosophical and his poetry was often obscure and rugged. They had one thing in common, though - a gift for writing lyric poetry.

As to their subjects, Tennyson was English to the core, but Browning was cosmopolitan to a certain extent. Tennyson hardly left English soil, Browning lived a great part of his life in Italy.

After having been educated at home, Browning was encouraged to write by his father, a clerk in the Bank of England.

In 1846 he secretly married Elizabeth Barrett, a fellow poet, and the daughter of a former slave-owner in Jamaica, who regarded his eleven children almost like slaves, forbidding them to marry. The couple eloped to Paris and soon afterwards travelled to Italy.

In his first period Browning also wrote a few dramas, e.g. *Pipa Passes*. They were not successful, because of their philosophy. In his second period, he produced dramatic monologues. In this kind of monologue we must infer from the speaker's reactions, what the listener has said, since the latter's words are not reported. It is as if one is listening to a one-sided telephone conversation.

Some of these dramatic monologues are ironic, psychological studies of criminals as, for instance, in *My last Duchess*. In this poem a cynical Italian Duke is proudly showing his picture gallery to the messenger of a

Count, whose daughter he is going to marry. He explains why he had his first wife killed.

MY LAST DUCHESS - FERRARA

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive, I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her! I said
'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 't was not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say 'Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat': such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart - how shall I say! - too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace - all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men, - good! but thanked
Somehow - I know not how - as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling! Even had you skill
In speech - (which I have not) - to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this

Or that in you disgusts me': here you miss,
 Or there exceed the mark - and if she let
 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
 Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
 - E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
 Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
 Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
 Much the same smile! This grew; I gave commands;
 Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
 As if alive. Will't please you rise! We'll meet
 The company below, then. I repeat,
 The Count your master's know munificence
 Is ample warrant that no just pretence
 Of mine for dowry will be disallowed:
 Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
 At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
 Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity
 Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) was the eldest son of the headmaster of Rugby School. He himself became one of the first of her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools at the age of 29. He was also a Professor of Poetry at Oxford.

Three of his best-known poems are *The Forsaken Merman*, *The Scholar Gypsy* and *Dover Beach*, the last of which is considered to be his best poem.

The dominant mood of his poetry is melancholy. In "Dover Beach" he reflects on the decline of religious faith in the 19th century. The world is a hostile place and not the land of dreams that we think it to be. The only certainty that remains is a true love-relationship.

DOVER BEACH

The sea is calm to-night.
 The tide is full, the moon lies fair
 Upon the straits; - on the French coast the light
 Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
 Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
 Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
 Only, from the long line of spray
 Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,

Listen! you hear the grating roar
 Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
 At their return, up the high strand,
 Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
 With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
 The eternal note of sadness in.
 Sophocles long ago
 Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought
 Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
 Of human misery: we
 Find also in the sound a thought,
 Hearing it by this distant northern sea.
 The Sea of Faith
 Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
 Lay like the folds of a bright, girdle furled.
 But now I only hear
 Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
 Retreating, to the breath
 Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
 And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
 To one another! for the world, which seems
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,
 So various, so beautiful, so new,
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
 And we are here as on a darkling plain
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and night,
 Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882) was the leading figure of a movement in poetry, which was called the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood**. He was also the head of a similar Brotherhood in painting, from which the former was derived. In painting, the Pre-Raphaelites sought to revive the individuality and sincerity which characterised painters working before the Italian painter, Raphael, began to influence painting. In poetry, they turned back to Antiquity and the Middle Ages for subject matter and poetic forms.

Rossetti's poetry owes much to Keats and is characterised by a tendency to mysticism as is to be seen in the following poem:

SUDDEN LIGHT (by Dante Gabriel Rossetti)

I have been here before,
But when or how I cannot tell:
I know the grass beyond the door,
The sweet keen smell,
The sighing sound, the lights around the shore.

You have been mine before, -
How long ago I may not know:
But just when at that swallow's soar
Your neck turned so,
Some veil did fall - I knew it all of yore.

Has this been thus before!
And shall not thus time's eddying flight
Still with our lives our love restore
In death's despite,
And day and night yield one delight once more !

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889). Although living and writing in the 19th century, Hopkins's genius was not discovered until after the First World War (1918). A Protestant, he turned to Roman Catholicism in 1866, joining a Jesuit Order.

In his early poetry Hopkins is clearly indebted both to Keats and to the Pre-Raphaelites, but even here we notice an extraordinary use of rhythm and syntax and an entirely original choice of imagery and diction.

The basis of this rhythm (known as "Sprung Rhythm") is not the regular iamb, but a fixed number of stressed syllables with a varying number of light, unstressed syllables. According to Hopkins, this was nearest to the rhythm of prose. This is clearly to be seen in the poem *Spring and Fall* and also in *God's Grandeur*.

The poems of Hopkins have had a great influence on modern English poetry, because of their experimental form and highly personal thought.

GOD'S GRANDEUR

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.
And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs -
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

صدر للمؤلف



TALES FROM EVERYWHERE



سلسلة حكايات عالمية للأطفال بلغة إنجليزية مُتدرجة، ومع ترجمة عربية كاملة
صدر منها ٤٠ حكاية