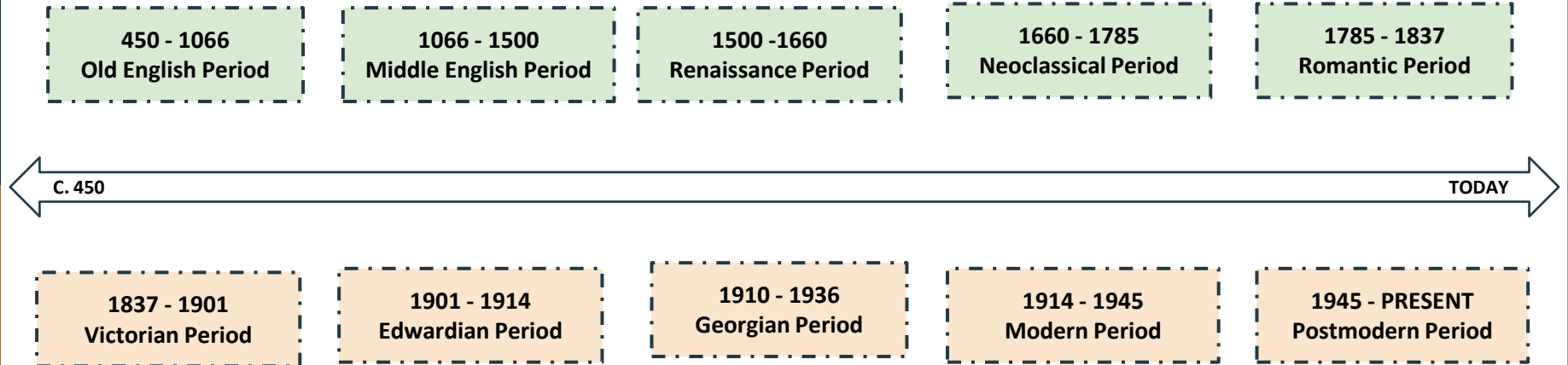


LITERARY ERAS

BRITISH LITERATURE

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TIMELINE OF BRITISH LITERARY HISTORY





MIDDLE ENGLISH PERIOD

▶ The event that marks the end of the Old English period, and the beginning of the Middle English period, is the arrival of the Norman French in England, following their victory at Hastings under William the Conqueror in 1066.

▶ It was the last invasion in England but had an enormous influence in many aspects of British life: habits, language, society, literature, justice, etc.

Defined by epic adventures,
heroes and a devotion to God

The period of **Middle English** covers the period between the twelfth and the first half of the fifteenth century – the time when Britain was under the Norman rule.

The French kings who ruled England at that time spoke no, or very little English and only some of them, as for example Henry II understood it, but did not speak it.

As the French introduced their laws the predominant external influence on the Middle English was French.

Moreover, many bishops, craftsmen and merchants arrived to Britain which increased the influence of the French language.

The best representative is **Geoffrey Chaucer**, 'the father of English poetry'. By making a conscious choice to write in English, he symbolizes the rebirth of English as a national language. His works also helped the London dialect of English become a standard.

Geoffrey Chaucer

[c. 1340 - c. 1400]

Facts :

- ♦ Known as Father of English Poetry
- ♦ Introduced Heroic Couplet and Rime Royal
- ♦ First poet to be buried in the Poets Corner of Westminster Abbey

Prose Tales

- ♦ *The Tale of Melibeus*
- ♦ *The Parson's Tale*

Poetic Career

French

- ♦ *The Romaunt of the Rose*
- ♦ *The Book of the Duchesse*
- ♦ *The Complaynt unto pité*
- ♦ *An A.B.C.*
- ♦ *The complaynt of Mars*

English

- ♦ *The Canterbury Tales*

Italian

- ♦ *Anelida and Arcite*
- ♦ *The Parlement of Foules*
- ♦ *Troilus and Criseyde*
- ♦ *House of fame*
- ♦ *The legend of Good women*

Crafted by Juhi

3 Forms of Church Drama

- **Miracle Plays** : About the life of saints; consists plots and characters from the Bible; Ex. Resurrection of Lazarus, Play of St. Catharine
- **Morality Plays** : Dramatizes the meaning of religion in terms of everyday human experience; allegories of right and wrong; teaches right & wrong; Everyman is a famous example
- **Mystery Plays** : Usually a cycle play such as those of York or Chester; dealt with scriptural and biblical events; Ex. noah's Ark, death on the cross, Christs Nativity

- John Gower, "*Confessio Amantis*", a collection of tales that illustrate the seven deadly sins;
- William Langland, "*Piers Plowman*", an allegorical poem on various religious themes;
- **Geoffrey Chaucer** (the major poet of England in the late Middle Ages) and his most famous work *The Canterbury tales*, an unfinished work which tells the story of a group of pilgrims travelling to their patron saint and who spend their time by telling stories to each other.
- The importance of **Chaucer** and his works is that he **established** the dialect of London as the **base** for the **Standard English** in the late Middle English period.

RENAISSANCE PERIOD

The Golden Age of English Literature

Beginning with the fall of Constantinople, Renaissance is a french word that means “**rebirth.**”

It particularly refers to a renewed interest in classical learning, i.e., the writings of ancient Greece and Rome. **Renaissance humanism** also laid emphasis on individual experience and the here and now instead of religion, fantasy and supernatural realms of the soul.

Named after Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603) it is also known as Elizabethan Age and **Age of Shakespeare**

Edmund Spenser’s **Spenserian Stanza** ; The conceits of **Metaphysical poetry** ; **Milton’s Epic**; Sir Thomas More’s **Utopia**

Cavalier or the Caroline Poets favoured Charles I during the **Puritan Age**, the age of pure Christianity when theatres were banned for 11 years (1649 - 1660). John Milton was the representative poet of this age.

A Time of Action, Invention and Discovery

- **Views and values:** humanism, individualism, energy, optimism, self-awareness, pride in nation
- **Renaissance hero:** multi-talented, self-developing, dignified, honourable, well-educated, good in fighting and politics
- **Themes:** human pride, ambition, time, death, religious subjects

William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616)

- the world’s greatest playwright in England
- was born in Stratford upon Avon
- he wrote historical plays about the kings of England (**Henry IV, Richard II...**), comedies (**A Midsummer Night’s Dream ...**) and tragedies (**Hamlet, Macbeth ...**)
- he is also known as a poet for his 154 poems, **The Sonnets**. They start by giving advice to a young man about marriage.

NEOCLASSICAL PERIOD

After the Renaissance--a period of exploration and expansiveness--came a reaction in the direction of **order and restraint**.

The period is called *neoclassical* because its writers looked back to the ideals and art forms of classical times, emphasizing even more than their Renaissance predecessors the classical ideals of **order and rational control**.

The classical ideals of **order and moderation** which inspired this period, its realistically limited aspirations, and its emphasis on the **common sense** of society rather than **individual imagination**, could all be characterized as **rational**. And, indeed, it is often known as the **Age of Reason**.

- Influence of Materialism<Authority and Enlightenment>
- Imitation of classics<Roman and Greeks>
- Concept of nature<Human Nature>
- Concept of Men<cheap , Limited>
- Beginning of Novel<Decline of theatre>
- New Trends <Vocabulary>
- Individualism rather than socialism
- scholarly allusions
- Didacticism

Heroic Couplet

•No Passionate Lyricism

•Objectivity

•Poetic Diction

•Wit, rationality, decorum

•Ben Jonson and the 'unities'

•philosophies and rhetoric.

Longest period of Literature.

Age of Restoration : Theatres were restored and monarchy was re-established with the return of Charles II from France.

Age of Reason & Enlightenment : Supremacy of logic & The Rise of Science (1660 -1700)

Augustan Age (1714-1760) : self conscious imitation of the original Augustan writers, Virgil and Horace by many writers of this period.

Age of Transition (1745 - 1798) :**The double tendencies** • Two movements can be noticed clearly – classicism and romanticism

-Order, Accuracy and Structure; The age wished to understand instead of imagine. Concerned with human nature and supremacy of reason.

-Major writers of the age were Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson and John Dryden in poetry; Jonathan Swift and Joseph Addison in prose.

ROMANTIC PERIOD

Romanticism arises as a response to social and economic changes caused by the Industrial Revolution. ▾

Wordsworth and Coleridge publish *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. Thus starting the Romantic Era. ▾

Keats, Byron, and Shelley write their greatest poems in the early nineteenth century.

Age of Reason

Reason and Judgement
Concern with the universal experience
The value of society as a whole
The value of rules

Romantic Age

- Imagination and Emotion
- Concern with the particular experience
- The value of the individual human being
- The value of freedom

Poets- Pre Romantics : Burns, Grey, Cowper, Thomson

1st Generation : Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey

2nd Generation : Keats, Byron, Shelley,

Prose: Austen, Bronte, Hawthorne, Melville, Scott, Mary Shelley

While 18thC poets had celebrated man's intellect and reason, 19thC poets rejected the same mostly owing to the **French Revolution (1789-1799)** which stirred interest in democratic ideals with french citizens storming the Bastille in Paris as a result.

Motto : "liberty, equality, fraternity."

1792 Reign of terror started in France; Monarchy was abolished; Jacobins took control and established a Republic
1793 King Louis XVI, Queen Marie Antoinette and 17000 aristocrats were guillotined.

Beauty of the Supernatural

- ▣ Believed something existed beyond physical world
- ▣ Spirit world overthrows tyranny in govt and literature
- ▣ Focused on supernatural energy and beauty

Championing of the Individual

- ▣ Focused on an audience of those who would become the middle class (a shift of balance btwn gentry and farmers/workers)
- ▣ Free itself from traditional forms and subjects; freer lyric language that emulated natural speech
- ▣ Interest in childhood (a person at their most natural state)

Emotion, sometimes extreme

Imagination, from the real lives of people to the imagination of Gothic tales, Fairy tales, supernatural stories, and science fiction

Originality, with a premium upon expression that used new techniques as well as new ideas

Intensity, passion

VICTORIAN PERIOD



The Victorian era is characterized by English imperialism. England was rapidly expanding. Queen Victoria was named Empress of India

The Victorian era is also thought to be a time of rigid morals and repressed sexuality. Reading became a new past time because some theatre was regarded as “immoral”

A long period of peace, prosperity, refined sensibilities and national self-confidence for Britain

The masses of men begin to be educated, begin to think for themselves, and a host of periodicals appear in answer to their demand for reading matter.

Poets, novelists, essayists, historians, all serious writers feel the inspiration of great audience, and their works have a thousand readers where formerly they had but one.

In a word, English government, society and literature have all become more democratic. This is the most significant feature of modern history.

Lord Alfred Tennyson Robert Browning
Elizabeth Barrett Browning Matthew Arnold
Strong desire to connect to the past
Skepticism about religion
Sense of Humor

Charles Dickens H.G. Wells Joseph Conrad
Lewis Carroll Thomas Hardy Oscar Wilde
Romantic and Gothic Elements
Social Problem Novels
Naturalism

It is the age of novel.
It is the age of dramatic monologue.
It is the age of weak faith in religion.
It is the age of merchant and business men. No aristocracy class.
It is the age of free and compulsory education.
It is the age of private religious rules.
The Victorian were materialistic.
The Victorian literature was propagandist.
It is the age of utilitarianism.

- The Victorian age encompassed years of unprecedented economic, technical, and political expansion and dramatic social change.
 - Imperialism was at its peak.
 - A strong middle class arose with a strict moral tone. It was at this time that the tea party became an important feature in middle class Victorian life.

EDWARDIAN PERIOD / GEORGIAN PERIOD

Literature before the 1st World War (Edwardian Period)

The main focus on the Victorian age – its social history and its values

Samuel Butler (1835-1902) – *The Way of All Flesh* (1903) – an attack on the hypocrisy of Victorian family life

John Millington Synge - (1871-1909) – Irish playwright: *Riders to the Sea* (1904), *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) – set in the world of the peasants on the Isle of Arran.

John Galsworthy - (1867-1933) *The Man of Property* (1906), (*The Forsyte Saga*) – describing a typical middle-class London family of the last decades of the 19th century.

Literature presented a total picture of English society as it moved towards the new century.

Arnold Bennett - (1867-1931) – *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908).

Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874-1936) – *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908)

The **Edwardian Period** is named for King Edward VII and spans the time from Queen Victoria's death to the beginning of World War I. The British Empire was at its height and the wealthy lived lives of materialistic luxury, while 4/5 of the English population lived in squalor. The writings of the **Edwardian Period** comment on these social conditions. Writers such as George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells attacked social injustice. Other writers include William Butler Yeats, Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, Henry James, and E.M. Forster.

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The **Georgian Period** refers to the period of British Literature that is named for the reign of George V (1910-36). Many writers of the **Edwardian Period** continued to write during the **Georgian Period**. Georgian poetry tends to focus on rural subject matter and is traditional in technique and form.

MODERN PERIOD

After the First World War, all kinds of literary trends of modernism appeared: symbolism, expressionism, surrealism, cubism, futurism, Dadaism, imagism and stream of consciousness.

(1) Modern English poetry:

It is, in some sense, a revolution against the conventional ideas and forms of the Victorian poetry.

(2) Modern English novels:

The first three decades of 20th century were golden years of the modernist novel.

(3) The development of 20th century English drama:

The most celebrated dramatists in the last decade of the 19th century were Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw, who, in a sense, pioneered the modern drama, though they did not make so many innovations in techniques and forms as modernist poets or novelists

Alienation and exile

Many of the great Modernist writers were **outsiders** (Irish, immigrants, expatriates, exiles): Joyce, Eliot, Lawrence, Conrad

Sense of **alienation** and outcast status from mainstream, middle-class, late Victorian British values—
more doubt creeps in



Cultural “chip on the shoulder”

Sense of alienation in literature:

- **The character belongs to a “lost generation” (Gertrude Stein)**
- **The character suffers from a “dissociation of sensibility”—separation of thought from feeling (T. S. Eliot)**
- **The character has “a dream deferred” (Langston Hughes).**

POSTMODERN PERIOD

The term was applied to a whole host of movements, many in art, music, and literature, that reacted against modernism, and are typically marked by revival of traditional elements and techniques.

Literature of this period reflects the social activism and social change characteristic of the times. In the latter half of this period, the influence of the digital age is reflected in new and emerging forms of writing and literacy.

Postmodernism emerged after the Second World war as a reaction against “Modernism”.

Like modernist literature, postmodern literature is part of socio-cultural and historical development and can be seen as a specific way of a depiction of the postmodern life and culture. It shows a crisis of identity of human being (ethnic, sexual, social and cultural).

There are a few similarities to modernist literature.

- both are usually told from an objective point of view.
- explore the external reality to examine the inner states of consciousness of the characters
- employ fragmentation in narrative and character construction
- reject boundaries between high and low forms of art,
- reject rigid genre distinctions, emphase pastiche, parody, irony, and playfulness.

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