

**BALTI STATE UNIVERSITY A. RUSSO
CHAIR OF ENGLISH PHILOLOGY**

HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE
Vth - XVIIth cent

Stela Gorbani

**Senior teacher of English,
Chair of English Philology**

BĀLTĪ

2009

CONTENTS

I. The Dawn of English Literature	3
Anglo-Saxon Literature	5
Beowulf	6
Norman Period in English literature	10
II. Middle English Literature	16
Geoffrey Chaucer	20
Canterbury Tales	22
III. Renaissance in English Literature	28
Thomas More – the first humanist in English Literature	30
Edmund Spenser	33
Christopher Marlowe	35
IV. William Shakespeare	40
The Taming of the Shrew	45
Romeo and Juliet	46
The Tragedy of Othello the Moor of Venice	51
The Tragedy of Hamlet – Prince of Denmark	55
V. English Literature of the Period Revolution and Restoration	59
John Donne	66
Ben Jonson	68
John Milton	70
VI. Enlightenment in English Literature	73
Daniel Defoe	76
Jonathan Swift	79

The Dawn of English Literature

English Literature of Middle Ages

Plan

1. Introduction
2. Classification of English literary history
3. English literature of Middle Ages
4. Anglo – Saxon Literature (7th-11th centuries): Caedmon, Venerable Bede, Alfred the Great.
5. Beowulf – the first national epic of English Literature
6. Middle English literature. The literature of the Norman Period (12th – 13th c.).
The writers of the age: Wace, Layamon.
7. The literary forms of the age: Romance, Fable, Fabliaux, Ballad, Folk songs.
Robin Hood – the character of ballads
8. Conclusions

Bibliography:

1. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*; fifth Edition. The Major Authors; New York, London, 1989
2. D. Dorobăț, S. Pîrvu, *English Literature*; Iași 1993
3. Bantaș, Clonțea Brînzean, *Manual de Literatură Engleză și Americană*; TEORA 1993
4. M. Hecker, T. Volosova, *English Literature* M.1963
5. Mcgraw-Hill, *English literature A Chronological approach*, McGraw-Hill, Inc. 1985
6. Т. Аникин, Н. Михальская, *История английской Литературы*; Москва, 1982
7. D. Duțescu, L. Luvetchi, *Beowulf*, București, 1969

I

Introduction

English literature plays an important role in the history of universal literature. The names of great Shakespeare, Byron, Shelley, Dickens, Thackeray, Shaw, Wells, Galsworthy, Aldridge, etc. are known all over the world. The works of these great writers have fascinated the readers of all ages. Their plays, poems, novels are a great contribution to the treasury of world literature.

English Literature has its specific national features and has always existed in close connection with universal literature, being influenced and influencing the literature of other nations and countries. For example the greatest dramatists Ch. Marlow and W. Shakespeare have been inspired by their contemporaries and borrowed the plots of some famous works from the existing already stories and plays. Ch. Malow's "Doctor Faustus" is based on the plot of the famous Goethe's work with the same title. The plots of King Lear and Romeo and Juliet, for instance, were borrowed by W. Shakespeare from other medieval works, by giving them a new interpretation and value. The creation of the great Bard, fascinated the public in all times and still continue to persist in modern culture.

English Literature reflects the history of the people that created it. The social events of the country have been always reflected on the pages of literature. The first writings that date with the 5th century AD were mainly written by monks and priests who were the only educated people at that time. The church was the center of education and culture at that time and the first writings were mainly translations and interpretations of the Bible. The first books of history are considered to be pieces of literature according to which we can judge about the people's life and the literature of the first periods, its form and style. The authors of those remote times were more concerned with recording the account of events of their age, which today is studied both as historic and literary works. In such a way we see that the development of English literature was closely connected with the development of English society. That is why literary history is classified in conformity with the periods of history of the nation.

2. Classification of Literary History

The outline of English Literature conveniently falls into the following historical divisions:

- I. Middle Ages (449 - 1500)
 - a) Anglo – Saxon Period (449 – 1066)
 - b) Middle English Period (1066 – 1485)
- II. Renaissance (1500 – 1640)
- III. Revolution and Restoration (1640 – 1688)
- IV. The Age of Enlightenment (1688 – 1789)
- V. Romanticism (1489-1835)
- VI. Critical Realism in the 19th century (1835-1880)

VII. Critical Realism at the end of the 19th century – the beginning of the 20th century (1880 - 1900)

VIII. Modern English Literature (1900 – 2007)

3. English Literature of the Middle Ages

Literature of the Middle Ages lasted for 8 centuries and was subdivided into 3 different periods: Anglo-Saxon period, Norman period and Pre-Renaissance. These three periods coincide with the three different historic periods in the life of the medieval British nation. They were connected with the invasion of many wild tribes of different origins to the British Islands. Originally the aboriginal inhabitants of the British Isles were the Celts who experienced several invasions that considerably changed this nation. The Britons were enabled to mix up with Roman, Germanic and Norman people, which later sprang into the British nation.

The Romans came to Britain in the 1st century A.D., the Anglo – Saxons attacked the Islands by the end of the 4th century, and the Normans conquered the Islands in the 11th century. All these peoples brought into the country their own lore (customs and traditions), forms of social life, language and culture.

4. Anglo-Saxon Literature (Old English)

(5th -11th century)

After the Romans lived and ruled the life in Briton for 3 centuries the British Isles were invaded at the beginning of the 5th century (449) by three Germanic tribes: Angles, Saxons and Jutes, who used to live in the northern and central parts of Europe. These were wild and fearless races, who could never been driven away by the Celts. After the first conquest the natives became slaves of the Anglo-Saxons and were forced to adopt many of their customs, traditions, language and ways of life. The language of the Celts which had already undergone a serious change under the Romans now blended with the Anglo- Saxon language. During this period literature existed mainly in the oral form and the authors remained unknown. People created poems, songs and epics depicting the aspirations of people, their faith and ways of life.

The first literary works existed in the form of verse. The verse was the most effective for oral delivery and more easily committed to memory. The principle rule of the verse was a long line, usually of about nine or ten syllables. The first three of the four stressed syllables were generally made alliterative i.e. they began with the same consonant or a vowel was repeated in several words.

The alliterative relation among the vowels which, added to the four rhythmical accents shows that the beating was the primordial element and the alliterations only served to mark them. It is worth mentioning that the names did not always meet the rules of alliteration, which was characteristic of structure in Anglo – Saxon poetry, and this is one reason why the poets felt it

necessary to substitute them for kennings. Kennings were metaphorical compounds – synonyms or near synonyms, which drove home a single idea in several different ways. For example: life was “a sea-travel”, the world was “moonlight”, the sea was “the swan-track”./1

One Kenning could produce a great many variations. Once the description of a ship “as a sea-steed” was accepted; any word meaning ‘steed’ was used to provide a slightly different image.

5. Beowulf

An example of such structures as kennings and alliterations was the first and the greatest epic of English Literature *Beowulf*. This beautiful Saxon poem reflects the times long before the Anglo – Saxons came to Britain. The idea of the poem seems remote and strange to modern perception. While the poem itself is English in language and origin, it does not deal with native Englishmen, but with their Germanic forebears, especially with two South Scandinavian tribes, the Danes and the Geats, who lived on the Danish Island of Zealand and in the Southern Sweden. The Danes and the Geats were great sailors and warriors. The population of this country was divided into two classes of free peasants and warriors. The peasants tilled the soil and served the fighting men, who defended them from hostile tribes. The safety of the people depended on the warriors, who were divided into several sub coordinated ranks: the folk-king, or liege-lord, who formed the top of the community, after them followed the earls, served by a lower rank of warriors, the “knights”. The poem reveals the everyday life of all these groups of people, presenting the warriors in battle and at peace, their feasts and amusements, their love for sea and adventure.

The poem was composed in the 5th or 6th centuries AD and was written down in the 8th or 10th century by an unknown scribe. In 1731, before any modern transcription of the text had been made, the manuscript was seriously damaged by the fire that destroyed the building of a church where the manuscript was kept. That church housed an extraordinary collection of medieval English manuscripts made by Sir Robert Cotton(1571 – 1631). As a result of it a number of lines and words have been lost from the poem. It is generally agreed that the poet who put the old material into its present form was a Christian as it follows many Christian traditions and many words quoted from the Old Testament are quoted. The poem also mentions facts about the beginning of feudalism. All these facts put together give us hints that the work was created long before the Anglo-Saxons invaded the country, because they were heathen tribes who received Christianity only after settling in Britain.

Thus, the poem was composed before the Anglo-Saxons came but was written down only in the 8th or 10th century in Anglo-Saxon (Old English).

The original manuscript of the epic is kept in the British Museum today. The modern reader has access to this work due to several translations of the epic done into modern English, and namely the prose translation by E. Talbot Donaldson and verse translation by Alfred David.

Beowulf is not only unique as an example of an Old English epic, but it is also the greatest of the surviving epics composed by the Germanic people that inhabited the British Islands in the 3-6 centuries, the Anglo-Saxons. It marked the beginning of English literature.

Beowulf was a young knight of the Jutes who lived on the southern coast of the Scandinavian Peninsula. His unselfish way of protecting people makes him worthy to be folk-king. The plot of the story deals with the heroic deeds of the young knight Beowulf who saved the Danes from a sea-monster and gave them freedom and peace. King Hrothgar of the Spear-Danes was as mighty a king as his great grandfather Scylding. Hrothgar had many treasures as his warriors brought victories after victories. So he decided to build a palace near the sea where they could celebrate these victories and relax between wars. They gave it the name Heorot or Meadhall. Days and nights there was a lot of merrymaking, laughter and joy going on and the noise of all that enjoyment bothered a sea-monster, Grendel, who lived near Meadhall in a sea den. He wanted to subdue the Danes because he grew jealous about the festive noise that the warriors made day and night after they returned from the war. One night when the heroes had fallen asleep, the monster carried away thirty men and devoured them. Nobody knew what had happened but it put the beginning of a twelve year terror in the country. So night after night the warriors disappeared and this made the Jutes give up all the gatherings in Meadhall. The beautiful palace became empty and useless, people being fear stricken, horror seized the country. The news of the horrible deeds of the monster spread to other countries and reached Beowulf, a liegeman to Higelac. Beowulf was very brave and decided to come to the rescue of the Danes, so he chose 14 companions and started his trip for ridding the Danes of the sea-monster. Beowulf learnt that Grendel used no weapons and he decided to fight a fair fight:

*“... alone now with Grendell shall manage the matter,
with the monster of evil,
That I may unaided, my earl men assisting me,
... only with hand-grip
The foe I must grapple, fight for my life as freeman with foeman.”*

When all people went to sleep Beowulf remained on watch, holding his breath. Suddenly Grendel broke into the hall, devouring one of the sleeping men. Then he approached Beowulf and such a desperate hand to hand struggle began, the monster thought:

*“B’neath the whole of the heavens, no hand-grapple greater
In any man else had ever encountered I...”*

Beowulf managed to tear off the monster’s arm and the beast crawled away into his den to die. Relieved of fear and care they all rejoiced and a banquet was given in honour of Beowulf. But peace didn’t last long because Grendel’s mother came to avenge her son’s death. After fighting with her bravely both ashore and in the sea Beowulf killed her in the water. He came out of the water with the head of Grendel in his hands as a sign of total defeat of the enemy.

After Higelac’s death Beowulf became king of the Jutes and had been ruling the country wisely for 50 years, bringing happiness and joy to the Danes. Still he had to face another battle in which he was defeated and killed. This time it was a fire spewing dragon. Beowulf remained as a symbol of freedom for his people. They have built a memorial on a mount that was visible from a great distance so that passing sailors might be constantly reminded of his devotion to his people and love for freedom.

6. More examples of Anglo-Saxon Literature

During many centuries a lot of literature was composed but little was written down. Alliterated poetry never ceased to be composed. Among the first poets of the Anglo-Saxon times that are known today are Caedmon, Venerable Bede and Alfred the Great.

Venerable Bede was known in his times as one of the greatest scholars. Born in 673, he was brought up in the monasteries of Northumbria where he received the best education of that time. He wrote in Latin and produced many theological works as well as books on science and rhetoric His great contribution to English literature and history of the English nation was his famous book “Ecclesiastic History”(731). The History tells about the Anglo-Saxon conquest though his main theme was the spread of Christianity and the growth of English Church. It contains many stories of saints and miracles that testified the glory of God. Another merit of Bede was the fact that he wrote the first autobiographical account in English Literature. Bede’s writings prove that he is reliable as a writer and a historian. His judgements are as accurate as could be. Although he reflects the view point of his race and time, he writes of other civilisations with equal justice and appreciation. His desire to interpret the events makes him integrate traditions or even legends. From his writings we learn about another poet of the age Caedmon. Bede says that Caedmon, an illiterate cowherd employed by the monastery of Whitby, miraculously received the gift of singing, entered the monastery and became the founder of the school of Christian poetry.

Caedmon We do not have much information about his life, still what we know is that Caedmon wrote in Anglo-Saxon. He wasn't a monk but a shepherd at Whitby. His name is known today for his poem "The Paraphrase" that is a versification of some books of the Bible. They were stories in alliterative verse. Caedmon versified the book of "Genesis", "Exodus" and "Daniel". He continued to write in the old formulaic style and followed the tradition of Old English verse.

Alfred the Great (849 – 901). Alfred the Great had travelled on the continent and visited France. He was a Latin scholar and did much to enlighten his people. He translated the Church – history of Bede from Latin into English which was a very significant event for the Englishmen since they were for the first time exposed to some historical facts. Alfred the Great wrote *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, which is considered the first history of England. His works do not come out of any vainglory. Neither are they the offspring of a personal craving to write. His sole purpose was to instruct his subjects. And he starts by reminding his nation of the glorious traditions which they should not let down. He writes in "Anglo-Saxon Chronicles": "*there were learned men formerly throughout England, both in religion and in secular positions*", "*how the kings who held rule over the people in those days were obedient to God and to their representatives and how they maintained peace and good morals and order at home*", "*how eager they were both in teaching and in learning*" and "*in all services they owed to God*", "*how people from abroad come to seek wisdom and instruction in our land*" and how "*we now have to go abroad to get wisdom and instruction, if we are to have them at all.*"² King Alfred was a teacher in the first place, a sensible receiver and a wise sender. He first informs his people of their own history, translating from Latin Bede's "Ecclesiastical History of the English". The version is close to the original but many chapters, unlikely to be of general interest, are omitted. The next translation that Alfred the Great made was "The History of the World" by Orosius. He was eager to let the English know what lies beyond their country. It isn't a scientific treaty, but a helpful guide to the history of other peoples. King Alfred drops out the controversial and what he thinks to be dull in it, and introduces a lot of new facts, among others a full account of the geography of Germany.

An exception is *De Consolatione Philosophiae* by Boethius in the sense that King Alfred is not attracted now by any pedagogical purpose but by his own feelings, i.e. he identifies himself with this book so much suited to the mood of a man who has understood that power, wealth and fame are temporary.

-
1. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*; fifth Edition. The Major Authors; New York, London, 1989 p. 20
 2. and 3. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*; fifth Edition. The Major Authors; New York, London, 1989 p 22, p 22
-

The book is a dialogue between the author and a philosopher who comforts him by proving that it is only the spiritual happiness that matters. The translator “sets down word for word, sometimes meaning for meaning” and sometimes, leaving the original aside, writes out of his life experience, with the same simplicity and clearness. Alfred the Great made a great contribution to the development of the Englishmen’s thinking.

7. The literature of the Norman period (11th century)

The year 1066 was marked in English history by a new conquest. The Norman duke William took profit of the struggle that took place among the Anglo-Saxon earls for supreme power and invaded the country, entering the history of English nation as William the Conqueror. Within five years the lands of most of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy were divided among the Norman barons after which followed Norman churchmen, scribes, minstrels and merchants. This great army of Normans brought into the country their own language feudal laws, and literature. In connection with all these events the communication in the country went on in three languages:

- 1) Latin - the language of education in monasteries
- 2) Norman-French - the language of the ruling class (Norman barons)
- 3) English - the language of the most numerous part of the population – common people. Norman – French and Anglo- Saxon were moulded into one national language only towards the beginning of the 14 century, forming Middle English.

All these three categories of people created their own literature which reflected their interests and ways of life. New literary forms sprang in the creation of these people.

The monks wrote historical chronicles in Latin. The scholars of Oxford University described their experiments in Latin, even antireligious satire was composed in Latin.

The Aristocracy wrote poetry in Norman – French. They created romances. The townsfolk wrote fables and fabliaux, while the country-folk made up their ballads and folk songs in Anglo-Saxon.

A Romance is a medieval story, usually in verse, relating the adventures of some hero of chivalry. The romance was the literary form of the Norman aristocracy. They used to idealize the feudal system showing the bravery and gallantry of royal knights. Their exploits were described in great epics. The court had love-stories and lyrical poems praising the chivalrous attitude towards women. These stories, poems and songs were very much admired by the aristocratic readers. The definition of Romances makes us believe that the ideal of any romance was a knight. The courtly

ideal is primarily an aesthetic ideal made up of varied fantasies and softly emotions. It is also an ethical ideal insisting on such virtues as piety, modesty, temperance, and fidelity. The centre of the individual universe was the knight's pride. Pride usually gives birth to a shameless selfishness but it is not this branch of it that is discussed in romances. On the contrary the authors praised pride, which allowed them to discover the knight's sense of honour, the thirst for glory and fame. The knight as a constituent of fiction would not mean very much if his experience was not marked by love, the feeling that turned him from an abstract symbol into a human being.

One of the poets who lived and created during the Norman period, depicting the deeds of the aristocracy in his romances was Wace.

Wace was born on the Island of Jersey at the beginning of the 12th century. He studied theology in Paris. Later on he was invited to the Court of Henry I and ordered to write the history of England. He wrote two rhyming Chronicles in the form of romances:

- 1) *Brute or the Acts of the Britts.*
- 2) *Rollo or the Acts of the Normans.*

In the first romance the poet informs his readers of how Brutus, the legendary forefather of the Romans discovered the Islands and called it Britannia. Wace imitated the Latin books of history and added to his composition the songs of the Welsh bards who never ceased singing the freedom. They used to enjoy it before the Anglo-Saxons had come to their island. In this work for the first time the name of King Arthur is mentioned in literature. This work comprises 15.000 lines and was written in 1155.

Laymon In 1205 Laymon another poet of the age created a version of Wace's *Brute*. It was called "Brute or Chronicle of Britain". This immense epic (32.000 lines) written in Old English consists in 3 books.

Book I deals with ancient history from Brut to the birth of King Arthur.

Book II retells various legends about King Arthur and the "Knights of the Round Table".

Book III continues the history of the British kings from the death of King Arthur to the victory of the Anglo-Saxon King Aethelstane.

Laymon borrowed the material for his writings from Latin histories, romances, from the book of Bede and even from "Beowulf". His intention was to show England as a glorious and powerful country.

The literature of the townfolk was characterised by fables and fabliaux.

Fables were short stories with animals for characters, conveying a moral.

Fabliaux were funny stories about cunning humbugs and unfaithful wives of rich merchants. They were rhymed versions of jokes and did not require much learning or wit to be understood. But there were also subtler stories among them. For example *The Roman de Renart* which is on the

whole an irreverent counterpart of the courtly romance. They were told in the dialects of Middle English being collected and written down much later. Contrary to the romance the literature of the townfolk did not idealise their characters but showed a more practical attitude to life, deriding such traits of character as vanity, hypocrisy, greediness, unfaithfulness, foolishness, etc .

Folk songs were various songs praising labour, love and honour. Some of them had a religious character. The most popular among them were the carols. A carol – is a dance-song, and also a love-song with a refrain of “douci amie”. The most popular were the Christmas carols that were devotions on sacred subjects. Many of them survived and are sung today in churches on Christmas.

The best of the folk poetry were the *ballads*. A ballad is a lyrico-epical poem in rhymed verse preserved in literature by oral transmission. They were short narratives in verse, which were used for singing or reciting. They were often accompanied by musical instruments and followed a simple tune. There were various kinds of ballads: historical, legendary, lyrical and humorous.

The most popular ballads were the ones devoted to Robin Hood, who was partially a legendary, partially a historical character. They described the numerous adventures of Robin Hood and his friend, Little John, William Scarlet and Much, the Miller’s Son. Robin Hood and his friends were outlaws who lived in the woods, where hunting was prohibited. Very often they were persecuted for doing it and this made them more vindictive.

Robin Hood came from a Saxon family, who was deprived of estate by a Norman baron. The Normans needed much land for pastures in order to breed more sheep, which was bringing much fortune. Robin had grown in the forest and became a very skilful archer and devoted his life to revenge upon the Normans who deprived his nation of their rights, making them poor. They robbed barons, archbishops and abbots, and whatever came into their hands they shared with the poor people.

These ballads were much like their more elevated counterparts: the country romances. Though with a difference: in the romances the adventure is experienced by “because”, while in the Robin Hood ballads there is a motive. Let us give consideration to the ballad *Robin Hood and the Widow’s Sons*.

*“There are twelve months in all the year,
As I hear many men say,
But the merriest month in all the year,
Is the merry month of May.
Robin Hood is to Nottingham gone,
With a link a down and a day,
And there he met a silly old woman,*

Was weeping on the way.
“What news” what news thon silly old woman?
What news hast thon for me?”
Said she, “Ther’s my three sons in Nottingham
To-day condemned to die.”

This news was enough for the young adventurous hero to come into action. He will not let three people die for having slain the King’s deer. He changes his apparel with an old palmer for a piece of good broad gold and “*now he is to Nottingham gone, With a link, a down and a day.*” When he gets there the execution is just ready to start. All the people were gathered on the central square of the city and the three sons of the widow were brought in. In no time Robin Hood blew his horn just once and a hundred and fifty of his men came riding over the hill surrounding the square.

The next loud blast that he gives brings six of his men who come shining over the plain. And...

“It is as easy as that:
They look the gallows from the slack,
They set it in the glen.
They hanged the proud sheriff on that
Released their own three men.”

All the ballads of Robin Hood depicted the aspirations of common people for freedom. They are written in nice rhyming verse which has a nice flow and are easy for reading.

Besides the Robin Hood ballads there were the so-called “*border ballads*” dealing with feuds between the English and the Scottish lords and their followers. Cherry Chase ballad is the most outstanding among this group.

Of the *historical Ballads* “Sir Patrick Spens” stand out. They based on stories from ancient folklore. Sir Patrick Spens – a brave sailor has to confront great difficulties sailing in unfavourable conditions which brought his crew and himself to the death.

Drinking the blude-reide wine:
O Whrt will I get a guid sailor
To sail this ship of mine?”
The king has written a braid letter
And signed it wi’ his hand,
And sent it to Sir Patric Spens,
Was walking on the sand.

So Sir Patric rushes to the sea and...

“Late, late yesterday I saw the new moon

*With the old moon in her arms
And I fear, I fear, my dear master,
That we will come to harm.”*

Conclusions

1. The literary periods are classified according to the historic periods of the development of English society.
2. The Literature of Middle Ages is subdivided into 2 periods: Anglo-Saxon and Middle English. Middle English comprises the period between the Norman Conquest 1066 and Renaissance.
3. The Anglo-Saxon period is characterised by the appearance of first writings connected with Bible stories and religion. The writers were monks and priests. The main form of writing was alliterative verse.
4. The beginning of English Literature was marked by one of the greatest epics “Beowulf” that depicted the aspirations of people for freedom.
5. The Literature of Middle Ages started with the Norman period which brought into being new literary forms, such as: romance, fable, fabliaux, ballad and folk songs, each reflecting the life of different ranks of society.

Practical assignments:

Beowulf

- I. Read the recommended passage from *Beowulf* and answer the following questions:
 1. Beowulf chooses a different weapon in the three battles with Grendel. Which are they? What do they symbolize?
 2. What was the primary motivation of Beowulf in all three battles?
 3. Look at the fire-dragon episode, starting with the failure of Beowulf. Make a list of the items in the sequence that brought him failure and death.
 4. Before dying Beowulf makes a speech. What actions did Beowulf make before that. Enumerate them.

5. Read the lament sung by a woman at Beowulf's funerals. What is its value in the work?
6. Select from the text elements of imagery poetry – similes, kennings.

II. Read the ballad *Sir Patric Spens* and *Barbara Allan, On the Banks of Allan Waters*. Comment on the composition of these ballads.

III. Read *Corpus Christi Carol* and answer the following questions:

1. What characteristic features does a carol have?
2. What effect does the refrain create?
3. Comment on the emotional force of “an orchard brown”, “purple and pall”, “gold so red”.

IV. Find other examples of carols, ballads and folk songs and comment on your choice.

Middle English Literature

14th century

Plan

1. Political, economic and cultural life of English society in the 14th century.
2. The writers of the age: W. Langland , “Pears the Ploughman”
3. J. Wycliffe - literary activity.
4. Geoffrey Chaucer – the father of English poetry. Three periods in G. Chaucer’s creation.
5. The Summit of G. Chaucer’s work – “Canterbury Tales” (1386), composition and structure. The story “The Wife of Bath”, “The Pardoner’s Tale”.
6. Conclusions
7. Practical assignments

Bibliography:

1. Dorobăț, S. Pârvu, English Literature Iași 1993
 2. Burgess, Anthonz, English Literature, London 1983
 3. Levițchi, Leon, Literatura Engleză de la începuturi pînă la 1648 , Iasi 1973
 4. M. Hecker, T. Volosova, English Literature/ M. 1978
 5. G. Chaucer , Canterbury Tales / Norton Anthology of English Literature Volume one/ fifth edition/ Norton and Company, New York London
 6. William Langland, Piers Ploughman A new translation by A.V.C. Schmidt Oxford University Press 1992
 7. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*; fifth Edition. The Major Authors; New York, London, 1989
-

Political, economic and cultural life of England in the 14th century.

In the 14th century the process of centralisation was carried to a state of perfection. As the Norman masters applied the same methods of government and exploitation to all parts of England, they forced the Northumbrians and the West Saxons to unite and fight for a common cause. The Norman kings made London their residence. The bourgeoisie became rich as a result of the trade with Flanders while the common people were losing their homes and becoming poppers being deprived of lands which were used as pastures for the sheep. The English shipped wool to Flanders where it was sold as raw material. The Flemish ports became the world market for northern Europe. France became a commercial rival of England. Flemish weavers were invited to England to teach the English their art. But the feudalism unfortunately remained a serious obstacle in the development of the country.

All these events were taking place at the beginning of the 14th century when King of England was Edward III. This powerful feudal lord wished to make himself King of France. He claimed this right because some French provinces, such as Normandy, had once belonged to England, while others were the possession of his mother, a French princess. While Edward determined to get his lands back the French feudal lords were plodding another thing, i.e. to seize the free towns of Flanders and in such a way to deprive England of its wool market. A collision was becoming inevitable. Edward felt that it was just the time to unleash a war with France putting his family interests above the national ones. Wishing to make his people believe that he defended English trade, the King started a war with France in 1337, promising his nation that it would be fairly a short war. In fact England was involved in a *100 Years War*. It is known as well as *the War of Roses*. The common people now suffered not only the yoke of French feudal lords but the war which carried away many lives. Poverty and exhaustion of the people brought to the epidemic of "pestilence". All these events had a strong impact on literature. The writers of the age were William Langland, John Wicliffe and Geoffrey Chaucer.

William Langland

(1332?-1400?)

William Langland was born in the Malvern region of Worcestershire, probably around 1330. Little is known about his life which he seems to have spent mainly in London. He earned his living as a Psalter-clerk. William Langland was a priest who believed in the grace of hard work. He considered that everyone had to work, having in mind the clergymen and the French barons who lived on the account of poor people who were working their guts and living in

misery and privations. His name is remembered for the poem *The Visions of William Concerning Piers the Ploughman*.

Pears the Ploughman is an allegory. Allegory is a story describing some ideas in which such qualities as patience, purity or truth stand for the characters of the story.

There are three versions of this poem. One of them contains about 25000 lines, another 40000 lines, the third being a revision of the second. The name of Langland is often associated with the latter but it is not clear whether all the three versions belong to Langland. If so, one can say that his opinions and interests have changed while writing the work, since there are some divergences in it.

Piers the Ploughman has the form of a dream vision which was a common medieval type in which the author presents his story as a guise of having seen it in a dream. The dream vision involves allegory. This work is considered the greatest of all English allegories actually containing a series of visions separated by brief intervals when the narrator is awake. The first passage presents the fourteenth century English society, which failed to live in accord with Christian principles. Langland pours out indignant satire about the corruption of the church. This poem had a strong impact of the later generations who made the reforms of the church. Virtue, Truth, Honesty, Mercy, Peace, Conscience, Reason are the main characters, being opposed to Envy, Gluttony, Adultery and other characters personifying the seven deadly sins. In his dream he saw false beggars, shaming for food and fighting at the alehouse, pardoners deceiving people, lawyers ready to do any wrong for money, churchmen making money. Piers the Ploughman was a poor peasant who told him about the hard life of the common people opening his eyes concerning the situation in the country. The author realizes that only peasants work their guts, while the others enjoy life, living on their account and cheating them in all possible ways. The part of Envy is the most eloquent:

*“ Envy with heavy heart asked for shift
And grieving for his guilt, began his confession.
...When I come to church and kneel before Christ’s cross
And ought to pray for the people as the priest teaches,
For the pilgrims, for palmers, for all the people after...
Away from the altar I turn my eyes
And see how Heinie has a new coat;
Then I wish it were mine, and all the web it came from.
And when he loses I laugh – that lightens my heart;
But when he wins I weep and wail the time. ...*

And if any man has more than I that angers my heart..."

Langland attacked the evils of the Church which was an act of great courage for that time. This poem helped the people to concentrate their minds on the necessity of fighting for their rights.

The characters are not simply puppets, but they are ultimately the author's mouthpieces. They have a life of their own and act being moved by the impulses of their own will.

Another representative of the literature of the age was John Wicliffe

John Wicliffe

(1320? – 1384?)

John Wicliffe is first of all a teacher, one who takes it to be his mission in life to instruct the others. His teaching is of a particular kind. He starts from religion. He is actually preaching. He formed a school of preachers called "true priests" and "poor priests" who were supposed to go from village to village and spread the Gospel.

He studied at Oxford and was employed as a counsel for the Crown in an office connected with papal claims. He was the first to deny the Church's right to be rich and appealed to the authorities to reform the corrupted Catholic Church. He was on a mission for the government at Bruges in 1374. Wycliffe met the demand of the people by translating the Bible into English. In those days it was a daring thing to do.

Wycliffe is remembered in English Literature as one who debated high questions of government in the common tongue. Thus he developed the English mind and helped the people to prepare for the uprising of 1381. After his death many of his writings have been destroyed.

The followers of Wycliffe were called *Lollards* and their work among people was called The *Lollard movement*. John Ball, a follower of Wycliffe, became very popular among poor people because he saw their sufferings. He turned parts of *Piers the Ploughman* into proclamations, and recited the poem to the people. Often he ended his speech with the famous Wycliffe's words:

*"When Adam delved and Eve span
Who was then a Gentlemen?"*

This statement became a revolutionary saying that demonstrated the protest against social injustice and exploitation of man by man. It was a very brave thing to compare the social system of England of that time with the order that God has established, since the church itself

broke it. Wicliffe's contribution to English literature and Christianity is great as he brought light into people's mind by offering to them the opportunity of knowing the truth directly from the Bible.

Geoffrey Chaucer

(1340 – 1400)

G. Chaucer was a representative of a new class that appeared between the already existing aristocracy and the commons – the middle class.

He was born in London in 1340 in the family of a wine merchant, and probably spent his boyhood in the atmosphere of London's wine merchandising area, where he mixed with common people of all sorts, which produced a great impact on his creation. He might have spent all his life there but in his early teens he was sent to serve as a page in one of the great aristocratic households of England and it opened a broad way for his further connections with the ruling nobility. G. Chaucer fulfilled many responsible and prestigious jobs during his life. He used to be a valet of Edward III, later he was sent to Italy to assist in arranging a trade agreement with the Genovese (1372); to France to get a royal bride for the young Prince Richard (1377). He worked as a Custom's Controller in the port of London (1374 – 86), he was elected Member of Parliament etc. It might seem that a man so busy would have little time to write poetry, but Chaucer seems to have been an assiduous versifier all his adult life. He had done many translations from French and Italian and wrote his own works.

Unfortunately few of his poems can be precisely dated and some have not been preserved.

Geoffrey Chaucer's literary activity can be divided into three periods: French, Italian and English.

The French Period(1369-1372)

In the early period of his literary activity Chaucer was greatly influenced by French literature. He was very fond of French poetry and he learned rhyme and rhythm from it. He was especially fond of the metric principle of French verse. Chaucer translated from French *Le Roman de la Rose*, which is an allegory, written by Guillaume de Lorris. It tells in the form of a dream the progress of a youthful love affair. Chaucer added to the original work 1770 lines and translated them into English. The poem is a mixture of highly diverse elements, and it is characteristic of Chaucer's love of variety which he managed to assimilate into his own work. At the end of this decade he produced his first major work "*The Book of the Duchess*" which was completed at the beginning of 1369.

As it was mentioned the specific models of the 1st Period of Chaucer's literary career were French, but a great deal of works has been translated from Latin into English by the poet as well. His favourite Latin writer was Boethius, especially *Consolation of Philosophy*, written by the poet while in prison, right before his execution. It became one of the most valued books for the whole Middle Ages.

The Italian Period (1372 – 85)

The journey that Chaucer made to Italy in 1372 was a milestone in his literary development.

“This journey immersed him in the works of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio – the last two still alive at the time of Chaucer's visit. Chaucer himself mentioned his respect for Boccaccio, whose cast of mind was far more congenial to Chaucer than the more sober Dante and Petrarch. Many of the famous Canterbury Tales are indebted to Boccaccio's works. His poems *The Parliament of Fowls* (1375 – 1385) and *Troilus and Criceide* (1385) have been inspired by Boccaccio's creation”./1 *Troilus and Criceide* is considered to be the 1st psychological novel in English although its characters are those of ancient Greece.

Troilus and Criceide is a courtly romance true to the courtly code of love, which stipulates some strange principles. They are the lover submits totally, voluntarily and irrevocably to the lady he has chosen. If he happens to fail her in one sense or another she has the right to punish him, even putting him to death. His supreme joy is to have the unique privilege of serving her. Once the love has been accepted the obligation of fidelity extends to both the lover and the beloved. Jealousy is considered a result of infidelity but it has no sign of love. The essential lesson lovers should be taught, Criseyde says, is that “*The first virtue is to hold your tongue*” not to boast about one's “*conquests*”.

Quite helpful in this respect is the philosophical background extremely adequate to the shaping of strong characters: namely the works of Fortune which ever-changing as she is, “*plays with us and there is no appeal.*” The feeble will be pushed out, the fittest, like Criseyde, will survive. “*Fortune favours the brave!*”

The French spirit, which is so visible in *Troilus and Criseyde*, is not absent in Chaucer's later work *Canterbury Tales*. It is still felt in long digressions, the naïve refinement, the malicious remarks. The vigorous and popular tone prevails in the word, though the bourgeois element is strong.

1. Levițchi, Leon, *Literatura Engleză de la începuturi până la 1648*, Iasi 1973 p 42

Under such circumstances, Chaucer's work is all the more remarkable. Keeping within the limits of a conventional genre, the courtly romance, he creates the first psychological novel in English Literature.

Between Chaucer and the greatest of the Italian writers, Dante, there was a large dissimilarity of temperament, yet if Chaucer could not assimilate *The Divine Comedy*, "he nevertheless appreciated its austere moral grandeur, and his works show its influence in a subtle, oblique way.² Moreover, one of his funniest poems, *House of Fame* written when he was in the customs (1374-1386) may be read as a light-hearted imitation of the comedy, though not a wholly successful one. From the works of Petrarch, also a writer of alien temperament, Chaucer obtained less, though he accords Petrarch respect on several occasions. It was Boccaccio, whose cast of mind was far more congenial to Chaucer than the more sober Dante and Petrarch who was to provide the source for some of Chaucer's finest poems – though his name is never mentioned in Chaucer's work.

During the English period Chaucer wrote a number of poems celebrating famous faithful women. He could not bring himself to use the simple moralistic technique of conventional English poetry and they often appeared to be burlesque.

Burlesque is a literary form in which a serious subject is made to seem foolish, or unimportant things are treated solemnly.

English period (1386-1400)

Canterbury Tales

The English Period in G Chaucer's creation is characterised by his great work "Canterbury Tales" (1386). This work represents a set of 22 stories told by different people, pilgrims who travelled to Canterbury. Chaucer lived in Greenwich some miles east of London where there was a highway. From his house he might have been able to see the pilgrim road that led to the shrine of the famous English saint, Thomas à Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury who was murdered in his cathedral in 1170. Medieval pilgrims were notorious tale tellers ("liars", according to the austere Langland). The sight and sound of the bands riding towards Canterbury may have suggested to Chaucer the idea of using a fictitious pilgrimage as a "*framing device*" for a number of stories. So the characters of his work are 30 people. Each one of them was supposed to tell two stories on the way to Canterbury and two more on the way back to make the pilgrimage not so tiresome.

2. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*; fifth Edition. The Major Authors; New York, London, 1989, p.90

Chaucer's original plan for this work was to create about 120 stories. Collections of stories linked by such a device were common in Middle Ages. "Chaucer's contemporary John Gower had used it in one in his *Confessio Amantis* early in the century, Boccaccio had placed the hundred tales of his Decameron in the mouth of ten characters, each of whom told a tale for ten days. Chaucer's exploitation of the device is, altogether his own. In Gower and Sercambi one speaker relates all the stories"³. But in *Canterbury Tales* each story is told by one narrator, whose personality is presented in a humorous way by the author in the Prologue to the Tale. There is a fascinating accord between the narrators and their stories. Chaucer's characters conduct two fictions simultaneously – that of the individual tale and that of the pilgrim who was telling the story. The work has a *General prologue* in which the author introduces in a humorous way all the characters. He develops the second fiction not only through the General Prologue but also through the links, the interchanges among the pilgrims, that occur between the stories. These interchanges sometimes lead to animosities.

The composition of none of the tales can be accurately dated; most of them were written during the last 14 years of Chaucer's life. The extraordinary variety of *Canterbury Tales* as well as their number might well have demanded their author's full energy. Chaucer's practical business prevented him from achieving more than 22 tales. His lifelong involvement in practical activity is one of the chief reasons for the poet's greatness. From birth to death Chaucer dealt continually with all sorts of people, the highest and the lowest and his wonderfully observant mind made most of this ever-present opportunity. His wide life experience and much reading gave him plots and ideas, but experience came from people. As a commoner he had sympathy towards the lower classes and they must have accepted him. Chaucer has won full acceptance from the proud and important personages as well with whom he associated at court. He understands perfectly well the high and the low but he remains curiously detached from both. The art of being at once involved in and detached from a given situation is peculiarly Chaucer's.

Chaucer did not need to make a pilgrimage himself in order to meet all the types of people that his fictitious pilgrimage includes, for most of them had long inhabited literature as well as life.

3. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*; fifth Edition. The Major Authors; New York, London, 1989 , p.90

They were: *a Knight, who had fought against pagans*, his son, *a Squire, a lover out of any love, who loved poems*, *The Prioress without a vocation but with jewelry*, *a Nun, a hunting Monck* and *flattering Friar*, *the too busy and too rich Sergeant of the Law*, *the fraudulent Doctor*, *the austere Parson*, *a Peasant*, *a Student*, *a Sailor*, *a Carpenter*, *a Cook*, etc. All these types are found in medieval literature. Chaucer achieves the effect of convincing his readers that they know similar people, by persuading us that his own interest lies only in the visible. Chaucer has selected his details in order to give an integrated sketch of the person being described while they are generally not full – blown literary symbols, who actually mediate between the world of types and the world of real people”. Independent bourgeois women of the time were often makers of cloth, so that the *Wife of Bath’s* proficiency at the trade is in one way merely part of her historical reality; or the *Franklin’s* red face and white beard seem always to associate themselves with a man of good will, who likes good living.

“Chaucer’s poetic world shows images often with an extraordinary clarity, as if reality itself was more real. *His Prioress* is an example of the basic human paradox, the great opposition of what people really are and what they pretend to be. Chaucer shows us clearly her inability to be what she professes to be. But in Chaucer’s handling the reality comprehends both sides of the Prioress character, he accepts the paradox without attempting to resolve it. He appears to have been a man who had no illusions about the surrounding him world, with all its inhabitants”⁴. The author appears to be deeply fond of them as they were.

The *Wife of Bath* is to illustrate the talent of G. Chaucer. It is the remarkable culmination of many centuries of an antifeminism that was particularly nurtured by the medieval church. In their eagerness to exalt the spirit ideal of chastely, certain theologians developed an idea of womankind that was nothing less than monstrous. This notion was given more eloquent expression by St. Jerome in his attack (written about 400 A.D.) on the monk Jovinian, who had uttered some good words for matrimony and it is Jerome that the wife of Bath comes forward not curiously enough to refuse, but to confirm.

4. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*; fifth Edition. The Major Authors; New York, London, 1989 , p.92

The first part of the Prologue of the *Wife of Bath* is a mass of quotations from that part of Jerome's tract where he is appealing to *St. Paul's Epistle (I Corinthians 7)* for ant matrimonial authority. On the narrow issue of her right to remarry, to be sure, the wife finds faults – rather mildly – with Jerome, but on the more central issue of why she wishes to marry and remarry she expresses no disagreement with him. Yet in the failure to defend herself and refuse the saint, she somehow manages to make the latter's point of view look a good deal sillier than she looked herself, and instead of embodying the satire on womanhood that one would expect because of her origins in antifeminist literature, she becomes instead a satirist of the grotesquely woman – hating men who had first defined her personality.

More important, because of the extraordinary vitality that Chaucer has imparted to her, the Wife of the Bath by the end of the Prologue comes to bear a less significant relation to satire than she does to reality itself. Making the best of the world in which they have been arbitrarily placed is the occupation of both – The Wife of Bath and the reader, and it is doing this that the Wife ceases to be a monstrosity of fiction and becomes alive. It is especially in the attitude with which she regards these limitations that her fiction becomes most true to life, since there are also the limitations imposed by the real world. Despite the loss of youth and beauty, her best weapons, she faces her future not only with woman ability to endure and enjoy what she cannot reshape, but also with a real zeal for life on its own terms that is almost more than human.

The Pardoner's Tale

The Pardoner performs in the sad context the function of an actor in a grim comedy which shows how a clever hypocrite exploits Christian principles in order to enrich himself.

The medieval pardoner's function was to collect money for charitable enterprises supported by church and to act as the Pope's agent in rewarding donors with some temporal remission of their sins. An honest pardoner got a percent of his collections, still there were others who owed everything.

Chaucer's Pardoner belonged to the most dishonest class of fund gatherers. The Pardoner's audacious description of his behavior in a church is followed by a sermon on his invariable text that runs as follows: "*The Love of money is the root of all evil*".

He used it most effectively in order to frighten the hearers. He proceeds to morality, which curiously enough does not concern the sin of avarice but drunkenness, gluttony, gambling and cursing. The Pardoner is in all ways a master of irony. His avarice brings him to try to get money even from the pilgrims to whom he has revealed his hypocrisy. His secret is revealed by the Host's coarse response and the verbal expression by which he maintains his superiority.

Owing to a certain stylistic level the narration of some events become an elevating entertainment. It is no longer a moral example and neither does it supply a laughing stock for low people. It entertains a group of gentlemen, priests, and common people. The listeners can appreciate the narrative structure. It becomes clear that Chaucer isn't an instructive writer but a narrator leaving the judgments to the reader.

Conclusions:

1. The writers of the 14th century were inspired by the social life of the time. Each of them wrote for the class he belonged to: Langland expressed the thoughts of the peasants; Wycliffe expressed the protest against the Catholic Church, and its dogmas; Chaucer described the life of the new class – the bourgeoisie.
2. Chaucer was the first who broke away with medieval forms and cleared the way for realism.
3. “*Canterbury Tales*” is the greatest work of the 14th century.
4. “*Canterbury Tales*” summed up all types of stories that existed in the Middle Ages (he used a romance, a story of a saint, a fabliaux, a fable, a ballad, etc).
5. Various ranks of society were described with humor by Chaucer but he observes them without indignation.
6. Chaucer was the first to attack the [clergy with humor](#)
7. The only representatives of the society, that escaped Chaucer's satire were “*the ploughman*” and “*the poor priest*” the only ones who turned out to be honest.
8. Chaucer was the creator of a new literary language. For the first time he wrote in the popular tongue. A single language emerged from a number of dialects. He used the London dialect which later developed into Standard English.
9. Chaucer has made a number of words that remained in the language to this day: daisy, coal – black, snow – white, etc.
10. Chaucer described one nation as a whole, depicting each class, and group of people separately.

Practical assignments:

1. Read *Canterbury Tales* and choose two stories and comment on their main conflicts.
2. Characterize both the story teller and the main characters of his (her) story. Are there any similarities between them? Name them.
3. Compare or contrast the portraits of the following pilgrims:
 - a) The Nun and the Monk (feelings, conversation, manner of life, interests, achievements)
 - b) The Knight and the Squire (accomplishments, rank, ages, clothing, feelings, habits)
4. Bring examples of irony and satire. Which of the characters are not presented in a satirical or ironical tone?

Renaissance in English Literature

(16th Century)

Plan

1. Economic, social and cultural changes in the 16th century in England.
2. Renaissance in England. The humanists.
3. The first period in English literature of Renaissance: Thomas More (1478-1533) - great humanist of the age. His contribution to English literature. "Utopia" (1516).
4. The Second period of Renaissance in English literature. The new poetic forms: epigrams, odes, hymns, eclogues, elegies. The English sonnet and its structure.
5. Edmond Spenser (1552-1599): life and literary creation: Shepheard's Calender (1579), Faerie Queene (1591).
6. The third period of Renaissance in English literature: English Drama of Renaissance. Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593): life and literary activity. "Doctor Faustus".
7. Conclusions

Bibliography :

1. The Norton Anthology of English Literature/ New York , 1973
2. Levițchi Leon / Istoria Literaturii Engleze și Americane / volumul II 2000
3. Morlez, Henry / An attempt towards a history of English Literature/ New York, 976
4. E. Spenser "Faerie Queene" (Norton Anthology)
5. Th. More "Utopia" (Northon Anthology)
6. Ch. Marlowe "Doctor Faustus" (Norton Anthology)
7. McGraw-Hill, English Literature A Chronological approach, McGraw-Hill, Inc. 1985

1. Economic, social and cultural changes of the 16th century in England

The 16th century in England was the age of the Tudor sovereigns. Three generations of Tudors ruled England from 1485 to 1603. Henry VII was the first representative of the Tudors – the monarch under whose reign great changes took place in the economic, social and cultural life of England. As England became a prosperous sheep-raising country and a famous manufacturing power, Henry VII made commercial treaties with the European countries. Many lands were enclosed to permit sheep grazing on a large scale. This brought to people being driven away from their own land to the cities. This circumstance contributed to the growth of many cities and London was first among them to become a new metropolitan market. The old Feudal order could not persist any more and it continued declining. New economic relationships were developing and it put the beginning of the economic prosperity of England which later became a strong power in the world.

It was the age when important events happened in the world. The most significant of them was the discovery of America by Columbus, after which followed Vasco da Gama's voyage to India. Though English were not pioneers in the discovery and exploration of the Western hemisphere, these discoveries profoundly affected the place of the English nation in the world, turning it into a great coloniser and merchant adventurer during the following century.

During the 15th century a few English Clerics and government officials had journeyed to Italy and had seen something of the extraordinary cultural and intellectual movement flourishing in the city-states. That movement, generally known as Renaissance, was a reflection of the classical antiquity and development of new aesthetic norms, based on classical models. It also unleashed new ideas and new social political and economic forces that displaced the old values of Middle Ages.

These Renaissance ideals were reflected in the poetry of Petrarch, the philosophy of Pico della Mirandola, the art of Leonardo da Vinci and the statecraft of Lorenzo di Medici. But it was not until Henry VII's reign which brought some measures of political stability to England, that Renaissance could take root there. Italian Renaissance had a great impact on English literature in the 16th century, which can be divided into three periods.

2. The first period of Renaissance in English literature. The Humanists.

The literature of this period was greatly supported by the art of printing that acquired a movable type. Printing made books plentiful and provided more opportunities for reading and learning. The best writers of that time were Chaucer's imitators. They were more Scottish than English. Among them were W. Dunbar (1460-1555), Gavin Douglas (1475 – 1522), Sir David Lindsay (1485 – 1555), etc. /1 (Norton Anthology of English Literature p 414

A new current appeared in English literature during this age which was the *Humanism*. The primary concern of the humanists was the education of man, which as they considered was primordial in man's improvement of life. They gave consideration to man's social status, realizing that the development of society depended on man. They struggled for the abolishment of medieval relations in society, for freedom of thought and action. The humanists introduced new thoughts and ideas which proclaimed man's freedom, happiness and power. They considered that man is the creator of his fate. In connection with this were written many treatises on education, family relations and public service. The founder of this movement is considered to be Thomas More, who is best known to the modern reader by his famous philosophical work *Utopia*.

Thomas More (1478 – 1535)

- the greatest humanist of the Age

Thomas More was one of the first and greatest humanists of Renaissance. He was born in London in 1478 and received education at Oxford. He began his life as a lawyer and later became a Member of Parliament. He was the first who wrote on social and political subjects in English. He wrote both in English and Latin. Among his writings in English are: *discussions on political subjects, biographies* and *poetry*. His style was simple and colloquial with an unaffected ease. The work by which he is best remembered today is "Utopia" (1516) in which the author reveals the sordid sides of English life and comes up with a plan for a Common Wealth. The work is divided into two books. In his first book the author gives a profound and truthful picture of the people's sufferings and ways out of the social evils characteristic for England at the beginning of the 16th century. The author meets in Flanders a sailor who used to sail with the famous geographer Amerigo Vespucci. The man had visited many countries, and coming to England he remained astounded at the cruelty of English laws and at the poverty of its population. With great regret he draws the conclusion, saying: "*Your sheep that used to be so meek and tame and so small eaters have now become so great devourers... that they swallow down the very men themselves...*"

The disastrous state of things in England puts on the sailor's mind the idea of a Common Wealth, which he had seen on the island of Utopia. The second part of the book contains the description of life on this island. It looks like a real fairy tale in which people own everything in common and enjoy complete economic equality. Labour is the most essential feature of life on Utopia. Everybody is engaged in useful work nine hours a day, after which they indulge in sports and games, spending much time learning. Education and all the sport facilities were free of charge, giving equal rights to all its members. Women are supposed to develop their intellectual abilities getting education and being involved in social work, free of household duties.

It is quite evident thus, that the ideas revealed in *Utopia* were truly humanistic. After this work, a tendency appeared in literature – to write fantastic novels on social reforms, which were characteristic for many countries. This work was translated into all European languages and was a revolutionary attempt to change man's mentality and way of life.

The poetry of the Age

The reign of Queen Elizabeth, the second of the Tudor monarchs who ascended the throne in 1558 brought prosperity to the nation and gave a chance to many people of talent to develop their abilities. A number of writers, poets, philosophers and actors appeared in rapid succession. The literature of the period was rather various. Lyrical poetry became very widespread, becoming very emotional. The poets introduced blank verse and Italian Sonnets./2

A Sonnet is a poem consisting of 14 lines, being divided into 2 groups: 1st group comprising 8 lines – *making an octave* and the 2nd group including 6 lines – *creating a sestet*.

Another literary form which was very rampant was the epigram – the most important Elizabethan satiric genre.

An epigram is a short poem or saying expressing an idea in a clever amusing way. The noblest lyric genres were thought to be the hymns and odes.

A hymn is a song in praise of God. This form of praising God is still practiced by many protestant churches in the world.

An ode is a lyric poem of exalted style and tone, celebrating worthy men and women on notable occasions.

The poets of Renaissance were Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Edmond Spenser, who followed the course of poetic development set by Virgil, beginning with *pastoral* and rising to *epic*.

The main literary modes of the age were: the *pastoral mode*, *lyrical mode* and *historical mode*. The conventions of the pastoral mode presented a simple and idealised world inhabited by shepherds, who were chiefly concerned with tending the flocks, falling in love, and engaging in friendly poetry contests. The values of this mode were defined by *Otium* as leisure and humble contentment – being opposite to the values of Middle English literature. The pastoral mode included several different genres, such as: *pastoral songs*, *elegies*, *eclogues*, *romances*, *episodes* and *dramas*.

Pastoral songs commonly expressed the joys of the shepherds' life and disappointments of love

Pastoral eclogues were dialogues between shepherds who might stage a simple poetry contest. The genres of satire were less well fixed in the sixteenth century as compared to the later periods but there was a good deal of satirical verse. The poems in the lyric mode were comparatively brief, and usually concerned with praise of various kinds, with celebrations of nature, good life, etc.

Still the most important lyrical form of the 16th century was the Sonnet, which reached its height in the 1590's. Its conventions were established by Petrarch (1304 – 1374) in Italian literature and were carried on by his numerous imitators in Italy and France. The Sonnet was introduced in English Literature by Wyatt and Surrey. Sonnets celebrated love, beauty, pain, eternity of love and disappointment of love. Later on sonnets became religious devotions and occasional sonnets might have addressed a wide variety of topics. The most common Italian form of sonnet was divided into an octave (8 lines) + a sestet (6 lines) = 14 lines. The so-called English sonnet was divided into three quatrains and a couplet: (rhymed: abab, eded, ef ef, gg)

The most popular was the Spenserian Sonnet which was later exploited by the great poet and dramatist of the age William Shakespeare.

E. Spenser

Leave Me, O Love

*Leave me, O love which reaches but to dust,
And thou my mind aspire to higher things;
Grow rich in that which never taketh rust;
Whatever fades but fading pleasure brings.*

*Draw in thy beams, and humble all thy might
To that sweet yoke where lasting freedoms be;
Which breaks the clouds and opens forth the light,
That doth both shine and give us sight to see.*

*O take fast hold; let that light be thy guide
In this shall course which birth draws out to death,
And think how evil becometh him to slide,
Who seeketh heaven, and comes of heavenly breath.*

*Then farewell world; thy uttermost I see;
Eternal love, maintain thy life in me.*

William Shakespeare

Sonnet 130

*My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
 Corel is far more red than her lips' red;
 If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
 If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.*

*I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
 But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
 And in some perfumes is there more delight
 Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.*

*I love to hear her speak , yet well I know
 That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
 I grant I never saw a goddess go;
 My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.*

*And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
 As any she belied with false compare.*

1609

Finally of course there was the heroic mode with its value of honour, battle courage, loyalty, leadership, endurance etc.

Its chief genre of the heroic mode was the epic – a poem about the heroic deeds of a person or a group of people. An example of an epic of the time was *Fairy Queen* by E. Spenser in which he devised an elaborate nine line stanza later called the *Spenserian stanza*.

Edmond Spenser

(1552 – 1599)

The greatest non-dramatic poet of the English Renaissance, Edmond Spenser was born in London probably in 1552. He studied at Cambridge as a “sizar” (poor scholar). He started his career by translating some poems. From his correspondence with his friend, Gabriel Harvey, we see that he was interested in theories of poetry. After receiving the BA and the MA degrees he served as a secretary to several prominent men, such as Dr. John Yond, and Sir Philip Sidney, whom he later dedicated his poem *Shepherd's Calendar* (1579).

Spenser was a prolific experimenter, who made further innovations in the later poems. He adapted the Italian canzone forms in the *Epithalamion*, built a special rhyme scheme of the Spenserian sonnet. Many English poets, such as Shelley, Byron, Keats, Tennyson, etc. learned the art of versification from Spenser.

‘Spenser was a complex genius who cannot be put into neatly labelled categories. He was strongly influenced by the Renaissance Neoplatonism, but he remained earthly and practical. He was a lover and a celebrator of physical beauty, yet sternly moral/1. He was greatly influenced by Puritanism, remained a protestant and portrayed the Catholic church as a villain in *Fairie Queene*.

The Shepherdes Calendar (1579)

The poem is written in 12 eclogues, each corresponding to a month of the year. Each one is prefaced by an illustrative woodcut representing the characters or the theme of the poem. Each month is represented on these pictures by the sign of the zodiac. The eclogues were first used by Virgil. The eclogues of Spenser, as Virgil’s represent dialogues between shepherds, reflecting the moods, feelings and attitudes of the simple, rural life. But some of its parts criticize the world as compared to the ideal pastoral life. At times his eclogues become a didactic or satirical comment on contemporary affairs. The commentator “E.K” divides the Calendar into three groups: plaintive, recreative, and moral.

The Faerie Queene (1591)

Spenser’s exuberant, multifaceted poem is peculiarly characteristic of its age. In some respects it is a “*courtesy book*”, that intended to “fashion a gentleman or noble person” such as one should be. It is a romantic epic, like Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, full of adventures and marvels.

Faerie Queene is an allegory representing the court of Queen Elizabeth. The whole is an interweaving of Greek myths and English legends. Spenser planned to divide his epic poem into twelve books. But only six books of the *Faerie Queene* were finished. The main character of the poem is Prince Arthur. In a dream he sees Gloriana, the Fairy Queen. She is very beautiful and he falls in love with her. So he sets on a trip to seek her in her Fairy Land. She is supposed to hold her annual twelve-day feast during which twelve adventurous knights are to be fought by each man who claims Gloriana’s hand. Each of the knights represents a certain virtue: Holiness, Temperance, Friendship, Justice, etc. Here follows the description of The beauty of Gloriana which is impeccable.

*Tell me ye merchants daughters did you see
 So fayre a creature in your towne before,
 So sweet, so lovely, and so mild as she,
 Aborn'd with beautyes grace and virtues store,
 Her goodly eyes lyke saphyres shining bright,
 Her forehead yvory white,
 Her cheeks like apples which the sun hath rudded* *made red*

*Her lips lyke cherryes charming men to byte,
 Her brest lyke lyllies budded,
 Her snowie necke lyke to a marble towre,
 And all her body lyke a palace fayre,
 Ascending uppe with many a stately stayre,
 To honors seat and chastities sweet bowre.*

This part of the epic is presented in its original spelling. Some spelling forms have been changed by the poet purposely, in order to create rhymes while looking at it. This inconsistency in spelling is typical of his time. In the sixteenth century, people even varied the spelling of their own names.

4.The third period of English literature of Renaissance: English drama

The epoch of Renaissance witnessed a particular development of English drama, which was closely connected with the increasing popularity of theatrical art. English drama of this period was a blending of the medieval dramatic works with new progressive humanistic ideas. A certain role in its creation was also played by the classical drama of ancient Greece and Rome. It was truly a democratic art and had an immense popularity.

Long before the existence of regular theatres, there were professional companies of travelling players who enjoyed great popularity. They were moving from place to place and performed their plays. As they became more complicated, special playhouses came into existence called “theatres” – (a Greek word never before used in English). The actors did not have to travel any more. They could perform in their own buildings which had a specific shape at that time, much different from the theatres of today. These buildings were made of wood and had the shape of octagons, having no roof and looking more like a stadium. The spectators could be seated in the amphitheatre and the central part of the arena was the stage. The richest people were privileged to be seated right in front of the actors, actually in the stage itself. Theatres got their own names, such as: *The Rose, The Curtain, and The Globe* etc. The contents of the plays changed from moralities to historical ones and playwriting became very popular.

Christopher Marlowe **(1564 – 1593)**

The Greatest of the pioneers of English drama was Christopher Marlowe (1564 – 1593). He lived during the time of William Shakespeare and actually was Shakespeare’s predecessor. He graduated from the Cambridge University where he was greatly inspired by the ideas of

Renaissance. His translations from Ovid prove that he took an interest in classics. At Cambridge Marlowe was greatly influenced by ideas of Renaissance which penetrated into his heart and moved him to write. He was overwhelmed by the thought that man should be free to express himself.

Though Marlowe got a religious education at Corpus Christy College he hated religion because he thought that it cramped individuality. He never took up church service, though he used to be one of the most promising students. Ch. Marlowe started his career in London by joining a group of playwrights named the University Wits. The plays of these dramatists formed an important phase in the development of the English drama because they broke away with all medieval forms and for the first time introduced real characters in their plays. The Pre-renaissance characters were animals or qualities of people. Though none of the University Wits had as yet written any great play, they had prepared the public to understand different forms of drama. They wrote in many different styles: plain colloquial, declamation, smooth verse and witty prose. The public got accustomed to hear from the stage vivid dialogues between funny old women and silly men. They prepared the public for the drama of the great masterpieces of W. Shakespeare.

Marlowe was the first in England to approach history from a political point of view. He depicted historic, social and political events. His main plays are: *Doctor Faustus*, *Tamburlaine*, *The Jew of Malta* and *Edward II*.

Marlowe's turbulent spirit revealed itself in the violent passions of his characters. He was fascinated by the role of power in man's life, depicting different forms of power in his plays. His three works create a Trilogy in which Marlowe depicts strong men who use their power not for the good of people but for their own self only. The thirst for power brought only evil, destruction, misery and wretched state of mind to all the characters ensnared by it. Finally all the heroes of his plays perish devastated by power. This trilogy included *Dr. Faustus*, in which Marlowe depicted the *viciousness of the power of knowledge* in a Doctor's life; *Tamburlaine* that revealed the *destructive force of the imperial power*, and *The Jew of Malta* that presented *the power of money*. These works were followed by another tragedy, "Edward II", which seems not to be a part of the trilogy, though it can be considered a continuation or consequence of the impact of power on man. *Edward II* was devoted to *loss of power*.

The life of Ch. Marlowe was quite a turbulent one. It was full of adventures and scandals. He tried his hand acting and during one of the plays he hit an actor killing the man, which brought him to imprisonment. In a scandal he was killed at quite a young age. In such a way Marlow disappeared from both the stage and playwriting. Later when Shakespeare's authorship was doubted many critics considered that it was Ch Marlow who wrote a part of Shakespeare's works. But these are just suppositions that lacked any serious grounds.

Doctor Faustus

(1588)

Doctor Faustus is a tragedy in blank verse and prose that was produced in 1588. It presents the dramatisation of the medieval German legend about a learned man who sells his soul to the devil. Doctor Faustus once acknowledged by everybody as a great learned man, one day becomes tired of treating the endless numerous diseases. He is told by his servant, Wagner, about the art of magicians, which appealed to the desperate doctor and, he utters:

Couldst thou make men live eternally
 Oh, being dead, raise them to life again,
 Then this profession were to be esteemed.
 Physic, farewell...
 ...Divinity, adieu!
 These metaphysics of magicians
 And necromantic books are heavenly:
 Aye, these are those that Faustus most desires.
 O what a world of profit and delight,
 Of power, of honour, of omnipotence,
 If promised to the studious artisan!
 All things that move between the quiet poles
 Shall be at my command. Emperors and kings
 Are but obey in their several provinces,
 Nor can they raise the wind or rend the clouds...
 ...A sound magician is a demigod
 Here tire my brains to gain deity! (Scene 1)

Being overwhelmed by this desire he makes a contract with Mephistopheles to serve him for twenty five years. Faustus sells his soul to the devil in exchange for all the knowledge of the world, that might help him, as he thought, become all mighty. Before selling his soul to devil Faustus is visited by a good angel and by an old man who repeatedly tell him about the dangerous path that he is on, but in vain. Doctor Faustus seeks knowledge and learning not for the mere study of nature, or for helping his patients but for gaining power over the world. But the events took another course, different from what he planned. He meets a beautiful woman, and suddenly feels the void in his heart which deprives him of love. He wanted to have this feelings back but it is impossible. This brought him to Mephistopheles to break the contract but it turned out to be irreversible. The evil

does not change his plan. Faustus regrets that he has made the contract and discloses his secret to everybody. He states:

But Faustus offence can never be pardoned; The serpent that tempted Eve may be saved, but not Faustus. Ay, gentlemen, hear me with patience, and tremble not at my speeches. Though my heart pats and quivers to remember that I have been a student here these thirty years. And what wonders I have done all Germany can witness, yea all the world, for which Faustus hath lost both Germany and the world, yea heaven itself – heaven the seat of god, the throne of the blessed, the kingdom of joy, and must remain in hell forever... the portion of the text comes in prose to reflect the sadness of the situation Dr. Faustus put himself into. Faustus understands how grave the sin he has committed is and does not admit that he can be forgiven. He dies wretched, morally and physically. The play finishes with a moral, making an invitation to all learned men not “To practice more than heavenly power permits”

Christopher Marlowe wrote several poems. One of them is “The Passionate Shepherd to his Love”.

The Passionate Shepherd to His Love

Come and live with me and be my love
 And we will all the pleasures prove,
 That valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
 Woods, or sleepy mountain yields.

And we will sit upon the rocks,
 Seeing the shepherds feed their flocks,
 By shallow rivers, to whose falls
 Melodious birds sing madrigals

And will make thee beds of roses
 And a 1 000 fragrant prosies
 A cap of flowers, and a kirtle dress
 Embroided all with leaves of myrtle,
 The shepherd's swains shall dance and sing boys
 For thy delight each April Morning
 If these delights thy mind may move
 Then live with me and be my love.”

Conclusions

1. The changes in the world had left an impact on English Social life introducing novelties in Literature (Sonnet, Pastoral mode)
2. Italian Art of Renaissance influenced greatly the creation of English poets and writers.
3. The works of the age bore humanistic characteristics.
4. Edmond Spenser introduced the 9-line stanza and contributed to the development of the English Sonnet
5. Christopher Marlowe and Th. More created works full of humanism, criticising the vices of society and the old medieval way of life.

Recommended assignments:

- I. Read the extract from *Fairy Queen* and answer the following questions:

Spenser used personification as means of describing the seven sins of the world. Can we attribute the same sins to nowadays or will they be different.

Read stanzas 17 and 36. They form the beginning and the end of the excerpt . What creates the different emotional effect of these stanzas?

- II. Read *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe and do the following assignments:

1. Quote the excerpt which presents Dr. Faustus unhappy with his medical career. What reasons does he have for changing his way of life?
2. Both speeches Dr. Faustus makes (The Apparition of Helen and the Damnation of Faustus) possess an intensity of feeling. State the differences in the mood of each. Comment on them.

William Shakespeare

(1564-1616)

Plan

1. W. Shakespeare's life and professional career
2. Chronological list of W. Shakespeare's works
3. W. Shakespeare's comedies: *The Taming of the Shrew*
4. The first of W. Shakespeare's tragedies *Romeo and Juliet*.
5. The tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice
6. The Summit of W. Shakespeare's creation: The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

Bibliography:

1. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor - The Oxford Shakespeare, Complete Works/
Clarendon press, Oxford 1994
2. Norton Anthology of English Literature 5th ed. Major Authors, W.W Norton & Company
New York, London 1986
3. English Literature – Major Authors. New York London, 1974
4. A Hymarx Outline of the Plays of Shakespeare / Boston, 1976
5. Bernard Grebanier, The Heart of Hamlet / New York, 1982
6. Marilyn French , Shakespeare's Division of Experience / Summit Books, New York, 1086
7. Patrick Cruttwell, The Shakespearean moment/ New York , 1981
8. Harley Granville- Baker , Prefaces to Shakespeare/ London, 1980

William Shakespeare

(1564-1616)

William Shakespeare is the greatest dramatist of all times and all nations. W. Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in central England about April 23, 1564. He sprang from honest hard-working, middle - class stock. His father, John Shakespeare, was a wool dealer, who owed considerable property and held important civic offices in Stratford, including that of a mayor. His mother, Mary Arden, was the daughter of a man of “worship” and of somewhat higher social standing than her husband. Nothing is known of Shakespeare’s education, except, the fact that he attended a free school. While still in his teens, on November 28, 1582 he married Ann Hathaway, who was several years his senior, and Shakespeare found himself with the responsibility of a family. His first child, a daughter, Susanna, was born in the following May, and the twins, Hamnet and Judith, in February 1585. Soon he improved his social standing and in 1597 bought a rich house, New Place, acquired a coat of arms and the privilege of writing himself “Gentlemen”. Shakespeare did not live together with his family most of the time, leaving for London, where he spent the greatest part of his mature life, devoting himself totally to play writing and theatre work. There are many suppositions concerning the reasons of his move there. For instance, there is a familiar romantic tradition that says that he was driven from his native city because of an escape from Sir Thomas Lucy who was going to sue Shakespeare for hunting on his lands, another asserts that Shakespeare was judged by the Gentlemen of Stratford and this made him flee to London. Other sources claim that William was a butcher’s apprentice who ran away from his master to join a troupe of actors, and a third asserts that for a time William Shakespeare was a country schoolmaster. None of these traditions have any corroborative evidence. It is very possible that Shakespeare turned to London being attracted by London theatrical life.

Shakespeare got at once involved in the theatrical life of London, though his first writings were not plays. “By 1592 Shakespeare aroused the resentment of Robert Green, a university man, who called the young talent an “*upstart crow*” and warned his fellow dramatists against the whole race of actors, but especially against this “*absolute Johannes factotum*” (Jack of all trades), who in his own conceit was the only “*Shakescene*” in the country”.¹ In 1593 Shakespeare published his first poem *Venus and Adonis*, after which followed *Rape of Lucrece* (1594). Both these poems were dedicated to the young Earl of Southampton. But W. Shakespeare did not continue with writing poetry, getting involved in theatre business - in acting, playwriting, coaching, etc. His first connections with the theatrical world of London were associated with Christopher Marlowe and later in 1594 with Lord Chamberlain’s Company, one of the best troupes in London, with which Shakespeare co-worked till the end of his career, devoting his talents and life to the activity of this

Company. In December 1594 Shakespeare acted before the Queen and some months later one of his plays, *Comedy of Errors*, was put on stage.

He became known as both a playwright and an actor. In 1598 the name of Shakespeare is mentioned by a critic as the best author of both comedy and tragedy. Shakespeare became a stockholder of the famous theatre, *Globe*, which was erected in 1599. The greatest of his plays have been put on stage in the *Globe*, which unfortunately burnt to ground in 1613 during the performance of *Henry VIII*. In 1603 Lord Chamberlain's Company passed under royal patronage and became the *King's Men*, which was a great privilege for that time. In 1608 his company got the right to open another theatre. In 1609 the Collection of Sonnets appeared in printed form. By 1612 the major part of W. Shakespeare's thirty seven plays had been produced. Shakespeare retired to Stratford, where he spent the rest of his life, writing several more works which form the third period in W. Shakespeare's creation. Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616 and was buried in the local cemetery, according to his will. Probably during all these years of separation with his native place the Great Bard missed it and in a verse asked his descendants to leave him rest in his native town. We find out about it from the epitaph engraved on his tomb, which runs as follows:

*Good friend, for Jesus sake, forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here
Blessed be he that spares these stones,
And cursed be he that moves my bones. (W. Shakespeare)*

Many people who knew Shakespeare "testify that he was an honourable man of a genial character, well-shaped, very good company and a ready and pleasant wit".² Many poets devoted numerous poems to the memory of the great Shakespeare. Ben Jonson expressed his reverence to the great Bard in his poem

"To the Memory of My Beloved, the Author, Mr. William Shakespeare, and What He Hath Left Us":

***Triumph, my Britain; thou hast one to show
To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.
He was not of an age, but for all time!
And all the muses still were in their prime
When like Apollo he came forth to warm
Out ears, or like a Mercury to char....***

1. Norton Anthology of English Literature 5th ed. Major Authors, W.W Norton & Company
New York, London 1986 p.866

*...Yet must I not give Nature all the praise; thou Art,
My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part.*

William Shakespeare left a rich heritage to the generations to come, creating a new epoch in world literature. His works combine all forms that existed before him, developing them to great heights. His works emerge from Renaissance and become the forerunners for the literature of the following centuries. The dramatist created a rich gallery of characters of great depth and unusual intellects. Shakespeare is attracted by the intellect of man, revealing man from a different perspective as compared to the attempts made in the previous centuries. W. Shakespeare presents man as a creature able to love and fight for his own destiny, against social injustice and prejudices. His characters are new people, dynamic creatures, who change alongside the development of the events. Shakespeare wants to see man free from prejudices, ready to act and change the world. Each play is presenting man from a different perspective, showing man as strong and weak, honest and deceitful, noble and mean, loving and hateful, white and dark-skinned, creating a rich gallery of characters that continue to inspire. The themes and the characters that he revealed in his plays have stirred many nations along centuries and remain actual today. Shakespeare touched upon such themes as: love, relations among people, relations between children and parents, friendship, devotion, jealousy, race discrimination, role of money and glory in life, role of man and woman in society, marriage, victory and honour, etc.

In spite of all these great evidences of Shakespeare's talents, at different times in history there have been made attempts to deny W. Shakespeare's existence as a writer. Some consider that a man could not have created such an amount of great works within such a small period of time (25 years), others considered that Shakespeare's insignificant education could prevent him from creating such great masterpieces, others thought that it was a group of people who wrote all the plays and used the nickname Shakespeare to sign them. Some of these dissidents consider that the works have been produced by a woman, namely Queen Elizabeth. Others assert that the authorship belongs to Francis Bacon, the well-known philosopher and writer, others give preference to the idea that it was Ben Jonson who wrote the plays. Though judging by the poem quoted before, this idea sounds as an absurdity. Still all these are just suppositions that probably come from people who do not trust talent and genius, which the great Bard, William Shakespeare, was undoubtedly endowed with by God.

Four Periods in Shakespeare's Literary Career

William Shakespeare has created quite a number of works, that include 37 plays, 156 sonnets, 2 poems and some stories. His plays can be subdivided into tragedies and comedies. The historical plays bring forth the life of some great people, such as Julius Caesar, Anthony and Cleopatra, Henry VI, Richard III, etc. W. Shakespeare's literary career can be divided into four periods

1. **1589-1600.** This period is characterized by an optimistic tone. The plays of this period are full of light and wit, and are written in a bright spirit of Renaissance. The characters of these plays are the creators of their own fate. During this time the great dramatist created most of his comedies, several historical plays and his first tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*.

To this period refer:

1589-1592 Henry VI, (parts I,II, III)

1592-1593 Richard III, The Comedy of Errors

1593-1594 Titus Andronicus, the Taming of the Shrew

1594-1595 The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Love's Labour's Lost, Romeo and Juliet

1595-1596 Richard II, A Midsummer Night's Dream

1596-1597 King John, The Merchant of Venice

1597-1598 Henry VI, (Part I) Henry VI (partII)

1598-1599 Much Ado about Nothing, Henry V

1599-1600 Julius Caesar, As You like it

2. **1600- 1608** The second period of Shakespeare's creation is the summit of his literary career. He produced the greatest plays, that are admired by people today just as they were during his times. The chronology of the second period runs as follows:

1600-1601 Hamlet Prince of Denmark, Merry Wives of Windsor

1601 -1602 Twelfth Night, Troilus and Cressida

1602-1603 All's Well that Ends Well

1604-1605 Measure for Measure, Othello

1605-1606 King Lear, Macbeth

1606-1607 Anthony and Cleopatra

1607-1608 Coriolanus, Timon of Athens

3. **1608-1613** This is the last period of romances and tragicomedy, which include:

1608-1609 Pericles

1609-1610 Cymbeline

1609-1611	Winter's Tale
1611-1612	The Tempest
1612-1613	Henry VIII, The Two Noble Kinsmen

For the first time Shakespeare's plays were published in Folio in 1623 and republished later in 1632 and 1663. Before that many of W. Shakespeare's plays have been pirated and some parts of plays have been printed from "foul papers" (papers reproduced by the actors that used to play a certain part and put it down later by memory). They were not precise variants of Shakespeare's plays. The Folio published in 1616 by Ben Jonson included 36 plays, 22 of them appearing for the first time in good text. They present the main and the most reliable source of W. Shakespeare's creation.

W. Shakespeare's Comedies

Shakespeare's plays are based on sharp conflicts but they possess an optimistic spirit. The victory of humanist ideals is inevitable but it is attained in a severe struggle against all obstacles. The heroes fight against destiny itself and build their own fate according to their own free will. As men of Renaissance, they for the first time trust themselves and their efforts are crowned with success.

Most of the comedies were written by W. Shakespeare during the first period of his creation. Among them are: *The Comedy of Errors*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *As You Like It*, in which Shakespeare touched upon such themes as: family relations, happiness in marriage, relations between parents and children, foolishness of man, freedom of thought, etc. There is a great deal of entertainment and comical humour and a variety in those characters which Shakespeare thought to fit people of his time. The characters of these plays are often forming two antagonistic groups – on the one hand there are people of the new generation who change under the circumstances of life and tend to change, on the other hand among them there are stupid creatures who prefer to go on living in obscurity and ignorance.

The Taming of the Shrew (1593)

In *The Taming of the Shrew* (1593) Shakespeare's critical tendencies are distinctly revealed. The plot is borrowed from a play printed at that time under the same title, which was permeated with the ideas of feudal times. A brute of a husband tames his wife and makes a slave out of her. According to the old play, women are inferior to men, their duty is to obey and fear their husbands.

Having taken the old plot, Shakespeare gave a new interpretation to the principal characters and created a comedy humane and progressive in its essence. The main characters are: Petruccio and Katherine. Petruccio, an adventurous young man, arrives at Padua on his way to Verona. He gets acquainted with Baptista, a rich citizen, and his two daughters, Katherine and Bianca. Bianca is a modest and obedient girl, while her sister is extremely stubborn and hard to deal with. Still it is the shrew who attracts Petruccio's attention. He wins her father's consent and gets his agreement to take her as a wife.

Petruccio is a lover of fun, good jokes and adventures. He never suppresses Katherine, never makes her change directly, but inspiring her that she is a personality who deserves to be treated humanly. Katherine feels this attitude and notices that Petruccio is a noble-minded man different from the greedy and stupid males who surround her. Petruccio does not really tame Katherine but simply penetrates into her heart and knows how to lead her in the necessary direction.

The characters of Petruccio and Katherine are contrasted to the world of selfish and ignorant people. If Katherine behaves like a shrew, she does it only in protest against her father who is concerned with the idea of how to secure rich husbands for his daughters. She struggles with all her might with her sister's vain and foolish admirers. Petruccio wins her heart not because he humiliates her, but because she comes to understand how greatly he differs from the petty men and women she knows. Katherine becomes the most loving and obedient among the wives. This puzzles the women and the men of their time and they take this change of her character as a miracle, never understanding that love, reasoning and understanding changed Katherine.

Their union becomes a symbol of an alliance of two young people of the new formation who have joined their forces to fight against the world, full of vanity and mediocrity. Their moral superiority makes the reader believe that they will win.

The method of realistic art first applied by W. Shakespeare to his early comedies finds further development in his historic plays and tragedies. The first among Shakespeare's tragedies springs *Romeo and Juliet*.

The First of W. Shakespeare's Tragedies

Romeo and Juliet

Romeo and Juliet is a lyric tragedy. Notwithstanding its tragic end, it is optimistic in spirit and remains an apotheosis of youthful and triumphant love. It is a play of great lyric beauty and is considered to be among the best tragic love-poems in the world. Shakespeare's merit is that he takes Arthur Brooke's tale with the same name and doubles its dramatic value by reducing its timing from months to days. The action in Romeo and Juliet is developed within a week's time. Shakespeare marshals it to a very definite purpose. Though it is a play about love the author opens his story not with a love scene but with the clash between the two homes: the Capulets and the Montagues,

which forms the core of the whole conflict. The feud between these two homes had existed for a long time and it referred to anyone related to the two families, their servants, cousins, friends, etc. Romeo came from the Montague family and Juliet from the Capulets. After the first scene of the fight between the servants of the two families Shakespeare introduces Romeo, who is very moody because Rosalinda, the girl whom he loved rejected him. His friend, Benvolio, tells Romeo about the existence of other girls in the world who might make better match for him. The boy calls Romeo to have an adventure and visit a feast in The Couplets' house. It was a party given by the Capulets in order to give a chance to Paris, a young earl, to meet Juliet, their daughter, for marrying her. Juliet's father, had had previously a conversation with young Paris concerning his proposal to Juliet, very easily decided to make the girl marry Paris. But this plan turns out to be a failure, as soon as Romeo meets Juliet during their first dance. They are touched by love which lasted to the end of their life. Soon afterwards both of them find out that their love is from the hostile family and Juliet concludes:

Juliet:

*My only love sprang from my only hate.
To early seen unknown and unknown too late.
Prodigious birth of love it is to me
That I must love a loathed enemy.*

Juliet's monologue on the balcony right after the party is illustrating her feelings and readiness to face her destiny:

Juliet:

*O, Romeo! Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn, my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.*

Romeo (aside): *Shall I hear more, or shall I speak to this?*

Juliet:

*'Tis but thy name That is my enemy;
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
What's a Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot,
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O, be some other man!
What's in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were it not be Romeo call'd
Retain that dear perfection which he owns*

*Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name;
And for that name, which is not part of thee,
Take all myself...*

Romeo and Juliet decide to marry. The two lovers understand that their parents will never agree to such a marriage and they marry secretly by the concern of Friar Laurence. Though the Friar was a churchman who had to follow the conservative view on marriage based on parents' approval of the choice of both the boy and girl, he saw in this young couple a force that could not stop them in their intention – their love. So he decided to marry them secretly. Unfortunately at this point the tragedy starts to develop with the death of some men from both homes, involved in the feud. Mercutio from the Montagues is killed by Tybalt, Juliet's cousin. Romeo tries to stop their fight but by chance wounds Tybalt to death. The blood, which has been spilt, increases the bitterness of the enmity between the two families. The tension never relaxes from now on: Romeo is banished from the country, Juliet's parents are making the arrangements for her wedding with Paris, while Juliet is left totally lonely to face her destiny. Her visit to Friar Laurence seems to bring a relief to her - he gives her a pill to put her to sleep for forty-eight hours in order to escape the second marriage to Paris.

On the day appointed for the wedding, arranged by her parents, Juliet takes the drug and is borne away to the family vault. The letter sent by Friar Laurence to Romeo about these events fails to reach its destination and Romeo is misinformed that Juliet is dead. His only purpose now is to die beside his bride in the tomb of his enemies. He has procured a strong poison and hurries to the churchyard, but is stopped by Paris, who involves Romeo in a struggle. Romeo's decision can not be interfered by anything – he kills Paris in order to continue his way. Near the tomb Romeo takes the poison and passes into the other world, the world of his Juliet. Juliet, however, soon wakes up. On seeing her Romeo dead she takes his dagger and kills herself.

Though Romeo and Juliet die, their love is triumphant, it is stronger than death. It makes their families reconcile over the grave of their children. The two families give the word to stop fighting and to erect a monument to their children's love.

Shakespeare concludes the play with the words, which became like a saying:

*For there is a story of no more woe
Than that of Juliet and her Romeo.*

Characters

Juliet

This is a tragedy of youth that draws an arbitrary line between youth and age. In it W. Shakespeare deals with such problems as: social prejudices, relations between parents and children,

love, devotion and maturity. Youth turns out to be more mature than their parents. For instance *Juliet*, who is urged by her mother to see if she likes Paris, replies to it:

I'll try to look, if looking liking moves...

While her parents seem to be quite immature, trying to convince their daughter to marry at the age of 14 to a man whom she literally does not know. Juliet is mature judging by her feelings and the responsibility with which she takes love. She is brave, knowing that her parents will never accept such a marriage with one of their loathed enemy. Her maturity is seen in her perception of the name, her beloved hears. She realizes that the name does not change or contribute to a man's role or position or quality. She has no prejudices like her parents have. Juliet is sincere and truthful in her feelings. She is ready to fight and overcome any obstacles and preserves her love, showing great fidelity. All this characterizes an innocent child, who at first sight is obedient when her mother and Nurse try to convince her marry Paris. In fact she is more reasonable and much wiser

Romeo is a dynamic character as all the central characters in Shakespeare's creation. He appears as a melancholic youth, very moody and unhappy. But with the emergence of Juliet he becomes an active-minded man, ready to act. He takes his destiny with readiness to suffer and overcome any difficulty but be with his love, with Juliet. He is innocent and pure, never meaning anything wrong. Even when another conflict emerges between the two families Romeo is ready to reconcile, but is not understood by Tybolt. He is a peacemaker. In the encounters with the Capulets he always wanted to solve the issues peacefully. Even meeting Paris in the graveyard Romeo asks him not to be provoked wishing to escape a new tragedy. Romeo accepts his fate without doubt, question, or hesitation. This is clearly seen from his words when they come to Friar Laurence to get married:

Romeo: *Do thou but close our hands with holy words
Then love, devouring death do what he dare,
It is enough, I may but call her mine.*

Romeo is very distressed when he is banished. His enthusiasm has vanished even more when he finds out about Juliet's death. Not knowing the real state of things, he vows:

Romeo: *"Well Juliet, I will lie with thee tonight."*

Romeo can not think of life without Juliet. His love is sincere and pure, it is stronger than the wish to live. He is brave in facing all the turns of life and death.

Romeo has been called by critics "an early study of Hamlet". Many ideas that make up Hamlet were seeded by Shakespeare long before this play with the character of Romeo. Romeo like Hamlet never stops in his intentions.

Though the end is tragic, this play has an optimistic character. The death of these two wonderful youth put an end to the feud of the two families which has carried away so many lives.

The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice

Othello was written about the year 1604 and was based on a story written by Cinthio. Shakespeare was attracted by the romantic setting of the story with its actions in Venice and Cyprus. That story dealt with the degradation of love. Shakespeare improved this work by compressing it into a drama, endowing its characters with extraordinary actuality and vitality. Shakespeare charges the sordid form of its original with poetry to make it the high tragedy we know. *Othello* is a humanist tragedy in all its essentials, in which W. Shakespeare treats many of those problems, which formed the essential part of some of his previous plays.

Othello was a Moor of high descent and noble qualities. He was a great man and a great warrior, highly respected in Venice, his only disadvantage being the dark colour of his skin (a blending of African and Arabic blood). He often visited Brabantio, an influential senator, who liked to hear him recount the stories of his numerous adventures at wars. Brabantio's daughter, Desdemona liked to hear him too and soon she became infatuated with Othello. Unfortunately Brabantio could not agree to let his daughter marry the dark skinned Moor.

The play opens in the night with Iago and Rodrigo, who awaken Brabantio to tell him that his daughter has fled with Othello. Iago is a villain who hates the Moor, partly because the latter has overlooked him in the choice of a lieutenant and has given him only the rank of an "ancient". This "honest Iago", "good Iago" as Othello calls him, is the embodiment of the dark powers that hate every thing that is truly great and noble. Iago is a great artistic generalization of envy, selfishness and utter depravity, concealed by good manners and a show of "noble intentions".

Messengers arrive to tell Othello that the Duke requires his presence, as a Turkish expedition, which is thought to be sailing for Cyprus, has been discovered. Then Brabantio appears with his followers to arrest Othello, whom he accuses of witchcraft, used to gain the affection of a young lady (Desdemona).

They all go to the Duke's, and as there is no evidence of witchcraft, and as Venice has great need of Othello, Brabantio is induced to give the Moor his daughter. So the couple is together but their happiness does not last long.

Othello receives a commission to go to Cyprus and Desdemona accompanies him. Soon after their arrival the news comes that a storm has destroyed the Turkish fleet. So Othello has no outward enemy to face. Desdemona is faithful and dearly loves her husband. Whenever she hears her husband's trumpet she thrills with delight:

Desdemona:

I know his trumpet.

Tis truly so.

Let's meet and receive him.

*O, here he comes
O, my fair warrior
My dear. Othello...*

When he arrives Desdemona meets Othello with the words:

Desdemona:

*It gives me wonder, great as my content,
To see you here before me. O, my soul's joy!
If after every tempest come such calm...*

Othello loves and trusts his wife, and it seems no easy matter to make him suspect her, but the artful Iago insinuates that she is too friendly with Cassio, Othello's lieutenant. Iago contrives for a handkerchief given to Desdemona by her husband to be found in the possession of the innocent Cassio and Othello is no longer in doubt. The handkerchief becomes the instrument of Othello's tortures and when his cup is full he speaks out:

Othello:

*... that handkerchief
Did an Egyptian to my mother give.
She dying gave, when my fate would have me wive,
To give it her...*

Meanwhile, Iago is scheming his further actions. He advises Othello to kill Desdemona, for betrayal.

Iago:

*The Moor already changes with my poison,
Dangerous conceits are in their natures, poisons,
Which at first are scarce found to disable
But with a little act upon the blood
Burn like the mines of sulphur...*

Iago goes too far, telling Othello in a cynical way how to kill Desdemona, saying:

Iago:

*Do it with poison,
Spangle her in her bed,
Even the bed she has contaminated...*

In anguish and despair Othello smothers his gentle wife. Then comes an awful awakening for him. Clear proofs appear of Iago's intrigues and Desdemona's innocence. Othello, without hesitation, stabs himself. Iago, who has caused the deaths of Rodrigo, Casio and his own wife is taken away to meet his fate.

But before Iago's wife Emilia makes her speech Iago stabs her because she unmasked his scheme. Emilia used to serve Desdemona and she brought Iago the requested handkerchief, without suspecting how it will be used. She loved Desdemona and felt pricks of conscience that her lady was killed with her assistance. Emilia's words were a full protest against Othello's blindness:

Emilia:

*O thou dull Moor! That handkerchief thou speakest of
I found by fortune and did give my husband
She gave it to Cassio! No, alas, I found it,
And did give my husband...*

Moor she was chaste, she loved thee, cruel Moor...

Othello answers decisively to this:

Othello:

*I have another weapon in this chamber
It is a sword of Span, the ice-brook'e temper
O, here it is. I must come forth...*

With this weapon Othello commits suicide, never forgiving himself for the mistake done.

In *Othello* Shakespeare is attracted by the question of love. The first act is very much like *Romeo and Juliet*. Just as there we have to face the struggle of a loving couple against social prejudices. Only here the conflict is deeper and more significant for two reasons:

In *Romeo and Juliet* the hostility of two families is revealed, while in "Othello" a social problem is brought into focus. Othello was a Moor and although the Venetian Patricians made use of him, they never forgot of what blood he was. They hate him as he was an African. That is why Iago could so easily succeed in all his intrigues.

Besides in *Othello* we have love of superior kind, a unity of minds. When Othello is accused of seducing Desdemona he answers with a beautiful monologue from which we see the source of their mutual love.

Othello: “*She loved me for the dangers I had passed
And I loved her for she did pity them*”.

It has been believed for a long time that “Othello” is a tragedy of jealousy. Such a point of view is extremely superficial.

Jealousy is not in the centre of the tragedy and Othello himself is not a jealous fellow by nature. He is too noble-minded to mistrust those whom he loves. He values integrity, sincerity and loftiness of mind above all other human qualities and he loves and cherishes Desdemona dearly, just because he finds her to be the very embodiment of these high qualities.

All his ideals are concentrated upon her; all that is pure seems to be condensed in Desdemona and their mutual love.

All this, together with her youth and beauty, make her his ideal of a woman, and her love – the greatest reward for the toils and hardships of his long, lonesome life. And though his own skin is dark, his face – weather beaten and covered with ugly scars, he is the bearer of a great moral beauty, and his heart is as true as steel and as pure as gold.

Desdemona and Othello both belong to a new world, but they live, to their misfortune, in a world based on selfish interest and vile hypocrisy.

When Iago by artful schemes makes Othello believe that Desdemona is unfaithful to him he is bewildered. If Desdemona, the most virtuous woman of the world, may be unworthy then nothing is worth, everything falls to pieces. Othello’s crime is a natural consequence of this despair, which penetrates through all his soul. Othello kills Desdemona not out of jealousy but by way of enacting a sentence of death upon a person whom he believes guilty of a gross crime – of defiling the noblest ideals of life.

When the mistake is discovered, being extremely just Othello does the only thing he can do. He punishes himself for the crime he had committed. But Othello is no longer that miserable man he had been before. His faith in love, in humanity revives. He considers that he himself is criminal, but life as such is not the thing he thought it to be. Desdemona was pure and life was worth living.

Othello: “*I kiss’d thee ere I kill’d thee; no way But this, (falling upon Desdemona).
Killing myself to die upon a kiss. (Dies).”*

So in spite of the tragedy and all the dead bodies and blood shared, *Othello* is an optimistic tragedy because love and innocence triumph.

“The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark”

Hamlet is considered to be the summit of Shakespeare’s art. It was written in 1601-1602 and first published in 1603. It is a work of profound philosophy.

This famous tragedy has as its scene the kingdom of Denmark. But Danish names couldn’t hide from the spectators and readers the fact that it was England, which the great writer depicted in his play.

Hamlet is the profoundest expression of Shakespeare’s humanism and his criticism of contemporary life.

The present king of Denmark has come to the throne upon the mysterious death of his brother. He marries his brother’s wife right after the death of the former king. Hamlet, the son of the late king, is deeply affected because of his father’s death and horrified at the action of his mother in taking a second husband so soon. During this unhappy frame of mind, the ghost of his father appears to him and tells Hamlet the circumstances of his recent murder. The ghost declares that he was really murdered by his brother who had stolen the queen’s love. Bidding Hamlet to revenge him the ghost disappears.

Hamlet wishes to find out the truth and insinuates to be mad, using this circumstance for hiding his real intentions. Hamlet is in love with Ophelia, whose father Polonius forbids her to have anything to do with the prince, fearing that Hamlet can mean nothing honourable towards a girl of inferior rank. These ideas are borne into his mind by Claudius, the present king who wanted to smash Hamlet and have no other rivals.

Hamlet however in his anguish of spirit at the discovery of the villainy of his uncle and treachery of his mother has no more thought of anything but vengeance. So much does the horror of the situation press upon his mind that the court thinks he has gone mad. In bitter mood he contemplates suicide and comes with his famous monologue:

*To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether ’tis nobler in the mind, to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles;
And by opposing end them? To die, - to sleep,
No more; and, by a sleep, to say we end
The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, - ’tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish’d. To die, - to sleep; -
To sleep! Perchance to dream: ay, there’s the rub;*

*For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
 Must give us pause: there's the respect,
 That makes calamity of so long life,
 For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
 The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
 The pangs of despis'd love, the laws delay,
 The insolence of office, and the spurns
 That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
 When he himself might his quietus make
 With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,
 To grunt and sweat under a weary life;
 But that the dread of something after death,
 The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn
 No traveller returns, puzzles the will;
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have,
 Than fly to others that we know not of?
 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
 And thus the native hue of resolution
 Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought;
 And enterprises of great pith and monument,
 With this regard, their currents turn away,
 And lose the name of action.*

Bright hopes and aspirations of his youth come to a clash with crude reality. The infidelity of his mother, the servility of the courtiers who bowed and cringed to the unworthy king, the falsehood of his friends and, finally, the crime committed by his uncle, made him realize how wicked and unjust the world he lived in was. He understood that he was not the only sufferer in the country:

“ For who would bear the whips and scorns of time
 The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
 The pangs of despised love, the laws delay,
 The insolence of office, and the spurns
 That patient merit of the unworthy takes,...?”

Hamlet understands that life is cruel and the social injustice presses so much on people. He can see it better now when Claudius is ruling the country. In great despair he asks himself: "To be or not to be..." But looking at the picture of the surrounding him world he considers that to die is easier but "Conscious does make cowers of us all..." It seems that he did not commit suicide because he was a coward. But in fact, it was an act of a greater courage to go on living with the reality he had to face and so Hamlet decides to live and disguise the murderer. To satisfy himself on this score Hamlet devices a plan: a company of traveling actors is to perform before the king and Hamlet instructs them to act out in a play the precise circumstances of the later king's murder as revealed to Hamlet by the ghost. When the actors were performing this, the king could stand it no longer. He is tormented and leaves the room. Hamlet is now absolutely convinced of the king's guilt. In a stormy scene with his mother hamlet reproaches her bitterly for her part in the affair. Hearing someone behind the curtains Hamlet stabs through them thinking it is the king. But it was instead Ophelia's father, who thus meets his death. The death of her father added to her lover's supposed madness is too much for Ophelia. The poor girl looses her senses and is subsequently drowned in a brook.

A poisoned weapon through the machinations of the king wounds Hamlet. But before he dies he slays the murderer. The queen also meets her death accidentally drinking a cup of poisoned wine, which had been prepared for Hamlet.

Characters

Hamlet

The character of Hamlet recalls the titans of the Renaissance. Hamlet is a man of genius, highly educated, a man of searching mind and sparkling wit. Hamlet is the pride of all Denmark. The common people of the country love him. Hamlet is a humanist, a man who is free from medieval prejudices and superstitions. Shakespeare makes him a student of the Wittenberg University, a seat of learning. He is very just and noble. This finds expression in Hamlet's admiration of man as a creature. It is so characteristic of Renaissance. He says:

*Hamlet: What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason!
How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable!
In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a God!
The beauty of the world. The paragon of animals!"*

This enthusiastic exclamation could have come only from a man of Renaissance. Such is Hamlet, who opposes a cruel hypocritical and treacherous world. His indignation at what he sees is summed up in bitter and condemnatory words: “Denmark is a prison”. Hamlet’s ideas bring him to the heights of humanist ideas.

Hamlet had to “*oppose the sea of troubles*”. And he starts with his family. The immediate surrounding of his is his Mother, Gertrude, and her husband, Hamlet’s uncle, the present king Claudius.

Claudius, the present king, personifies the most disgusting traits of the Court – he is a villain and a murderer. He pretends to be generous and caring. But in fact he has a destructive force which brought Hamlet’s family and the whole kingdom to destruction. Hamlet calls him “the king of strings and patches”. Claudius has lost any sense of decency – after killing his brother with cold hand, he perverts Gertrude, his sister-in law. He plays the noble and just man, fooling everybody around, using Laertus, Othelia’s brother, to kill Hamlet. In fact Claudius used everybody in disguising his crimes but justice triumphs. All the main characters of this play are killed. Before his death Hamlet addresses people with the request not to commit such mistakes which were committed in the Kingdom of Denmark. He challenges everyone to live in peace and love.

Hamlet Prince of Denmark is a very humanistic tragedy. It calls for justice, freedom and honesty.

Practical assignments:

Romeo and Juliet

1. Read *Romeo and Juliet* and say why it is called Shakespeare’s “One Week’s Tragedy”. Make a sketch of this week by enumerating all the events and the days when they took place.
2. Comment on Juliet’s monologue on the balcony.
3. Make the character drawing of the main characters. Illustrate your opinions with examples from the play.
4. *Romeo and Juliet* is considered an optimistic tragedy. Give reasons for such a statement.

Othello, the Moor of Venice

1. Read the tragedy and comment on its main conflicts.
2. Comment on the major theme of the tragedy.
3. Write an essay about the problem of race discrimination in W. Shakespeare's drama.

Hamlet Prince of Denmark

1. Read the tragedy and comment on its main characters.
2. Make a list of actions that helped Hamlet disguise the crime committed against his father.
3. Comment on the actuality of Hamlet's famous monologue "*To be or not to be...*"
4. Pick up from the tragedy actions or words that characterize Hamlet as a humanist.
5. Comment on the humanism of W. Shakespeare. Bring examples from all his creation.

English Literature of the period of Revolution and Restoration (1600-1660)

Plan

1. Social and political life of England in the 17th Century. The Character of the revolution (1600 – 1640). The leading force of the revolution – the Puritanism.
2. Literary currents of the time
3. Birth and death of Literary forms
4. The Literary activity of John Donne – the representative of metaphysical poets.
5. “Ben Jonson – the founder of the first “Literary school” in Britain, the representative of the Cavalier poets.
6. John Milton – the greatest of all epic poets in English literature.
7. Conclusions

* * *

Bibliography

1. Levițchi, Leon, *Istoria Literaturii engleze și americane*, vol II, TEORA 1985
2. Levițchi, Leon, *Literatura engleză de la început pînă la 1648*, TEORA 1973
3. *The Northon Anthology of English Literature 6th Edition* Major Authors. New York, London 1989
4. M. Hecker “*English Literature*” M. 1979
5. *Literature, Major Authors*, London 1972
6. *Britanica, enciclopedia*, London, 1980

English social life in the 17th century.
The revolution and its character (1603 – 1660)

“Social life of Britain at the beginning of the 17th century was marked by the events that took place during the period that extends from the accession of the first Stuart king (James I) in 1603 to the coronation of the third (Charles II) in 1660. These events bridge the gap between the Tudor “tyranny – by – consent” of the 16th century and the constitutional monarchy of the 18th century. At the centre of the period lies the Puritan Revolution (1640 – 1660).”¹

It was the end of Queen Elisabeth’s reign and she had expected “the nation’s supreme triumph over a long – awaited invader to release a tide of patriotic good feeling”. But nothing of the sort happened, quite on the contrary. Social problems that had for a long time been hidden, suppressing in the interests of national unity, suddenly came to the surface. They gave birth to bitter quarrels and total misunderstanding between the Monarch and the Parliament, which lasted quite a bit, producing local fights throughout the country. The struggle between the two sides began to sharpen in 1625 when **Charles I** took his father’s place and ascended the throne. Charles brought from abroad some feudal laws, which as he thought might have helped him to carry out his policy. Repeated conflicts took place between Parliament and Charles I, who tried to support France in its wars on the account of the poverty and suffering of the English nation. Parliament was in King’s way to fulfill his promise to his brother-in law, King of France Louis XIII, and refused to get involved in a new war. The Commons were enabled to present a list of demands for the present King, named the “Petition of Rights” which included no taxation without the consent of the Parliament, no imprisonment without trial, responsibility of the ministers appointed by the King before Parliament. Charles was outraged by such an unobtrusiveness and disobedience on behalf of Parliament and tried for several times to dissolve Parliament, but the King encountered great opposition and strong violence of Parliament, which refused to dissolve. The leaders of the opposition were arrested by Charles I and the King determined never to call another Parliament. In such a way Charles ruled the country without a Parliament for 11 years after 1628, having two people for assistance: Archbishop Laud and Thomas Wentworth who helped the King to carry out his autocratic policy in Scotland and Ireland. They demonstrated much cruelty and harshness in their rule, which gave rise to much bitter feelings throughout the country.

1. *The Northon Anthology of English Literature 6th Edition* Major Authors. New York, London 1989
 p 104

In order to subdue Ireland, Charles tried to make some reforms there, which consisted in taking away the lands from people and making them Protestants. Most of the Irish refused to give up the old Catholic religion and this brought to fights in Ireland.

The agitation against the authoritarian Episcopal Church became acute, bringing to the formation of two active political forces in the country – the Parliament and the Puritans. The first had only one aim – to get rid of Charles, which ended up with Charles' execution in 1649. English Protestant church suffered great struggle inside since they have retained much of the Catholic tradition in form. This struggle was carried out by the Puritans. The Puritans were a religious sect of the Protestants who wanted to purify the English church from Catholic rites. The Catholic church used to have strict demands for the fulfillment of God's Law, while the Pope and other clergymen never did so, breaking it and perverting Biblical principles. The Puritans called the Christians to live a stern way of life, without any pleasures and enjoyments, following all the rules of Christian life, proving it to be more pure and holy before God. One of their distinctive features was a specific uniform which distinguished them from other people, always being dressed in dark-brown clothes and black hats. The fact that the King was almighty and people were supposed to obey him, because it was a call of the Bible, caused much distress and hatred among common people who saw much injustice in the King's rule. Great numbers of people joined the Puritans and they became a leading force in resisting the King. Charles together with his advisers persecuted the Puritans, killing them. This caused many Puritans to migrate to America.

Around these broad social changes there took place a set of intellectual and spiritual changes, no less striking and significant. "Thus the English community changed from one founded on the concepts of hierarchy and uniformity to one founded on concepts of multiplicity, disparity and toleration. It turned into a vigorous materialistic community of competing pressure groups". / 2

2. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature 6th Edition* Major Authors. New York, London 1989
p 1050

Literary currents of the Time

Literature had been greatly influenced by all the social and political changes of the period. The works of the Puritans became prevailing. They considered that the Renaissance forms of art were perverted: this caused many Renaissance literary forms to fade away in this period being replaced by sermons and religious tracts, etc. Puritan sermons explored in intimate details the psychology of the Christians trying to be sure of their own salvation. The Puritan tracts developed dramatic new ways of exciting the real interest of the readers. The Puritans mistrusted the belles-lettres, music and religious rituals. They gave a heavy moral and social pressure to their writings.

Alongside with the Puritans the age gave birth to Metaphysical poets, who combined strong feelings with clever arrangements of words and ideas. Among them was Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, Cowley, etc. They tried to deepen the traditional lyric forms of love and devotion. On the other hand there were the Cavalier poets, represented by

Jonson, Herrick, Suckling, Lovelace, Donham, etc. They tried to compress and limit their poems giving them a high finish and a strong sense of easy domination. Though Donne borrowed some of the Jonson's style and vice versa, these poets created two alternatives characteristic for this period.

Another great poet of the time was John Milton with his deep sense of moral imperative and his heroic ambitions for poetry. Milton was capable of profiting from the study of Donne and Jonson. But for his central inspiration Milton raced back beyond both Metaphysical and Cavalier poets to the figure of E. Spenser.

Under the influence of the Puritan revolution many theatre were closed and anything was hardly written for the stage.

III.

Birth and death of literary forms.

“The stress and stain of a revolutionary age can be read in literature as well. It changed from the sombre, sluggish, melancholy of the early decades. Through the hoarse, incoherent warfare of the middle years and to the new standards of decorum and correctness after 1660”.³ During this turbulent period a number of literary forms perished while others were born.

3. *The Northon Anthology of English Literature 6th Edition* Major Authors. New York, London 1989
p 1057

The *Sonnets* of the Elizabethan age, that used to deal with erotic themes were turned by Donne into religious devotions. Milton's sonnets touched upon religious and political issues. Later on sonnets completely faded from the poetic repertory.

Allegory suffered even a more curious fate. It was the essential method of Spenser's *Fairy Queen*. The figures of Sin & Death in the midst of *Paradise Lost* testify to its survival. But when Dryden used allegory there was a kind of grotesque comedy about it, as if the form was fundamentally a joke. Serious allegory had slid down the social scale.

Blighted by the frost of Puritan disapproval, the masque (theatrical play written in poetry, including music, dancing and songs) and the madrigal (song for singer without instrument) both perished. Both were suspect by the puritans as vain, sensual and worldly. Madrigals as a blend of Folk and art songs were particularly to be regretted. For many years they had been sung in the yeoman's home, being accompanied by lutes, viols and recorders. They faded away together with rounds, carols, etc. Madrigals made way for psalm singing and sermon listening.

As the many intricate stanzaic forms of the early century lost favour, rhymed couplets came to the fore. They combined the stinging effect of epigrams with the cumulative rhythms that build verse paragraphs. The lyrics became far less expressive. Formal verse, satire, which was a novelty at the beginning of the century was a well – established mode of poetry by the end of it, growing subtler and more various. Besides satire, burlesque became rampant. All these changes in literature brought the English reader on the very threshold of the modern novel.

The new appearing literary forms involved more prose than verse. Prose grew simpler and less artful. This period gave birth to the first intimate English biographers, the first diarists, Pepys and Evelyn, professional psychologists, like Robert Burton, the "character – writers", represented by Overbury and Earle. All of them contributed to the arts of revealing and understanding the human personality. The first newspapers sprang up during the civil wars. Abraham Cowley produced a series of personal essays, more relaxed than those of Bacon. English translation came into its second stage, by presenting Old and Mid English works in Modern English. Dryden translated into Modern English some of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

All these developments were predestined to a reading audience which was responsive, alert and eager to be informed. The most outstanding writers and poets of the time were John Donne, Ben Jonson and John Milton

John Donne

(1572-1631)

John Donne characterized himself as “an adventurous young spark who wrote cynical verses and at the same time the grave and eloquent divine, Doctor Donne, the dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral”./ The contrast is striking but the key to both characters is the same – it is a restless searching energy.

J. Donne was born in an old Roman Catholic family at the time when anti-Catholic feeling in England was at its height and Catholics were subject to constant harassment by secret police. His faith barred him from many usual avenues of success and his point of view has always been of an insecure outsider. Though Donne attended both Oxford and Cambridge Universities he never took any academic degrees and never practiced law. After quietly abandoning Catholicism some time during the 1590s he had scruples about becoming an Anglican. His financial situation made him use his wit and charm in order to make his way in life./4 He travelled on the Continent and put himself in the way of court employment. In 1601 he secretly married Lady Edgerton’s niece, Ann More, and ruined his own worldly hopes. His father-in-law had imprisoned and dismissed him from his post. Donne became poor and sick. He took up writing. Approaching the age of 40 he published two anti -Catholic polemics. Donne publicly announced about his renunciation to the Catholic faith. In 1611-1612 he wrote several long poems, among them was *The Anniversaries on the Death of Sir Robert’s Daughter Elizabeth*.

Polemics is the art of carrying on arguments

Though Donne refused to take Anglican orders, King James was certain to make a great Anglican preacher of him. He declared that Donne could have no employment from him except in church, so Donne was forced to enter the ministry and received this order in 1615.

In 1621 Donne was appointed dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral. Donne’s metaphorical style, bold erudition and dramatic wit established him as a great preacher. 160 sermons of his survived. His private devotions were published in 1624 but he continued to write secret poetry.

The poetry of Donne represents a sharp break with that written by his predecessors and most of his contemporaries. Donne took his cue from recent continental poets who had freshened the Petrarchan tradition, by developing a more intellectualised form of conceit, created highly concentrated images, which involve a major element of dramatic contrast.

4. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature 6th Edition* Major Authors. New York, London 1989
p 1060

The clichés of early love poetry, such as: bleeding hearts, cheeks like roses, lips like cherries, appear in Donne's poetry only as a mockery or in some ingenious transmutation. The tears, which flow in his poem "A Valediction: of Weeping" are different from ordinary fluid of unhappy lovers; they are symbols of world's emptiness without a beloved./5

Donne likes to twist not only images and ideas, but also traditional rhythmic and stanzaic patterns. His speech patterns are colloquial and varied.

The great change in the interest of the readers by the end of the century made Donne's poetry rarely read, though in a period of time things changed and in 1612 a new edition of Donne appeared and was quickly accepted as standard. Many of his poems were black marks on Donne as a Godly Divine, because they were difficult and allusive. His collected poems were first published in 1633, the poems were divided into several generic groups such as sonnets, epigrams, love elegies, satire, verse letters and funeral elegies.

John Donne

Break of Day

'Tis true, tis day; what though it be?

O wilt thou therefore rise from me?

Why should we rise because 'tis light?

Did we lie down because 'twas night?

Love, which in spite of darkness brought us hither,

Should in despite of light keep us together.

Light hath no tongue, but is all eye;

If it could speak as well as spy,

This were the worst that it could say,

That being well, I fain would stay,

And that I loved my heart and honor so

That I would not from him, that had them; go.

Must business thee from hence remove?

O, that's the worst disease of love.

The poor, the foul, the false, love can.

Admit, but not the busied man.

He which hath business, and makes love, doth do

Such wrong, as when a married man doth woo. (1633)

A lecture upon the Shadow

Stand still, and I will read to thee

A lecture, Love, in love's philosophy.

These three hours that we have spent

Walking here, two shadows went

Along with us, which we ourselves produced;

But, now the sun is just above our head.

We do those shadows tread

And to brave clearness all things are reduced.

So, wilt our infant loves did grow

Disguised did and shadows flow

Form us and our care; but now 'tis not so.

That love hath not attained the high'st degree

Which is still diligent lest others see.

Except our loves at this noon stay,

We shall new shadows make the other way.

As the first were made to blind

Others, these which come behind

Will work upon ourselves, and blind our eyes.

If our loves faint and westwardly decline,

To me then falsely thine

And I to thee mine actions shall disguise.

The morning shadows wear away,

But these grow longer all the day,

But, oh, love's day is short if love decay

Love is a growing or full constant light,

And his first minute after noon is night.

(1635)

Ben Jonson

(1572 – 1637)

Ben Jonson was an actor, a playwright, poet, scholar, critic, translator, man of letters, the head of the first “Literary school” in England.

Ben Jonson did so many different things in the literary world of the early 17th century and made use of so many different styles” that he can be called a giant of a man.

Jonson’s life was tough and turbulent. He was educated at Westminster School by the great classical scholar William Camden. He joined the army and fought with the Spaniards. During his career of an actor and playwright Ben Jonson killed a fellow actor in a duel, and escaped punishment only by pleading “Benefit of Clergy”, offering his help to the court as he could read and write and in such a way. Later on Jonson became the unofficial literary dictator of London, the king’s pensioned poet and a favourite of the court.

The first of his great plays was *Every Man is His Humour*, in which W. Shakespeare performed in the leading role. It was the first so called “comedies of humours” in which the ruling passions of men were exposed to satiric interpretation. His classical tragedy *Sejanius* (1603) has not been much liked because of its gloomy mood and static character, but *Volpone* (1606), and the *Alchemist* (1610) are the two supreme satiric comedies of the English stage. Both have been repeatedly adapted and modernized. In 1605 Jonson began writing for the court a series of masques, involving allegory, complimenting the king or the queen.

In 1616 he published a splendid collection of *Works*, a body of poetry to which he kept adding up to the end of his life. He wrote several devotions, poems and plays. Now let us enjoy some of Ben Jonson’s poetry:

Ben Jonson

To John Donne

Donne, the delight of Poebus and each Muse,
 Who, to thy one, all other brains refuse,
 Whose every work, of thy most early wit,
 Came forth example and remains so yet;
 Longer a knowing than most wits do live,
 And which no affection prais enough can give.
 To it thy language, letters, arts best life,
 Which might with half mankind maintain a strife.
 All, which I meant to praise, and yet I would,

But leave, because I cannot, as I should.

(1616)

* * *

To William Camden

Camden, most reverend head, to whom I owe

All that I am in Arts, all that I know

(How nothing's that!) to whom my country owes

The great renown and the name wherewith she goes,

Than thee the age sees not that thing more grave,

More high, more holy, that she more would crave.

What name, what skill, what faith hast thou in things

What sight in searching the most antique springs!

What weight and what authority in thy speech!

Man scarce can make that doubt, but thou can teach.

Pardon free truth and let thy modesty

Which conquers all, be once o'ercome by thee

Many of thive this better could than I

But for their powers, accept my piety.

(1616)

The following poem is a piece of irony at the address people that like to be something and do all their best for it, but succeed only in the appearance to be so.

On Something, that Walks Somewhere

At court I met it, in clothes brave enough

To be a courtier, and looks brave enough

To seem a statesman: as I hear it came

It made me a great face. I asked the name

“A Lord”, it cried, “buried in flesh and blood,

And such from whom let no man hope least good,

For I will do none; and as little ill,

For I will dare none. “Good Lord, walk dead still”.

(1616)

John Milton

(1608 – 1674)

John Milton is the greatest of all epic English poets. **John Milton** was born in London on December 9, 1608 in the family of a scrivener (a clerk who copied documents). From the very beginning Milton showed prodigious gifts as a student of languages. He graduated the Cambridge University with the degree BA in 1629 and MA in 1662. Such an education might have helped him take up the career of a church worker. But Milton disliked the trend of religious affairs and spent several years in his native place, in Horton, Buckinghamshire, where he wrote many poems. Later he traveled on the Continent to put the final touches on the already splendid education.

The literary activity of J. Milton is divided into three major periods. His life falls into three divisions. There is a period of youthful education and apprenticeship, which culminates in the writing of *Lycidas* (1637) and his foreign travels. There is a period of prose and controversy (1640 – 60). And the third period comprises the last 14 years of his life, when he appeared as a mature figure and published his three major poems: *Paradise Lost* (1667), *Paradise Regained* (1671), and *Samson Agonistes* (1671).

His literary career began by publishing tracts against bishops' ruling churches. In 1644 he wrote a short essay *Of education*, later the same year he published his work *Areopagitica*. A series of pamphlets appeared and earned his reputation as a radical. His failure in marriage supplied him material for an other series of pamphlets, arguing that divorce should be granted on grounds of incompatibility. It was a scandalous work for that time. The third set of pamphlets was published after the execution of Charles I in 1649. That year J. Milton was made foreign Secretary of the New Republican Government and the next ten years of his life were busy with politics and official work. Milton was closely connected with the puritan revolutionaries who often consulted him. In all his publicist works he attacked the enemies of the Republic.

With the restoration of monarchy Milton was deprived of his office and consequently of his livelihood. Many of his pamphlets had been burned but his militant spirit could not be crushed. They tried to get rid of Milton but his poor state of health saved him from being executed. In 1652 Milton lost eyesight. The years of his retirement became the third period in his literary career, which turned out to be the most prolific though he could not write or read on his own. During this time Milton created the most significant works of his: *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*, with the help of some of his friends and his youngest daughter, Deborah. Milton died on November 8, 1674.

Paradise Lost is Milton's greatest work. It is an epic that presents the author's views in an allegoric religious form but its basic idea is easily discerned, i.e. the exposure of reactionary forces of his time and a passionate appeal for freedom.

The poem consists of 12 books. It's based on the biblical legend of Adam and Eve, and involves God and his eternal enemy, Satan. The revolutionary spirit is shown in Satan, who revolts against God, drawing to his side many rebel-angels. Being driven out of Heaven and falling on Earth possessing humane qualities. Satan is determined to go on with his war against God and uses Eve as an innocent creature in his plans. Choosing sin Eve and Adam are deprived of immortality and driven away from Paradise. They are taken to the gates of Paradise by Archangel Michael, who showed them pictures of future of the Earth. Those were scenes from the history of the human race, that involved wars, strenuous labour, joys and endless sorrows. Michael prophesies that only by hard toil they could achieve moral perfection and regain eternal bliss.

Paradise Lost was a deeper, larger, more evangelical work, than anything he might have written. It was well suited to appeal to a nation, which had just passed through a massive spiritual crisis. It is a major monument, one of the last and most impressive of the Renaissance tradition of Christian humanism'. Milton forged a poem of epic dimensions that would remain for centuries to become a supreme literary achievement./4 The way of life that Adam and Eve take up by the end of the poem (they have to face the burdens of humanity, seeking blessings, striving for purity, suffering inevitable defeats. This is a triumphant balancing of this conclusion which completes the noble architecture of Milton's poem.

Milton's works form a bridge between the poetry of the Renaissance and the poetry of the Classicists of the later period. He was attracted by the poetry of ancient mythology and drama because of the free thought they expressed. He chose his themes from the Bible but in his allegorical epic poem they became revolutionary in spirit, which bring J. Milton to great heights.

In his poetic art Milton blends the traditions of the Renaissance with the spirit of revolutionary struggle and the ideas of Puritanism, love for art and nature. The belief in the power of science and the profound humanism are blended with a puritan rigidity of morals. That's why Milton's poetry is in many respects so contradictory and complex. But his revolutionary feelings raised him to high spirits of creation.

Conclusions:

1. The turbulent spirit of the age of Revolution was broadly reflected in literature, giving birth to new forms, values and morals.
2. The Revolution gave a heavy moral pressure on Literature, excluding some literary forms and introducing new ones.
3. The poets of the age are divided into two groups: metaphysical and cavalier poets, who though having a different approach to literature and literary forms, borrowed the styles from each other.
4. John Donne's poetry appears to be an absolutely new style, refreshing the Petrarchan tradition.
5. Ben Jonson created the first "Literary school" in Britain.
6. John Milton blended the traditions of Renaissance with the revolutionary spirit of the age.

Enlightenment in English Literature (18th century) Plan

1. Historical background of English Enlightenment. Sentimentalism – a new trend in English Literature.
2. Literary theory of the age: pamphlet – a leading literary form. The writers of the time J. Swift, R. Addison, J. Steel, A. Pope.
3. The Beginning of the novel.
4. Literary contribution of A. Richardson, H. Fielding, T. Smallett, L. Stern.
5. Daniel Defoe – the founder of the English novel. His life and literary activity. The first novel in English literature *Robinson Crusoe*.
6. Jonathan Swift – the greatest satirist of the time. Life and literary work. *The Battle of the Books*, *The Tale of the Tub*.
7. Gulliver's Travels – the first satirical novel

* * *

Bibliography

1. *Norton Antohology of English Literature* 5th Edition / Major Authors/New York London 1989
2. **H. Hecker** – *English Literature* / M. 1995
3. **Bantaș, Clonțea** – *Manual de Literatură Engleză și Americană* / Teora 1993
4. **Ana Cartianu, Ioan Preda** – *Eseuri de Literatură engleză* / Edit. St. 1970
5. **Leon Levitchi** – *Istoria Literaturii Engleze și Americane* V 2 Dacia Cluj – Napoca 1985.
6. **Daniel Defoe** – *R. Crusoe (Norton Anthology, New York 198)*
7. **J. Swift** – *Gulliver's Travel (NAEL)*

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

As the 17th century drew to a close, its temper became more secular, tolerant and moderate. The history of England of this time was marked by British colonial expansion. The most active section of the population were the commercial classes which made England a commercial centre of Europe. Many goods were brought to England. New traditions were born. They opened the so called coffee houses where people gathered to drink Coffee, Chocolate and tea and discuss politics. There was a great variety of people under their roofs. There were earls, clergymen, translators, book-printers, who criticized the corrupt government and its ministries. This was a remarkable rise of literature. People wrote on many subjects and in many fields, such as: history, philosophy, political economy and natural science. The new age was willing to settle for the possible within the limits of human intelligence and of the material world. Its temper was expressed by its most influential philosopher - John Locke (1632 – 1704) in his work *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690).

But if the eighteenth century brought a recognition of human limitations it also took an optimistic view of human nature. Some philosophers asserted that human beings are naturally good and find their highest happiness in the exercise of virtue and benevolence/1. Such a view was thought to be “sentimental”.

The sentimentalism forced a benevolence that led to social reforms, which in its turn brought to the improvement of some spheres of life.

Literary theory

The movement produced in France at the beginning of the 18th, known as the classical literature or enlightenment distinguished the age of Louis XIV. In England this period was named “neoclassical”. The central problem of vital importance to the writers of the 18th century was the study of man and the origin of his good and evil qualities. They considered that human nature was virtuous. The life of people was much influenced by the social development of events. They met with the survivals of feudalism and with the evils of the newly established system of production. They were as yet unable to understand the laws of its development. They said: “Vice is due to ignorance”. The writers of the 18th century started a public movement for enlightening people, by teaching them. The writers of this period rejected church dogmas. English literature was greatly influenced by the enlightenment movement that took place in French literature, and namely by such writer and thinkers as Voltaire, Rousseau, etc. The movement of Enlightenment all over Europe had much in common, and namely: hatred to feudalism, education of people, and a revolutionary spirit, though in England the Revolution was over long before Enlightenment came forth.

This period saw the transition from poetry and the heroic age of Shakespeare to the prosaic age of *essays*. *Essay is a composition on any subject written in prose*. The period also saw the rise of the political *pamphlet*. *Pamphlet is a booklet on problems of current interest*. The most prominent in this area were D. Defoe and J. Swift. The great essayists of the day were R. Steele and J. Addison.

What poets tried to see and respect was “Nature” – a word with so many meanings. Usually by Nature people understood – the universal, permanent and representative elements in human experience. External nature – the landscape – as a source of aesthetic pleasure and scientific inquiry attracted the people’s attention.

The beginning of the 18th century was marked by the works of such great writers as: Swift with *A Tale of a Tub* (1704 – 10), Addison’s with *The Campaign* (1705), prior with several *Poems on Several Occasions*, and Pope with *Pastorals*. On the whole the literature of the period is a literature of “wit”, concerned with civilization and social relationship, it is critical and in some way moral or satiric. Some of the works of the time were mock-heroic, for instance Swifts’ *A Description of a City Shower* and Pope’s *Rape of the Lock*. Some works were humorous burlesques, for example John Gay’s *The Art of Walking the Streets of London*. Such literature was addressed to highly sophisticated and cultivated readers.

Never before, nor since have so many great writers of prose flourished at once. They represented different types of writings, which can be grouped into: *literary criticism* with Samuel Johnson; *biography* – James Boswell; *philosophy* – David Hume; *politics* – Edmund Burke; *history* – Edward Gibbon; *natural history* – Gilbert White. Each of these writers was a master stylist, whose effort to express himself clearly and fully created an art difficult to achieve for the readers of the age.

The spirit of prose has driven away poetry. Though some of the distinguished poets still persisted. They were William Collins, Thomas Gray, Mark Akenside and the brothers Joseph and Thomas Warton. Edward Young (1683 – 1765) wrote an immensely long and popular poem in blank verse *The Complaint: or the Hight Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality* (1742 – 46), which was a pessimistic poem about a dark view on Christianity based on fear:

The Beginning of the Novel

At the foundation of novel writing was D. Defoe and J. Richardson. Both of them belonged to the middle class and expressed in their works middle class interests and attitudes. They also wrote about and for women. To a large extent the development of novel is identical with the attempt to interest the growing number of female readers by shaping their lives into literature. Defoe tried to show not the earlier romances but to create their world as it was populated with

people concerned with their practical life. He did not seek readers among the upper classes. He wrote for servants and apprentices.

Richardson however caught the attention of all literate Europe and established a solid and enduring literary landscape. His great works are *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) a story told in a series of letters in which a virtuous servant girl eventually wins her master for a husband. Another masterpiece of the age was the novel *Clarissa* (1747 – 48) written by J. Richardson.

No earlier author had involved his reader fully in the thoughts and emotions of his characters nor had any author paid such close attention to the pressures on women. Some Later novelists as Fanny Burney (1752 –1840) and Jane Austen would profit from his example.

Henry Fielding (1707–1754) wrote *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* (1749) under the influence of Richardson’s works. The protagonist became the pattern of a good-natured hero of the age: “a young” man of many virtues, generous, high spirited, loyal and courageous but impulsive and full of animal spirits. The critics characterized it as a brilliantly constructed plot.

This picturesque tradition was continued by Tobias Smollett (1721 – 1771) with his novels *Roderick Random* (1748), *Peregrine Pickle* (1751), *Ferdinand, Count Fathom* (1753). In his works Smollett depicted the grotesque side of the 18th century life, its brutality, coarse practical jokes, and strong odors.

The most original novelist of the period was Laurence Stern (1713 – 1768), a humorist, sentimentalist and an author who reminds us that one of the roots of the novels is the word “novelty”.

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy (1760 –1767) frustrated the readers. The plot does not have a logical order; he abandons clock time, interrupting scenes. In fact, it is an elaborate joke at the reader’s expense. Who was not ready for such a change.

Fielding, Smollett and Stern gave English Literature a gallery of eccentric and original characters that illustrate the interest of the age not only in the ideal but also in the individual and the unique character.

Daniel Defoe

(1661 - 1731)

Daniel Defoe is considered to be the founder of novel in English Literature. He was born in London in 1667 in the family of a butcher, who gave him a good education, which meant to make Daniel a priest, but the young man refused to go into the ministry. He started his adult life as a merchant but turned out to be a failure in this field. The only branch of business in which D. Defoe proved to be successful was journalism and literature. At the age of 23, D. Defoe started

writing pamphlets. His first one was an attack at the policy of Charles II *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* (1702) which was directed against the Tories. The irony of the pamphlet being very subtle, the enemy didn't catch it. They even praised Defoe for this pamphlet, considering that the critics was addressed to the opposition. Later on they grasped the idea and sent him to jail. They arranged a disgraceful punishment for Defoe - "the pillory". The person doomed to it was tied up to a pillory in a public square and people were supposed to throw eggs and rotten tomatoes at anybody standing at the pillory. It was a tough and humiliating experience, which made Daniel Defoe compose the poem *Hymn to the Pillory*, which was a bitter criticism of this Law. After being released from prison he became editor of a journal, which supported the Tories, his former enemies.

In 1719 he tried his hand at another kind of literature – fiction. He wrote his famous novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, which brought him fame. After it followed some other novels: *Captain Singleton* (1720), *Moll Flanders*, *Lady Roxanne* and *Colonel Jacque* (1722).

D. Defoe died in Cripplegate, on April 24, 1731 of lethargy.

ROBINSON CRUSOE

(1719)

This book appeared as a feedback to an adventure story published in R. Steele's magazine *The Englishman*. It was an article about Alexander Selkirk, a Scotch sailor, who went on sea and after a quarrel with the captain of the ship was put ashore on a deserted island. The man had lived there during four years and four months quite alone. D. Defoe was greatly touched by this brave man and it supplied to him the plot for his novel *Robinson Crusoe*, which brought fame to the writer.

The original title of *Robinson Crusoe* has an unusual form which is not common for the modern reader. It sounded as follows:

The life and Strange Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Of York, Mariner: Who Lived Eight and twenty Years, All alone in an uninhabited Island on the Coast of America, Near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoke; Having Been Cast on the Sore by Shipwreck, Wherein all the Men Perished but Himself, With an Account How He Was at last Strangely Delivered by Pirates..

The novel as a whole is a praise to human labour and the triumph of man over nature, which was studied and described by the writers of the age. Labour and fortitude, courage and enthusiasm helped Robinson, the main character of the novel, to endure hardships, saving him from despair and perishing.

Defoe was a great master of realistic detail. He describes all the adventures of Robinson on the island as if he himself experienced them. The contact of Defoe with the reader is felt in the clarity of his style.

Characters

Robinson

The charm of the novel lies in Robinson, the central character. At the beginning he is an inexperienced youth, a frivolous boy who later changed into a strong willed man, able to overcome all the calamities of his unusual destiny. He never gave way to despair, self-pity or fear. The author presents him as a real optimist. His guiding principle in life became: “*never say die*” and “*in trouble be troubled is to double your trouble*”. He was self-confident and very ingenious, showing a practical approach to every difficulty he encountered on the island.

For the first time in English literature the problem of slavery and race discrimination is touched upon. As soon as Friday appears, Robinson becomes his master, considering himself superior. He does not lose his qualities of a bourgeois though living for twenty years far from being a bourgeois. As soon as other people appear on the island he organized a colony and introduced class relations. When Robinson needed money he sold Friday without hesitation. He did it to the man who at first was his friend, then turned him into a servant.

Friday

The other central character of the book is Friday. Defoe makes the reader sympathize with Friday. He is intelligent, brave, generous, and skilful. Crusoe manages to teach him English and he starts to master it rather quickly. Defoe for the first time depicts a Negro as an able, pleasant human being. Usually they were regarded as “*ready mercantile commodity*” (a profitable article for trade).

Robinson Crusoe is a glorification of practicalness and energy. According to Defoe man can live by himself comfortably and make all the things he needs himself without having someone to assist him. This is an optimistic novel that inspires the reader the feeling of self-concern and the assurance in his own forces. It is a study of man, of his abilities to survive in extreme situations. The man is shown in relation to nature, to civilization, as well as in relation to labour and private property. This was the first novel in English literature which has characters which whom the reader could actually identify.

Jonathan Swift

(1667 – 1745)

The greatest of the prose satirists of the age of Enlightenment, Jonathan Swift, was born of English parents in Dublin. Through the generosity of an uncle he was educated at Kilkenny School and Trinity College, Dublin, but before he could fix on a career, the subsequent invasion of James II in Ireland drove Swift to England. Between 1689 –1699 J. Swift took the orders of the church and became a part of it. It was then, when he discovered his gift of a great satirist. About 1696 – 97 he wrote his powerful satiric works devoted to corruption in religion and learning, *A Tale of the Tub* and *The Battle of the Books*. These were the years when he slowly came to maturity.

A good part of his life Swift devoted his talents to politics and religion. As a clergyman he supported the Anglican Church, giving to it no less importance than to the Crown. In 1710 having strong disagreements with his old party the Whigs, he abandoned it and joined the Tories, becoming the most brilliant journalist of the time. Later on he moved to Ireland where he became an ecclesiastical administrator and the leader of resistance to English oppression.

Under the pseudonym *M. B. Drapier*, he published the famous series of public letters, which enraged the king, who promised 100.000 pounds for the real name of the writer. His last years of life were less happy, because of his sickness. Swift has written several poems devoted to his great love, Lady Esther Johnson (Stella). He dedicated to her his famous journal letters published in 1766 under the title *The Journal to Stella*.

The Battle of the Books – is an allegory, based on a discussion, which began in France devoted to *The Advantages of Ancient and Modern Writers*. These debates separated the literary world in two parts, some supporting the ancient literature and others the modern one. *The Battle of the Books* was written in 1697 and published in 1704. It relates about an incident in St James Library. Swift pretends to have come upon an old manuscript, which he decided to publish. The librarian having a sceptical attitude to everything that is old, had thrown away from the shelves the volumes with antique works. The books of the ancient authors strive to get back their own position, and make war with the Moderns. Amidst the cloud of dust the two armies engage in a battle. Swift didn't want to take either of the sides that's why no winner is mentioned

The Tale of a Tub is an antireligious satire. The title of the book has a double meaning and explains the idea of the book. *The Tale of the Tub* means a nonsense story told as a joke: the world tub suggests the idea expressed in the proverb: "*Empty vessels make the greatest sound*". In the preface to the book Swift tells his readers of an old custom, the seamen have when at sea, i.e. if a whale begins to follow a vessel, they throw the empty tub into the water to divert the whale's attention from the ship. The whole is a satire upon religion in England. The empty tub

symbolises religion, which diverted people from political thinking, which offered the chance to discover the real state of things about the ruling class.

The inventive genius of J. Swift and his savage satire were at their best reflected in his masterpiece *Gulliver's Travels*.

Gulliver's Travels

This book provoked a great sensation both in England and Ireland. This book was a total novelty in English Literature. In this work Swift intended to satirize the evils of the existing society in the form of fictitious travels of a young man. The scenes and the nations described in the book are so extraordinarily amusing that the novel became a favourite both with children and grown-ups.

It deals with the adventures of a ship's surgeon during his four voyages that he made in different fictitious places: The first is an account of his voyage to Lilliput; The second is a voyage to Brobdingnag and Gulliver's encounter with its Giants; The third voyage involves the visit to several places, such as: to Laputa, a flying island; to the island of Balnibarbi, where Gulliver visits Lagado, a city with an absurd academy; to Clubdubdrib, the island of magicians, and to Lugguagg, another island where people continue living after the power of enjoying life is gone; the fourth voyage brings Gulliver to the Honyhnhnms where the intelligent creatures are horses and all the human beings are reduced to the level of brutes.

In the first book Gulliver found himself in Lilliput, a nation of tiny creatures who thought too much of themselves. Swift used these lilliputs as a nation to show their insignificance, making the reader feel contempt for their ideas, customs and institutions. He mocks at their Emperor who boasts that he is the delight of the universe, while in fact he is no taller than the side of a nail. This country, with shallow interests and corrupted laws, symbolizes England of that time, with its court, with the atmosphere of hostility, hypocrisy where the author felt lousy, just as Gulliver felt in Lilliput.

Describing the war between Lilliput and Blefuscu based on disagreement concerning the method of breaking eggs, the author expressed his indignation against the war of England with Spain.

The second voyage brings Gulliver in Brobdingnag, the country of the Giants who treat him very kindly. Brobdingnag is an expression of Swift's desire to find the ideal and to escape from the disguising world of Lilliputians. The author idealizes an agricultural country ruled by an ideal monarch. This king is kind and dislikes wars. The conclusion of the King after his talk with Gulliver is very significant. He says: "Ignorance, idles and vice are the proper ingredients for qualifying a legislator", which is a grotesque statement.

The third Voyage Gulliver undertakes in the country of Laputa. The climax of the bitterness of his satire is attained in his description of the Academy of science. These academics are busy inventing such nonsense as:

1. Extracting sun beans out of Cucumbers;
2. Building houses beginning from the roof;
3. Converting ice into gunpowder;
4. Softening marble for pillows;
5. Preventing the growth of wool upon lambs, breeding naked sheep all over the Kingdom;
6. Simplifying the language by leaving out the verbs and participles;

Some critics accuse J. Swift of contempt for Science, but it goes without saying that he criticized not science itself but parody on it.

Being disgusted with life around him Swift idealized the ancient times in describing Gulliver's voyage to Clubdubdril, the island of magicians. The governor of this island has power to revive people and commands their service for 24 hours. Swift compares the modern government with the senate of Rome.

The fourth part of the book is devoted by J. Swift to Gulliver's travels to Honyhnhnms – the ideal island where there is neither sickness, nor dishonesty. The noble race of horses rules the country by reason and justice. These horses possess human virtues. This last allegory bares a more positive hue than the previous ones, which witnesses that J. Swift was against stupidity, ignorance, and stood for reason and justice.

Practical assignments:

1. Read *Robinson Crusoe* by D. Defoe and do the following assignments:
 - a) Make a list of all objects that were left to R. Crusoe after the ship wreck.
 - b) Make a list of objects that have been created by Robinson while living on the island. How does this characterize Robinson?
 - c) Pick from the story all cases of direct characteristic of the main hero.
 - d) Write an essay on the topic *The Optimism of Robinson*
2. Read *Gulliver's Travels* by J. Swift and do the following assignments:
 - a) Make a list of actions that characterize the population of each of the countries visited by Gulliver. Comment on the allegory of each of the peoples Gulliver visited.
 - b) Comment on the sarcasm of J. Swift as reflected in *Gulliver's Travels*.
 - c) Write an essay on the topic: *The Country of my dream*.

Bibliography

1. Norton Nathology of English literature, New York 1987
2. English literature, Major Authors, London 1976
3. Western and English Literature, Cambr. Un. Press 1994
4. D. Dorobat , N. Pirvu, English Literature, Iasi 1993
5. L. LEVITCHI, Istoria lietraturii Engleze si americane, Cluj- Napoca 1994
6. Bantas, I. Clontea, Manual de liteartura engleza si amiericana, TEORA 1995
7. G. Anixt, C. Mihaliscaya, Istoria angliysckoy liteartury, M 1986
8. Ana Cartianu, Ioan Preda – *Eseuri de Literatură engleză* / Edit. St. 1970
9. Morlez, Henry / *An attempt towards a history of English Literature/* New York 1976
10. McGrow-Hill, English Literature A Chronological approach, McGrow-Hill, Inc. 1985
11. Britanica, Enciclopeadia, London, 1980
12. A Hymarx Outline of the Plays of Shakespeare / Boston, 1976
13. Bernard Grebanier, The Heart of Hamlet / New York, 1982
14. Marilyn French , Shakespeare’s Division of Experience / Summit Books, New York, 1086
15. William Langland, Piers Ploughman A new translation by A.V.C. Schmidt Oxford University Press 1992
16. D. Duțescu, L. Luvețchi, Beowulf , București, 1969
17. S.Wells and G.Taylor, Wiliam Shakespeare, The Complete Works/ Oxford Univ Press 1998
18. An Outline of the Plays of shakespeare/ Boston, Ma 1956
19. Charles and Mary Lamb, Tales from Shakespeare/ San Rafael CA USA 1972
20. M. Wood, In search of Shakespeare/ BBC Worldwide 2003
21. Lesie Dunton, Essential Shakespeare Handbook, A Penguin Company, 2004
22. Sylvan Barnet, The Sonnets and narrative Poems by W. Shakespeare/Sognet Classic, 1989
23. Ch. Marlow, Doctor Faustus, M 1984
- 24.G. Chaucer, Canterbury Tales, Penguin Collection, 1989
25. Patrick Cruttwell, The Shakespearean moment/ New York , 1981
- 26.Harley Granville- Baker , Prefaces to Shakespeare/ London, 1980