
English Poetry

HISTORY OF ENGLISH POETRY

'A Brief Survey'

English Poetry begins with Chaucer. Before Chaucer, England had Anglo-Saxon poetry. The greatest work in Anglo-Saxon Poetry was "Beowulf". It was a collection of ballads in the form of an epic. Nothing is known about the authorship of this literary work.

In fact, Chaucer is called "The father of English poetry" and "the God father of English novel". He is acknowledged as the chronicler of his age from 1340-1400. His greatest work is '*The Canterbury Tales*'. He is also called the morning star of the Renaissance just as 'Wycliffe' is called the morning star of the reformation. Other poets of the age were John Gower and William Langland.

➡ *The Chaucerians (Fifteenth Century)*

After Chaucer, there was a decline in the poetry of England. The poets that appeared on the literary scene, were his imitators; hence they were called "The Chaucerians". Some of the poets of this period were Thomas Oocleve, John Lydgate, William Dunbar, Robert Henryson and Gavin Douglas.

The poetry of the Early Renaissance in England produced poets like Thomas Wyatt and Surrey. The Tottel's Miscellany was published in 1557.

➡ *The Age of Shakespeare (1558-1625)*

The Age of Shakespeare begins from 1558 and extends up to the death of James I in 1625. Almost all the poets of the period wrote sonnet sequences, Sir Philip Sidney, Spenser and Shakespeare were the chief among them. John Donne was another great poet of this period. He is known as the Metaphysical poet. He was the leader of the Metaphysical school of poetry in England.

➡ *Seventeenth Century—John Milton (1608-1674)*

Milton is universally recognised as the greatest poet of the English Language. He was the first and the last Epic poet of England. '*Paradise Lost*' is his classical epic, '*Paradise Regained*', '*Samson Agonistes*', '*L Allegro*', '*Comus*' and '*Lycidas*' are his famous works. Other poets of this age are Robert Herrick, Thomas Carew, Sir John Suckling and Andrew Marvell.

➡ *The Restoration Period—John Dryden (1660-1700)*

Monarchy was restored in England in 1660. Hence, the period beginning with the year 1660 is called the Restoration Period. Dryden was the greatest literary figure of this period. He was a poet, playwright, prose-writer and critic. His predecessors Edmund Waller and Sir John Denham are commonly considered the pioneers of the so called "Classic" school of poetry of which Dryden was the greatest exponent. He is known for his '*Heroic Couplet*'. He wrote elegies and odes also. Samuel Butler was another poet of this age.

➡ *The Eighteenth Century—Neo-Classical/Classical Poetry*

Neo-classical age was also called the Augustan Age of English Literature. The chief characteristics of the Neo-classical poetry were; intellectual aristocratic and unromantic. Alexander Pope was the greatest poet of this period. He was the true representative of this age. 'The Rape of the Lock' is his greatest work. His translations of the 'Iliad' and the 'Odyssey' are very much admired, Matthew Prior, John Gay, Edward Young, Robert Blair and Samuel Garth are other names worthy of mention.

➡ *The Age of Johnson (1745-1798)*

The age of Johnson is a period of Translation in English Poetry. Johnson and Goldsmith were strong conservatives in literary theory. The creative work of both these writers is classical in matter and form. 'London' and 'The Vanity of Human Wishes' of Johnson are his best poems, Goldsmith's 'The Traveller' and 'The Deserted Village' also belong to this class. James Thomson, William Blake, Thomas Chatterton, William Collins, Thomas Gray, George Crabbe, Robert Burns and William Cooper are seen reviving the older romantic traditions in poetry.

➡ *The Romantic Movement—The Age of Wordsworth (1798-1832)*

The romantic movement is also called the second Renaissance. It is both a revolt and a revival. It was in 1798 that the 'Lyrical Ballads' was published. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge contributed their poems. Wordsworth's share was much larger. The chief characteristics of the Romantic Poetry were; subtle sense of mystery, mysticism, love of nature, naturalism, simplicity of diction, intellectual curiosity, lyricism and spontaneity etc. Some of the poets of this age were Robert Southey, Lord Byron, P.B. Shelley and John Keats. Wordsworth and Coleridge belonged to the elder group of the romantic poets, while Byron, Shelley and Keats belonged to the younger group of the romantic poets.

Love of nature was common to all the romantic poets. They were all lyrical poets. The influence of the French Revolution was clearly discernible of the poetry of these poets barring, of course Keats, who was deeply influenced by Hellenism and Medievalism. Melancholy pervades the entire gamut of the romantic poetry.

➡ *Victorian Poetry*

Queen Victoria ascended the throne in 1837. She died in 1901. The Victorian Age had enormous complexity and bewildering diversity. The age is remarkable for the Victorian compromise; which is in the field of political life, was between democracy and aristocracy. They had compromise in science and religion. In personal life, they had compromise between indulgence in sex and wedded-bliss.

Tennyson and Browning were the two faces of the Victorian Age. Tennyson was the representative poet of the age. Browning was a Cosmopolitan. He was aloof from the social and political problems of his age. Tennyson, the poet laureate of England, wrote many literary works. Among them may be mentioned, 'In Memoriam', 'Locksley Hall', 'Locksley Hall after Sixty Years', 'The Princess', 'X Maud' and 'Idylls of the King', Browning has to his credit 'Pauline', 'Paracelsus' 'Men and Women', 'Dramatic Personae' and 'The King and the Book'. Matthew Arnold, Arthur Hugh Clough, Macaulay, Edward Fitzgerald were other eminent poets of the period.

➡ *The Twentieth Century*

The complexity and many sidedness of the twentieth century is too difficult to be explained with full justice in the sort of brief survey. The scene is crowded one. Some famous poets of this period are W.B. Yeats, Gerard Manley Hopkins, T.S. Eliot, Walter De la Mare, George William Russell and D.H. Lawrence.



Introduction

Poetry : Its Nature and Various Forms

Poetry is "*Spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings*"

(William Wordsworth)

Poetry, one of the several branches of literature, is the oldest and most honourable branch. It is meant to be enjoyed. If you ask what poetry is, it can not be told. If you do not ask, it is known. Poetry excites our emotions. It awakens our hearts and makes us to see a new earth or a new heaven. The more one reads poems, the more one enjoys. Poetry is eternal and it makes the moment, eternal. In fact, poetry is a moment's monument.

Definitions of Poetry

Poetry can not be defined. It is like love, that can not be defined but can be felt. Love is life and poetry has to fasten on life. It is difficult to define it into exact language. There is, however, a number of definitions of poetry. Some of them are given below :

- ◆ "Poetry we will call musical thought". —*Carlyle*
- ◆ "Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moment of the best and happiest minds". —*P.B. Shelley*
- ◆ "The best poetry is the most feelingly based on imagination". —*Shakespeare*
- ◆ "Poetry is the sister of sorrow, every fear, averse and every heart a poem". —*Andre*
- ◆ "Poetry is spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. It takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility". —*William Wordsworth*
- ◆ "Poetry consists in best thoughts put in best words in best order". —*Coleridge*
- ◆ "Poetry is the rhythmic creation of beauty". —*Edgar Allen P.*
- ◆ "Poetry is "a criticism of life under the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty". —*Matthew Arnold*

Elements of Poetry

Elements of poetry are as under :

- (a) **Thought**—Thought is one of its elements. Plato was of the opinion that half of the world is created out of idea. He says that Art is an imitation of life. According to Matthew Arnold it is the "*Application of ideas to life, it contains thoughts which are the outcome of reason*".
- (b) **Emotion**—Emotion is also an important element and plays a predominant role in poetry. Wordsworth rightly says that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. Mere ideas or thought would not make poetry if they are not modified by a predominating passion.

- (c) **Imagination**—Dr. Johnson calls poetry. "The art of writing pleasure with truth by calling imagination to the help of reason." In fact, the poet creates an altogether new world out of the real world with the help of his imagination.
- (d) **Rhyme and Metre**—Poetry gives us pleasure on account of its closest relation to music. It conveys a rich imaginative sensibility and awareness of experience through meaning, sound and rhythm. These elements of sound, sense and rhythm create music in poetry. Similarly, metre gives a highly organised form of poetry. It adds pleasure and charms to the poetry.

Forms of Poetry

Poetry can be classified into two general categories —

- (1) Subjective Poetry.
 - (2) Objective Poetry.
- (1) **Subjective Poetry**—All poetry which is neither objective or dramatic, is called lyrical or subjective. Its main kinds are lyric, sonnet ode and elegy.
- (2) **Objective Poetry**—Objective poetry can be said impersonal. It is concerned with the outer world. While writing a poem of this class, the poet forgets himself. Its main classes are narrative poetry, dramatic poetry, epic poetry, descriptive poetry and ballad.

Some Prominent Forms of Poetry

➡ ***Lyric***

A lyric directly expresses the Poet's own thoughts or sentiments rather than a description of events.

It is usually full of passion and deep feelings. It has some special features—

1. It is a short poem, dealing with a single emotion.
2. It is a musical poem.
3. It is a subjective poem, expressing the varying moods of the author.
4. It is a well-knit poem, possessing a definite structure.

Some of the famous lyrics are :

1. Stanzas written in Dejection Near Naples by P.B. Shelley.
2. Nightingales by Robert Bridges.
3. The True Beauty by Thomas Carew.
4. Our Casuarina Tree by Toru Dutta

➡ ***Sonnet***

Sonnet is a sort of poem of fourteen lines. Petrarch, the Italian poet of the fourteenth century, popularised it. The English sonnet is of two types—Shakespearean and Miltonic. Shakespeare, Milton,

Wordsworth and Keats are some great sonnet writers. "On His Blindness" by John Milton and "Mercy" by William Shakespeare are fine examples of the sonnet.

➡ ***Ballad***

Ballad is a kind of lyric which is sung while dancing. It was originated in the Middle Ages. The ballad is a short story in verse, dealing with love, war and chivalry. It is dramatic in character. The modern ballad is a literary development of the traditional form. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Coleridge and "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" by John Keats are very good examples of the modern ballad.

➡ ***Elegy***

The elegy is a poem of mourning sorrow. It is often written on the death of a person. It is full of pathetic feelings. 'O Captain! My Captain!' by Walt Whitman, "An Elegy written in a Country Churchyard" by Thomas Gray are some of the best known elegies.

➡ ***Ode***

The ode is a dignified lyric. It is rhymed lyric, often in the form of an address. The structure of an Ode is either regular or irregular. "Ode to the West Wind" by P.B. Shelley and "Ode to a Nightingale" by Keats are well known.

➡ ***Epic***

An epic is a narrative poem. It deals with the martial exploits of some national hero. Milton's 'Paradise Lost' is a classical epic like Homer's 'Iliad'.



Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is an expression which is uncommon and deviates greater effect. The famous figures of speech are discussed below :

1. Simile

It is a figure of speech in which a comparison is made between two objects of *different kinds* which have at least *one point in common*. It is generally indicated by such words as 'like', 'as', 'such as', 'just as' and 'so on'.

Examples—

1. Life is *like a dream*.
2. She is lovely *like a rose*.
3. I wandered lonely *as a cloud*.
4. My love is *like a red, red rose*.
5. She is as fresh *as dew*.
6. She floats *like a laugh* from the lips of a dream.
7. *As shines the moon in clouded skies*, she in her poor attire was seen.
8. She hangs *like a star* in the dew of our song.
9. The city's voice itself is soft *like solitude's*.
10. Look *like the innocent flower*.
11. She is as *firm as a rock*.
12. Expanding *like the petals* of young flowers, I watch the gentle opening of your minds.

2. Metaphor

A Metaphor is an implied simile or an implied comparison. The likeness is embodied in a single word and that word fuses the identity of both into one. In metaphor, words of comparison as 'like', 'as', 'just as', etc. are not used.

Examples—

1. Life is but a *walking shadow*.
2. Life is a *dream*.
3. I see a *lily* on thy brow.
4. Whose armour is his *honest thought*.
5. Love is the *spice* of life.
6. The camel is the *ship* of the desert.
7. She is a *fen* of stagnant waters.
8. Revenge is a *kind of wild justice*.
9. Hope is the *poor man's bread*.
10. Life is a *tale* told by an idiot.
11. He is the *star* of the family.
12. The lion is *the king* of the forest.
13. Kalidas is the *Shakespeare* of India.

3. Personification

Personification is a figure of speech by which we attribute life and mind to inanimate things. Here, lifeless objects or abstract ideas are treated as if they were human beings. A very common example of Personification is '*Love is blind*'. Here love has been seen as a living human being who is blind and so can not see the decipher what is right and what is wrong. The personified object is written in a capital letter.

Or

"In personification (inanimate) objects and abstract notions are spoken of as having life and intelligence".
(P.C. Wren)

Examples—

1. *Death* lays his icy hands on kings.
2. Let not *Ambition* mock their useful toil.
3. *Authority* forgets a dying king.
4. *The sea* that bares her bosom to the moon.
5. But *Patience*, to prevent that murmur, soon replies.
6. *Anxiety* is sitting on her face.
7. *Experience* is the best teacher.
8. *Jealousy* is a green-eyed monster.
9. *Truth* sits upon the lips of dying men.
10. *Love* is blind.
11. Opportunity knocks at the door but once.

4. Apostrophe

It is a figure of speech whose force lies in addressing a dead person, an animal, a thing or abstract quality or idea as if it were alive, present and capable of understanding.

Examples—

1. *O Death!* where is thy sting ?
2. *O Julius Caesar!* thou art mighty yet.
3. *Frailty*, thy name is woman.
4. *O Grave!* where is thy victory ?
5. *O Solitude!*, where are thy charms, that sages have seen in thy face.
6. *Milton!* thou should'st be living at this hour.
7. *O Liberty!* what crimes are committed in thy name.
8. *Life!* I know not what thou art.
9. *O Sweet Content!* where is thy mild abode ?
10. *O World! O Life! O Time!*
on whose step I climb.
11. O Judgment ! thou art fled to brutish beasts.

5. Oxymoron

It is an association of two words or phrases having opposite meanings.

Examples—

1. She is feeling *sweet pain* of love.
2. This is an *open secret*.

3. He is the *wisest fool* in the group.
4. He is *idly busy* these days.
5. Love is *bitter sweet*.
6. Having *nothing*, he hath *all*.
7. Our *sweetest songs* are those that tell of saddest thoughts.
8. Her mother, too upon this occasion, felt a *pleasing distress*.
9. The *morehaste, the less speed*.
10. His *honour* rooted in *dishonour* stood. And *faith unfaithful* kept him *falsely true*.
11. Mohan is *regularly irregular*.
12. She is my *sweetest enemy*.
13. He is an *innocent criminal*.
14. Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all.

6. Hyperbole

It is a figure of speech of exaggeration or over statement in order to lay high emphasis on the statement. In hyperbole, things are represented as greater or less, better or worse than they really are.

Examples—

1. She wept an *ocean of tears*.
2. *Rivers of blood* flowed in the battlefield.
3. *Ten thousand* saw I at a glance.
4. *All the perfumes* of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.
5. Belinda smiled and *all the world* was gay.
6. They build the nation's pillars.
And *lift them to the sky*.
7. And out of joy 'His heart' jumped *miles high*.

7. Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia is the employment of words that initiate or suggest the sound or echo the sense. Here, sound effect is the most important factor. The words, by their very sound, suggest the sense or the meaning of those words.

Examples—

1. A *murmuring whisper* through the nunnery ran.
2. I heard the water *lapping* on the crag.
And the long *ripples* washing through the reeds.
3. I *Chatter, Chatter* as I flow.
To join the brimming river.
4. Swords *clanged* and guns *boomed*.
5. The door opened with a *bang*.
6. I *babble* on the pebbles.
7. The snakes are *hissing* and the bees are *buzzing*.
8. The beauty born of *murmuring sound* shall pass into her face.



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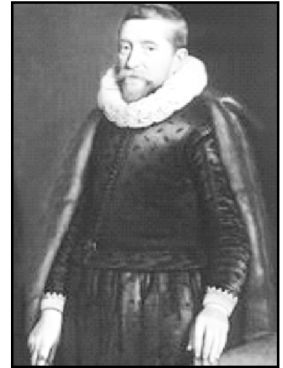
CHAPTER

Character of A Happy Life

Sir Henry Wotton (1568-1639)

➡ About the Poet

Sir Henry Wotton, a famous scholar and critic of the seventeenth century, was born in 1568. He was educated at Winchester and entered the Middle Temple to qualify for practising at the bar. He was not only a poet but also a diplomat. So he was made agent and secretary to the Earl of Essex. He was ambassador at the Court of Venice. He was also employed on various other diplomatic missions from 1604 to 1624. John Donne and Jayaac Walton, famous writers of the time, were his notable friends. His famous writings are '*Character of a Happy Life*', '*On His Mistress*', '*The Queen of Bohemia*' and '*You Meaner Beauties of the Night*'.



➡ About the Poem

According to Sir Henry Wotton, the Life of a truly happy man is marked by true freedom of thought, righteousness, honesty, truth, simplicity, faith, carefreeness and self contentment. He is always free from jealousy, ill-will and worldly anxieties. He prays to God daily. He envies none. He passes his time in the company of a good book or a good friend. He is the Lord of himself and master of all, he surveys. He may be poor but morally he is always great.



*How happy is he born or taught,
That serveth not another's will;
Whose armour is his honest thought,
And simple truth, his utmost skill!*

*Whose passions not his masters are,
Whose soul is still prepared for death;
Untied unto the world with care,
Of princely love or vulgar breath;*

*Who hath his life from rumours freed,
Whose conscience is his strong retreat;
Whose state can neither flatterers feed,
Nor ruin make oppressors great;
Who envies none whom chance doth raise,
Nor vice; who never understood;
How deepest wounds are given with praise,
Nor rules of state, but rules of good;*

*Who God doth late and early pray,
More of his grace than gifts to lend;
Who entertains the harmless day,
With a well-chosen book or friend;*

*This man is free from servile bands,
Of hope to rise, or fear to fall;
Lord of himself, though not of lands,
And having nothing, he hath all.*

—Sir Henry Wotton

➡ Appreciation of the Poem

'Character of a Happy Life' is a didactic poem intended to teach us something. It is composed by Sir Henry Wotton who inspires us into righteousness, honesty, simplicity, faith and carefreeness. The poem shows us the path of true happiness. There is smooth flow from beginning to the end. It is divided in six stanzas having the rhyme scheme ab, ab, cd, cd, ef, ef, gh, gh. The poem is completely easy to memorise. We find fine example of oxymoron in the line—"And having nothing, he hath all."

||Glossary||

Serveth	: serves (सेवा करता है)
will	: desire (इच्छा)
armour	: defensive covering, usually metal for the body (protection) (सुरक्षा कवच)
simple truth	: pure truth (पूर्ण सत्य)
utmost skill	: great quality (महान योग्यता)
whose armour is his	: honesty is the only weapon with which the honest thought protects himself (ईमानदारी वह अकेला हथियार है जिससे ईमानदार विचार अपनी रक्षा करता है)
passions	: strong feelings or desires (मनोवेग)

whose passions not his	:	The person who is not led away by his strong emotions or desires (व्यक्ति जो अपनी सुदृढ़ भावनाओं और इच्छाओं से परे नहीं है)
whose soul is still	:	The person who is not afraid of death, prepared for death (मृत्यु के भय से रहित व्यक्ति)
untied unto—vulgar	:	a truly happy man does not aspire for the breath love of a prince nor does he care for the criticism of mean or low persons
rumours	:	gossip or baseless news (अफवाह, आधारहीन समाचार)
conscience	:	inner voice (आत्मा की आवाज)
retreat	:	shelter, refuge (शरण स्थली)
state	:	condition in which somebody is (in appearance, mind, health etc.) (एक व्यक्ति की स्थिति—अस्तित्व, मस्तिष्क, स्वास्थ्य आदि के सन्दर्भ में)
flatterers	:	people who praise too much (अत्यधिक प्रशंसा करना)
ruin	:	destruction (विनाश, बर्बादी)
oppressors	:	cruel persons who try to keep down others (दूसरों को नीचा दिखाने वाला क्रूर व्यक्ति)
envies	:	feels ill-will or grudge at other's better fortunes (ईर्ष्यालु)
vice	:	evil conduct, immortality (पाप कर्म)
who envies—nor vice	:	a happy man does not have a feeling of heart burning at the lot of those persons who have risen to eminence by sheer chance and not by their merit or work. Nor does he envy those who have achieved distinction in life by adopting unfair means
How deepest wounds — with praise	:	The world is full of deceitful people who stab you in the back although in your face, they might praise you sky high. But the happy man is not of that kind. He never praises anybody nor does he want to be praised either. He calls a spade to spade
nor rules—of good	:	The happy man does not care for the rules framed by the Government if they are not in the interest of the people. He observes only those rules that are based on goodness and righteousness and promote the well-being of mankind.
late and early	:	at every time (हर समय)
grace	:	mercy, divine influence (दया, दैवी प्रभाव)
to lend	:	to grant, to bestow (अनुदान या ऋण लेना)
gifts	:	blessings (आशीर्वाद)
entertains	:	welcomes (मनोरंजन, स्वागत)

well chosen	:	useful (उपयोगी)
servile bands	:	conditions which make man act like a slave (वह परिस्थिति जिसमें व्यक्ति गुलामों की तरह कार्य करता है)
of hope to rise or	:	in the hope of progress (विकास की आशा में)
fear to fall	:	fear of failure (असफलता का भय)
lords of himself — not of lands	:	The happy man may not possess an estate but is essentially the lord of himself because he has self-control and is ever satisfied with his lot
And having — hath all	:	Although the happy man may have no material possessions yet he has all the worldly riches for he achieves real happiness

||Exercise||

➡ Answer the following questions :

1. Name the figure of speech used in the lines given below:
Lord of himself, though not of lands.
And having nothing, he hath all.
2. Explain the meanings of, 'Whose armour is his honest thought'.
3. Give the central idea of the poem 'Character Of A Happy Life'.

➡ Explain the following lines with reference to the context :

1. How happy utmost skill!
2. Nor ruin of good.
3. This man hath all.
4. Who hath his life oppressors great.
5. Whose passions vulgar breath.

