AGE OF JOHNSON

Dr Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

- He is the greatest prose writer of this age.
- He lived most of his life in poverty and sickness.
- He had a melancholic disposition.
- Dr Johnson published essays in ‘The Rambler’ and ‘The Idler’
  - In 1750 he started the periodical ‘The Rambler’.
  - In 1756 he founded ‘The Idler’ which ran for 103 numbers.
  - He also founded a periodical named ‘The Adventurer’.
- One of his greatest pupils was David Garrick.
- One of his earlier poems titled “London” was written in imitation of Juvenal.
- A Dictionary of the English Language was completed and published in 1755.
- The most important critical work of Dr Johnson is Preface to Shakespeare.
- In the evenings of a single week he composed the romance of Rasselas, an Abyssinian Prince.
- He wrote speeches for both Whigs and Tories.
- In 1764 Johnson organised the famous Literary Club which included well known figures of the day like his student David Garrick, Goldsmith, Joshua Reynolds, Burke and others.
  - They met regularly at Turk’s Head Tavern.
- He wrote a tragedy titled Irene
- His important works are
  - The Vanity of Human Wishes.
    - It is a poem written in imitation of Juvenal.
The poem examines Wolsey Buckingham and Clarendon.
- The poem also refers to Swift.
  - *Rasselas*.
  - *The Lives of the Poets*.
    - This is a series of Biographies published between 1779 and 1781.
    - He sketches the life of 52 poets.
    - The sketches begin with the *Life of Cowley*.

**Edward Gibbon (1737-94)**

- He is chiefly known for his work on Roman history titled *The Decline and the Fall of Roman Empire* (1776-83).
  - It is a work in six volumes.
  - He examines the greatness of Rome.
  - Another prose work of any significance is his *Autobiography*.

**Edmund Burke (1729-97)**

- He is chiefly remembered in history for the famous impeachment speech that he gave against Warren Hastings in 1786.
- In his writings about India, he observed that India had a great civilization but it had degenerated and stagnated.
  - He was one of the earliest to introduce the idea of the Native Effeminacy.
- He criticised Hastings for exploiting the Indians.
- He also wrote two small treatises.
  - *A Vindication Of Natural Society*
  - *Philosophical enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and the beautiful*.
- Some of his pamphlets were
- *Observations on the Present State of Nation* (1769)
- *Thoughts on the Present Discontents.*

- Other important works are
  - *Reflections on the French Revolution* (1790)
  - *A letter to a Noble Lord* (1790)
  - *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791)
  - *Thoughts on French Affairs*
  - *Letters on a Regicide Peace.*

- His style was conditioned by oratory.

**James Boswell (1740-1795)**

- He was a Scotchman.
- He is chiefly remembered as the author of Johnson’s biography, *Life of Dr Johnson* (1791)
  - This is a detailed record of Johnson’s eccentricities, prejudices, genius etc.
  - Boswell met Johnson in 1763 at a bookseller’s shop.
  - Boswell kept record of Johnson’s life for 20 years.
- He also wrote a popular work titled *Account of Corsica* (1768)
- Boswell himself is known for his vanity, self consciousness, sexual promiscuity, narcissism and drinking habits.
- Another work of significance is his *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides.*
- Boswell may well be remembered as a diarist.

**Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774)**

- In his early life he was known for his wildness and stupidity.
- He was a medical student.
- He was a friend of Dr Johnson
- He was a member of the famous ‘Literary Club’
Goldsmith had criticised Garrick.
Garrick rejects his plays.
Garrick says that Goldsmith “wrote like an angel even though he talked like poor Poll”
He reacted against sentimental comedy.
His long poem “The Traveller” is dedicated to his brother,
In the essay *A Comparison Between Laughing and Sentimental Comedy* Goldsmith treats distress as a source of entertainment.
Important works of Goldsmith are
  - *The Vicar of Wakefield*(1766)
    - It is a good example of sentimental novel.
    - It portrays rural England.
    - It deals with the story of Dr Primrose and the love affairs of his daughters Olivia and Sophia.
    - George Primrose’s continental wanderings are inspired by Goldsmith’s own travels of Europe.
    - Dr Primrose stands for his father.
    - Moses in the *Vicar of Wakefield*, young Honey Wood in the *Good Natured Man* and Tony Lumpkin in *She Stoops to Conquer* are his own autobiographical sketches.
  - He worked as an assistant to Richardson.
  - The novel includes the famous poem “When Lovely Woman Stoops to Folly”.
  - *The Deserted Village*(1770)
  - *She Stoops to Conquer*(1773)
    - Its central character Marlow is uncomfortable with women of his own class.
    - The woman who stoops to conquer Marlow is Miss Kate Hardcastle.
- *The Bee* (1759)
  - It is a serial miscellany.
  - It ran for eight weekly numbers.
- *An History of the Earth and Animated nature* (1774)
  - It is an eight volume work.
- *Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe* (1759)
  - In this work he mourns the demise of arts and culture in general.
- *The Citizen of the World* (1760-61)
  - *The Chinese Letters* which he contributed to the public ledger were published together in 1762 as *The Citizen of the World*
  - It is written by a Chinaman visiting England.
- *Good Natured Man* (1768)
  - It is a sentimental comedy

**David Hume (1711-76)**

- Primarily a philosopher
- His important works are
  - *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748)
  - *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751)
- Hume is known for his concept of the ‘association of ideas’.

**Gothic Fiction**

- Gothicism was a form of architecture that flourished between the 12th and 16th centuries in parts of Europe.
- These novels exploited superstition and romance.
- It is also called ‘novel of terror’.
- These novels revived the interest in the middle ages.
Horace Walpole (1717-97)

- Walpole was a friend of Gray and Mrs. Anne Radcliff.
- Walpole had turned his small house or villakin into a gothic castle.
- The term gothic refers to architecture.
- His important novel is *The Castle of Otranto* (1765).
  - It is subtitled ‘A Gothic Story: Translated by William Marshal Gent, from the Original Italian of Onuphrio Muralto’
  - It refers to the events of 12th and 13th century.
  - Walpole says that he attempted to “blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern”
  - The novel was meant to be a satire.
  - The story describes the manners of feudal period.
  - The novel combines murders, mysterious passages, secret rooms, moving statues, speaking portraits etc.
  - It was inspired by a dream of a gigantic hand in armour.
  - It is said that Gray was frightened after reading it.
  - Byron called it ‘The first romance in the language’
  - Walter Scott also appreciated this work.

William Beckford (1760-1844)

- His important gothic novel is *The History of the Caliph Vathek* (1784)
  - Vathek has oriental setting.
  - Its story resembles a few of the stories in Arabian nights.
  - The book was originally written in French during Beckford’s continental travels.
  - The English translation was published in 1784.
Anne Radcliff (1764-1823)

- She published five novels of mystery and terror
- Her important novel is *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794)
  - Montoni is the villain in *Udolpho*.
  - It is set in late 16th century France and Italy.
- Some say that Anne Radcliff became insane writing these novels.
- Her male characters are an early representation of Byronic heroes.
- Jane Austen makes fun of Anne Radcliffe’s novel in *Northanger Abbey*.

Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775-1880)

- Lewis was strongly impressed by German romanticism.
- He had met Goethe.
- He had translated Schillers’ *Kabale and Liebe* into English.
- His most important work is *Ambrosio* or *The Monk* (1795)
  - It combined both Radcliffian properties and German terror material.
- He wrote a musical drama titled *The Castle Spectre*.
- He wrote an opera entitles *Adel Morn the Outlaw*.
- His novel *The Bravo of Venice* (1804) was based on German Romantic writer Zschokke’s work *Abellino*.

Clara Reeve

- She wrote a gothic novel titled *Old English Baron*.
  - It is described as a gothic story
  - The initial title of the novel was ‘The Champion of Virtue’.
- She attempted to write less violent novels.
Charles Robert Maturin (1782-1824)

- His important gothic novels are *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) and *the Fatal Revenge* (1807)

Other important gothic writers are Charlotte Smith (She wrote *Emmeline or the Orphan of the Castle* (1788)) and Sophia Lee (She wrote *The Recess*)

**GRAVEYARD POETS**

- The most important graveyard poets are Thomas Gray, Thomas Parnell, Edward Young and Robert Blair.
- Gloom, despair and pessimistic thought are the important features of these poems.
- Death is frequently referred to in these poems.
- Grave is a recurring image in these poems.

**Thomas Gray (1716-71)**

- He was a man of poor health.
- He was a recluse.
- One of his earliest poems is “The Alliance of Education and Government”.
  - It is written in closed couplets.
- His first important poem is the ode titled “On Distant Prospect of Eton College” (1742)
- He is chiefly remembered for his *Elegy Written in A country Churchyard* (1751)
  - It is well appreciated by Dr Johnson.
- His other poems of any significance of the earlier period are
  - “Ode to Spring”
  - “On the Death of a Favourite Cat”.
“On the Death of a Favourite Cat” is written in the tradition of mock heroic.

- As he grew older his poems became more romantic.
- The two great odes that he wrote are “A progress of Poesy” and “The Bard”
  - “The Bard” follows the style of old Celtic poetry.
  - The poem is a prophesy addressed by a Welsh Bard to Edward I.
- His poem the ‘Fatal Sisters’ and ‘The Descent of Odin’ are written against Celtic themes.
  - “Fatal Sisters” follows Norse style.
  - Dr Johnson ironically calls the poem ‘Fatal Sisters’, “the wonderful wonder of wonders”
- He wrote poems with rustic settings and ordinary life.
- Gray’s work also included a medieval fable, *The Bard*
- He composed poems on Celtic myth.
- He translated some Norse poems.
- He wrote Pindaric odes.
- He combined a highly stylised diction with intense passion.
- “Hymn to Adversity” is a poem where he indulges in moralising.
- Dr Johnson refers to Gray as a poet who is “tall by walking on tip toe”.
- Wordsworth objected to Gray’s sonnet “Sonnet on the Death of Mr Richard West” for the artificiality of diction.
- He was a friend of Horace Walpole.
- He declined Poet Laureateship in 1757.

**Thomas Parnell (1679-1718)**
He is chiefly known for his poem “Night-Piece on Death” written in 1721

**Edward Young (1683-1765)**

- He is remembered for his epic poem “Night Thoughts” written in 1742.

**Robert Blair (1699-1746)**

- He was a Scottish writer.
- Retains his fame as a graveyard poet chiefly because of his poem “The Grave”.

**TRANSITIONAL POETS**

- William Collins, William Cowper, William Blake and Thomas Gray are the important transitional poets.

**William Collins (1721-1759)**

- He is primarily remembered for his odes.
- “On the Passions” echoes Dryden and Pope.
- His other important poems are “To Evening” “Ode to Simplicity” “On the Death of Thomson”.
- He had great admiration for Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton
- He studied Greek drama.
- His earliest published work is “Persian Eclogues”
  - The poem has Persian names and settings
- His *Odes On Several Descriptive And Allegorical Subjects* were planned to be part of a joined venture with Joseph Warton.
  - But this collection appeared separately.
- “His Ode to Pity” celebrates Euripides
- His “Ode To Fear” pays tribute to Aeschylus and Sophocles
His “Ode on the Poetical Character” is the most complex of his odes.
His “Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland” is incomplete and was published after his death.
His poem “Song from Shakespeare’s Cymbeline” shows his interest in the older poets.

**William Cowper (1731-1800)**

- He led a secluded life
- He was interested in gardening, reading, and writing.
- His poem “Table Talk” was written in couplets.
  - In this poem he refers to the artistic talent of Pope.
- “The task” is a long poem in four books
  - The poem presents pictures of country scenes.
- The influence of ballad form could be found in his poem “The Diverting History of John Gilpin”.
- His best poem “The Castaway” describes a sailor washed overboard and left alone in the ocean.
  - He swims for an hour and drowns
  - The last lines of this poem are quoted by Mr Ramsay in Virginia Woolf’s *To The Light house*.
- His satires are modelled on the works of Pope.
- His most quoted line is “god made the country and man made the town”
- There is sympathetic treatment of nature in Cowper’s poems.

**William Blake (1757-1827)**

- He is known as the visionary poet
  - As a child he used to get visions
  - He was well read in mysticism and occult philosophy.
Blake was a printer and an engraver.
- His poems are chiefly remembered for their visual impact.
- He is known for the symbolism in his poetry.
- He believed that Satan was the hero of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.
- *In the Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, he argues that god is both good and evil.
  - He says without contraries are no progression in the Marriage of Heaven and Hell.
  - Hell for Blake was a symbol of liberty and spontaneity.

His poetry combines contraries
- He anticipates Romantic poetry in his *Songs of Innocence and Experience*.
- *The Songs of Innocence* (1789) portrays the world of children, sheep, and lambs which are symbols of innocence.
- *The Songs of Experience* (1794) deals with the corruption of innocence.
  - In these poems Blake expresses his hatred of authority—parents, teachers, and priests.
- Blake depicts the world in terms of conflict between
  - Nature and Culture
  - Corruption and innocence
  - Imagination and rationality
- He was critical of Industrialisation.
- The poem “The Sick Rose” describes the corruption of beauty and innocence.
- His prophetic books are *America* (1793), *Europe* (1794) and *Jerusalem*. They deal with liberty.
The songs of Los (1795) deals with the loss of imagination which is replaced by religion and rationality.

He published three volumes of verse titled Poetical Sketches in 1783.

His familiarity with Bible is obvious in his works.

He was influenced by the Swedish visionary and religious thinker Emanuel Swedenborg.

Blake’s earlier poems were influenced by Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton and Chatterton.

The French Revolution (1791) deals with his response to the French Revolution.

Blake comments “to generalise is to be an idiot. To particularise is the alone distinction of merit.”

OTHER POETS

John Gilpin

He is known for his treatise Three Essays : On picturesque beauty ; on picturesque travel ; and on sketching landscape.(1792)

The picturesque according to Gilpin was a landscape improved by human beings.

The picturesque was an important quality of the romantic writing.

Robert Burns (1759-96)

He is hailed as the National Poet of Scotland.

He was a peasant’s son.

His interest in Ballad was kindled by a member of the household named Betty Davidson.

Robert Burns is also known as Rabbie Burns.

Burns collected folk songs from across Scotland.
“A Red, Red Rose”; “A Man's A Man for A' That”; “To a Louse”; “To a Mouse”; “The Battle of Sherramuir”; “Tam o' Shanter”, and “Ae Fond Kiss” are the most celebrated poems of Burns.

He dedicated the poems “The Highland Lassie O”, “Highland Mary” and “To Mary in Heaven” to his lady love Mary Campbell.

Burns’ plan of elopement with Mary Campbell to Jamaica is referred to in his song “Will ye go to the Indies, my Mary, and leave auld Scotia's shore?”.

Burns wrote many of the poems included in his first book, titled *Poems*, in the Scottish Dialect.

Robert Burns died from heart disease at the age of thirty-seven. On the day of his death, his wife Jean Armour gave birth to his last son.

Most of Burns' poems were written in Scots.

- They document and celebrate traditional Scottish culture, expressions of farm life, and class and religious distinctions.

"Handsome Nell", is a poem about his first love for a girl called Nellie.

Burns' work reflect the story of an ordinary Scotsman, his background, his encounters, his observations & thoughts.

His poem “Tam O'Shanter” which means "Tom from the village of Shanter" is considered his great folklore masterpiece.

- It is a chilling & fantastic story in which Burns describes his friend Tam O' Shanter,

One of his most famous lines is “A Man's a man for a' that” meaning A man is a man for all that

- O' My Luve is like a red, red rose is surely the most famous love poem of Burns

**Thomas Percy (1729-1811)**
He began his career with the translation of a Chinese novel.
He had a taste for the old.
Percy published a collection of Ballads titled *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*.
  - The collection included ballads and political songs.

**Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770)**

- He was influenced by Medieval myths and legends
- Chatterton claimed that he discovered a medieval poet named Thomas Rowley.
- Horace Walpole and Thomas Warton criticised Chatterton for attempting forgeries.
- He is chiefly known for his poem “An Excelent Balade of Charitie”.
- Wordsworth describes Chatterton as
  “The marvellous boy
  The sleepless soul that perished in his pride”
- Coleridge wrote a poem about him titled “Monody on the Death of Chatterton”.

**SENTIMENTAL COMEDY**