



## 1000 YEARS OF ENGLISH POETRY - A BIRD'S EYE VIEW (FROM SOCIAL-PEDIA TO SOCIAL MEDIA)

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'When you set out for Ithaca,

Pray that your road is a long one

Full of adventure, full of discovery' - C. P. Cavafy

When we start our journey on the endless road of Time line at some place the vague memories start becoming clear and from that point of time, periods of History bear specific names and fames to let us simplify and memorize the passing villages, towns, cities and of course, people.

Literary critics in their varied views classified differently the saga of English Literature, but the accepted one with mild deviations gives us the whole story in a nut-shell.

1. From the Roman Conquest to Geoffrey Chaucer (1066= 1400)
2. From Chaucer to Edmund Spenser ( 1400- 1599)
3. The Age of Shakespeare (1564- 1616 )
4. The Age of Milton ( 1608- 1674)
5. From the Restoration of Monarchy to the Death of Pope (1660- 1744)
6. From the death of Pope to the French Revolution ( 1744- 1789)
7. From the French Revolution to the Death of Scott (1789- 1832)
8. From The Death of Scott to the Present Time (1832-

**The Literary periods also can be classified into –**

1. Renaissance Time Literature
2. The Enlightenment
3. Romanticism
4. Transcendentalism
5. Victorian times Literature
6. Realism
7. Naturalism
8. Modernism
9. Bloomsbury Group
10. Existentialism
11. Beat generation
12. Spoken Poetry

To this list we can add Social Media Poetry of present times.



### FROM ORAL TRADITION TO GREEK EPICS

In the 4th and 5th centuries, Europe does not exist. Whole civilization is centered on the Mediterranean, politically on Rome and Constantinople, economically on North Africa, Egypt, and the Bosphorus. Christianity, its art and philosophy came from the Eastern Mediterranean; its language became predominantly Greek. Greece's poetic movement was part of the greatest cultural and intellectual community in world history. Poets were often dramatists who wrote for choirs, or courtly muses who entertained regional kings. Hundreds of dramas were performed, each of them featuring exquisite lyric poetry within its three-act structure. The Greeks developed nearly all of the classic forms that formed the underpinnings of later literature, drama, music and poetry, including the ode, epic, lyric, tragedy, and comedy. The famous Greek poets were Homer, Hesiod, Sappho, Pindar, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Anacreon, and Euripides. Ancient Greek poets were also unique because they were the first large group to commit their poetry to writing; prior civilizations preferred the oral tradition, though some written poems date back to the 25th century B.C. Ancient Greece's cultural explosion ended when it was conquered first by Alexander the Great and then by Rome. The Romans borrowed from Greek works to develop their own dramatic, literary, and poetic movements. As Greek works became disseminated through the Western world, they created the basis for modern literature.

### PROVENÇAL LITERATURE AND TROUBADOURS

The popes of the Holy Roman Empire – the purveyors of the Middle Ages – like dark clouds clamped down and extinguished creative and artistic expression and created Dark Ages...

By the time 13th century dawned, Rome was the ecclesiastical centre, Italian conquest was one of the recurrent themes and lures attracting European monarchs.- German, Spanish, French or English. Western European coast-line had become the centre of trade and industry. It was northern Europe that gave birth to feudal institutions, to chivalry, and to much of the enrichment of the religious life of the Middle Ages. Vikings, Danes, Normans, Germans, and French Gauls all looked towards Britain and especially

Danes took their new language with them to England where they effectively eliminated Old English.

As there is unsettlement of one language as common language and still the progress is in liquid stage, great literature to emerge took some time. Vernacular literature predicts a settled, reasonably sophisticated language and poets chose to write in Latin, which gained the status of a sacred language. Latin- Romana lingua- gave lyrics, and the first medieval romance, Ruodlieb. The love poems of troubadours, Petrarch love poetry- sonnets, Spanish literature interpenetrated by Arabic and Hebraic culture (Moors Invasion), the emergence of Germanic vernaculars, the Galician poetry, the Icelandic poetic Edda successfully reached Central Europe, and England with invading tribes and troops.

In Britain, after the Roman legions withdrew, while the Celtic tribes fought amongst themselves, Angles and Saxons from Schleswig-Holstein, just to the South of Denmark, in the fifth century successfully invaded the island and either subjugated the Celts or drove them into Western parts. As Celts and Teutonic people possessed 'oral literature' that is quiet independent of Latin, the contact of various tribes brought the inclusion of words from one language to another.

The earliest English records are in seventh-to-tenth century manuscripts, about 30,000 lines Old English verse remain to us. The verse line of four stresses of which three begin with the same letter (alliterating), with incisure or pause, owes nothing to Latin. These lines don't rhyme. Old English was an independent literature which eagerly borrowed from Latin. The first Englishman of letters was Aldhelm- (second half of 7th century).

However, as the 11th century reached its midpoint, a group of troubadour musicians in southern France began to sing and write striking lyrics. They were influenced by the Arabic civilization and its leading denizens, Omar Khayyam and Rumi, inspired by Latin and Greek poets, and guided by Christian precepts. With a gift for rhythm, meter, and form, the musicians and poets created a masterful style by the 13th century.

These court singer-poets, Troubadours) among them William X, Duke of Aquitaine, Eleanor, King Richard I of England, practiced the art, but its



undisputed masters were Bertrand de Born, Arnaud Daniel, Guillaume de Machant, Christine di Pisan, Marie de France . They influenced poets like Dante, Petrarch and Chaucer. Forms like the sestina, rondeau, triolet, canso, and ballata originated with the Provençal poets.

The Inquisition doomed the Provençal movement in the 13th century, though a few poets continued to produce into the mid-14th century. Most troubadours fled to Spain and Italy, where two new movements flourished – including the Sicilian School.

### THE INFLUENCE OF SICILY

In the twelfth century, Sicily integrated three distinct languages and cultural influences: Arabic, Byzantine Greek, and Latin. When Sicilian poets interacted with the Provençal troubadours, they found the perfect verse form for their utterances of the heart: lyric poetry.

Beginning with Cielo of Alcamo, the court poets developed a series of lyrical styles that used standard vernacular to make art of poetry. They were aided by Frederick II, who required poets to stick to one subject: courtly love. Between 1230 and 1266, court poets wrote hundreds of love poems. They worked with a beautiful derivative of canso, the canzone, which became the most popular verse form until Giacomo de Lentini further developed it into the sonnet. Besides writing sonnets, de Lentini continuously invented new words in what became a new language – Italian. Among the best-known poets were de Lentini, Pier delle Vigne, Renaldo d'Aquino, Giacomo Pugliese, Mazzeo Ricco. The Sicilian poets wrote poetry to be read, rather than accompanied by music, and created the 14-line sonnet structure, broken into an octet and sestet, which stands to this day. As the 14th century dawned, the Sicilian poets' canzones, balladas and sonnets came to the attention of Dante and Petrarch, who spread them throughout Bologna, Florence, and other emerging literary centers.

In Anglo- Saxon literature we have Beowulf, Caedmon, Seafarer, The Dream of the Rood. Alfred, king of the West Saxons wrote preface to Pope Gregory's 'Pastoral Care' in prosaic language. Aelfric, Wulfstan, Cynewulf paved the way with their writings and chronicles. After the Norman conquest of 1066

Old English religious literature continued to be copied but English was neglected as the language of high culture. By 14th century it slowly recovered and equaled any language written in the medieval Europe. ( Medieval Literature- Edited by Boris Ford-New Pelican guide)

English literature has sometimes been stigmatized as insular. Yet in the Middle Ages the Old English literature of the subjugated Saxons was leavened by the Latin and Anglo-Norman writings, eminently foreign in origin, in which the churchmen and the Norman conquerors expressed themselves. From this combination emerged a flexible and subtle linguistic instrument exploited by Geoffrey Chaucer and brought to supreme application by William Shakespeare.

### ELIZABETHAN ERA (SHAKESPEARE)

Through Sir Thomas Wyatt, by the time the Italian Renaissance waned, its greatest poetic exports—the ballad and the sonnet—found their way to England. He introduced the forms to a countryside attuned to lyrical and narrative poetry by the great Geoffrey Chaucer, whose experiences with latter Provençal poets influenced the style credited with modernizing English literature.

Sonnets swept through late 16th and early 17th century England, primarily through the works of Wyatt, Sir Philip Sydney, Edmund Spenser, and William Shakespeare. Spenser and Shakespeare took the Petrarchan form that Wyatt introduced to the literary landscape and added their individual touches, forming the three principal sonnet styles: Petrarchan, Spenserian, and Shakespearean.

### AFTER ELIZABETHAN ERA- THE EMERGENCE OF METAPHYSICAL POETRY

In many ways, the Elizabethan era more closely resembled the expressionism of the Ancient Greeks than the Sicilian and Italian Renaissance schools from which it derived its base poetry. . In the theater, their verse often preceded Shakespeare and Marlowe dramas – a practice followed nearly four centuries later by many of San Francisco's 1960s rock musicians, who preceded their concerts with readings from Beat poets.

A century after the height of the Elizabethan era, beginning with John Dryden, the metaphysical movement was a loosely woven string of poetic



works that continued through the often-bellucose 18th century, and concluded when William Blake bridged the gap between metaphysical and romantic poetry. The poets sought to minimize their place within the poem and to look beyond the obvious – a style that greatly informed American transcendentalism and the Romantics who followed. Among the greatest adherents were Samuel Cowley, John Donne, George Herbert, Andrew Marvell, Abraham Cowley, Henry Vaughan, George Chapman, Edward Herbert, and Katherine Philips.

### ROMANTICISM

The Romantic period, or Romanticism, is regarded as one of the greatest and most illustrious movements in literary history, which is all the more amazing considering that it primarily consisted of just seven poets and lasted approximately 25 years – from William Blake's rise in the late 1790s to Lord Byron's death in 1824.

The core group included Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelly and Keats. While history did not treat Robert Southey so kindly, Byron considered him a key member of the movement. Keats, who wrote "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode to a Grecian Urn," only lived to the age of 26. Shelley died at 30, while Byron succumbed at 36. The romantics' message was clear: life is centered in the heart, and the relationships we build with nature and others through our hearts defines our lives. They planted the seeds for free verse, transcendentalism, the Beat movement, and countless other artistic, musical, and poetic expressions. The Romantic movement would have likely extended further into the 19th century, but the premature deaths of the younger poets, followed in 1832 by the death of their elderly German admirer, Goethe, brought the period to an end.

### TRANSCENDENTALISM (1836- 1860)

On September 8, 1836, a group of prominent New England intellectuals led by poet-philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson met at the Transcendental Club in Boston. They gathered to discuss Emerson's essay, "Nature" and developed "The American Soul," which stated, "We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds ... A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself

inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men."

The Transcendentalists grew from that mission statement, which was inspired by Emerson's love of Hinduism, Swedenbourg's mystical Christianity, and Immanuel Kant's transcendental philosophy. They created a shadow society that espoused utopian values, spiritual exploration, and full development of the arts. The important transcendentalists are Emerson, Alcott, Louisa Alcott, Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Brownson, Channing, Sophia Peabody, Nathaniel Hawthorne.

The Decadents of the late 19th century and the Modernists of the early 20th looked to continental European individuals and movements for inspiration. Nor was attraction toward European intellectualism dead in the late 20th century, for by the mid-1980s the approach known as structuralism, a phenomenon predominantly French and German in origin, infused the very study of English literature itself in a host of published critical studies and university departments. Additional influence was exercised by deconstructionist analysis, based largely on the work of French philosopher Jacques Derrida. (Reginald P C Mutter et al)

Further, Britain's past imperial activities around the globe continued to inspire literature—in some cases wistful, in other cases hostile. Finally, English literature has enjoyed a certain diffusion abroad, not only in predominantly English-speaking countries but also in all those others where English is the first choice of study as a second language. Some of English literature's most distinguished practitioners in the 20th century—from Joseph Conrad at its beginning to V.S. Naipaul and Tom Stoppard at its end—were born outside the British Isles.

Throughout history, there have been hundreds of major and minor poetic movements and communities. Major community-based movements – such as the Ancient Greek poetry schools, Provencal literature, Sicilian court poets, Elizabethan and Romantic poets, American Transcendentalists, Paris expatriate (Surrealist), and Beat poets – changed the course of poetry during and after their respective eras.

**THE BEAT MOVEMENT (1948- 1963)**

The Beat movement has a common thread: a desire to live life, a handful of New York and San Francisco students and young intellectuals resulted in the most influential movement of the past 100 years. The mixture of academia, be-bop jazz, the liberating free verse of William Carlos Williams, and the influence of budding author Jack Kerouac (who coined the term "Beat Generation" in 1948 at a meeting with Allen Ginsberg, Herbert Huncke, and William S. Burroughs) inspired a young Ginsberg to change everything he'd learned about poetry. He wrote throughout the early 1950s in a narrative free verse, joined by the young Gregory Corso and Peter Orlovsky, and the older Burroughs, who, like Kerouac, opted for fiction – though Kerouac wrote beautiful poetry that has been read and appreciated over the past two decades. On October 9, 1955, a group of Beat poets from both coasts gathered for what became the 20th century's most famous single reading – but it was Ginsberg's reading of Howl that left his peers gasping in amazement and that ignited a subculture.

By the time of the Six Gallery reading, San Francisco was host to a burgeoning Beat community that included poets Gary Snyder, Michael McClure, Philip LaMantia, and three older influences: Kenneth Rexroth, Lew Welch, and Philip Whalen. In 1947, Rexroth launched the San Francisco Renaissance, a loose poetic movement including he, Whalen, Kenneth Patchen, and William Everson. It directly fed the San Francisco Beats, as did the Black Mountain Poets that included Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov. Another major contributor was former New York poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who owned and operated City Lights bookstore, which in the 1950s sold books that were banned by the U.S. Justice Department. He published Howl, thus creating a legacy as the greatest publisher and distributor of Beat literature.

In the past 50 years in the U.S., poetry has been fed by the Beats (Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Michael McClure, Anne Waldman), San Francisco Renaissance (Kenneth Rexroth, Robert Duncan, Madeline Gleason), Confessionalists (Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Robert Lowell), New York School (Ed Sanders), Black Mountain Poets (Mary Caroline

Richards), and L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E avant garde poets (Bob Perelman, Rae Armantrout). All responded or reacted to the three major movements of the first half of the 20th century: Imagism (Ezra Pound, h.d.), Objectivism (Lorine Niedecker, Charles Reznikoff) and the American contribution to France's Surrealism (Marianne Moore). This pattern has permeated the wide-rooted, long-branched family tree of community-based poetry.

**THE SPOKEN WORD**

The performance-based poetry phenomenon is the Spoken Word now. It grew at least partly from the Harlem Renaissance in the early twentieth century, with the working-class black history poetry of Langston Hughes being a clear precursor; and in music, Gil Scott-Heron's 1970 poem, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, from the album *Small Talk at 125th and Lenox*, grabbed everybody's attention. Today, slam poetry nights are ten-a-penny; prose writers perform at international Literary Death Matches; and music festivals have Spoken Word stages. Gone are the days of garret-dwelling solitary writers; and, more significantly for the world at large, literature has become accessible.

**SOCIAL MEDIA- THE RESURGENCE OF POETRY;-**

-'Being limited to strict formats did wonders for the sonnet and haiku. One wonders where this highly impractical word limit will lead as the future unfolds.'

-Paul JJ Payack, President of The Global Language Monitor.

With the mushrooming of social media- Facebook, Twitter, tumblr, Blog brought a new generation of poets to come closer.. At the very least, these forms of ultra minimalist narrative didn't emerge until after social media was on the scene. Literature too seems studded with ultra minimalism. Wallace Stevens wrote in "*Le Monocle de Mon Oncle*," "There is... nothing like the clashed edges of two words"...

-'If we are fortunate, if the gods and muses are smiling, about every generation someone comes along to inspire the imagination for the journey each of us takes.'

- Bill Moyers.

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