

Old English (450-1066)



- Few surviving texts with little in common.
- Language closer to modern German than modern English.
- Frequently reflect non-English influence.
- *Beowulf*, “The Wanderer”

Middle English (1066-1500)



- Works frequently of a religiously didactic content.
- Written for performance at court or for festivals.
- Geoffrey Chaucer (*The Canterbury Tales*)
“The Cuckoo’s Song”, mystery plays

English Renaissance (1500-1660)



- Influence of Aristotle, Ovid, and other Greco-Roman thinkers, as well as science and exploration.
- Primarily texts for public performance (plays, masques) and some books of poetry.
- William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Francis Bacon, John Fletcher, Francis Beaumont.

Neoclassical Period (Enlightenment/Age of Reason)



England 1660-1785

- Reaction to the expansiveness of the Renaissance in the direction of order and restraint.
- Developed in France (Moliere, Rousseau, Voltaire).
- Emphasized classical ideals of rationality and control (human nature is constant through time).
- Art should reflect the universal commonality of human nature. (“All men are created equal.”)
- Reason is emphasized as the highest faculty (Deism).

Romantic Period



England 1785-1830

- Reaction against the scientific rationality of Neoclassicism and the Industrial Revolution.
- Developed in Germany (Kant, Goethe).
- Emphasized individuality, intuition, imagination, idealism, nature (as opposed to society & social order).
- Elevation of the common man (folklore, myth).
- Mystery and the supernatural.

Victorian Period (England 1832-1901)



- Named for the reign of Queen Victoria, Britain's longest reigning monarch.
- Period of stability and prosperity for Britain.
- British society extremely class conscious.
- Literature seen as a bridge between Romanticism and Modernism.
- Generally emphasized realistic portrayals of common people, sometimes to promote social change.
- Some writers continue to explore gothic themes begun in Romantic Period.

Victorian Period (cont.)



Charles Dickens (*David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist*, *Great Expectations*), George Eliot (*Middlemarch*), Thomas Hardy (*Tess of the D'Urbervilles*), Robert Louis Stevenson (*The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*), Rudyard Kipling (*Jungle Book*), Lewis Carroll (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*), Charlotte Brontë (*Jane Eyre*), Emily Brontë (*Wuthering Heights*), Alfred, Lord Tennyson (*In Memoriam*), Elizabeth Barrett Browning (*Sonnets from the Portuguese*), Robert Browning ("My Last Duchess"), Matthew Arnold ("Dover Beach"), Oscar Wilde (*The Importance of Being Earnest*).

Edwardian Period (England 1901-1914)



- Named for King Edward.
- Some see as a continuation of Victorian Period; however, the status quo is increasingly threatened.
- Distinction between literature and popular fiction.
- Joseph Conrad (*Lord Jim*, *Heart of Darkness*), H.G. Wells (*War of the Worlds*), E.M. Forster (*A Room with a View*, *A Passage to India*), George Bernard Shaw (*Major Barbara*), A.C. Bradley (*Shakespearean Tragedy*).

Modern Period (1914-1945)



- Reaction against the values which led to WWI.
- Influenced by Schopenhauer (“negation of the will”), Nietzsche (*Beyond Good and Evil*), Kierkegaard (*Fear and Trembling*), as well as Darwin and Marx.
- If previous values are invalid, art is a tool to establish new values (Pound: “Make it new”).
- Writers experiment with form.
- Form and content reflect the confusion and vicissitudes of modern life.
- Expositions and resolutions are omitted; themes are implied rather than stated.

Modern Period (cont.)



Poetry:

Ezra Pound (*The Fourth Canto*), T.S. Eliot (*Prufrock and other Observations, The Waste Land*, “The Hollow Men”), W.B. Yeats (*The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems, The Swans at Coole*), H.D. (“Pear Tree”), Wallace Stevens (*Harmonium*), William Carlos Williams (“The Red Wheelbarrow,” “This Is Just to Say”), Robert Frost (*Mending Wall, The Road Not Taken*).

Modern Period (cont.)



Fiction:

James Joyce (*Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*), Franz Kafka (*The Metamorphosis*, *The Trial*, *The Castle*), Ernest Hemingway (*In Our Time*, *The Sun Also Rises*), William Faulkner (*As I Lay Dying*, *The Sound and the Fury*), F. Scott Fitzgerald (*The Great Gatsby*), John Steinbeck (*The Grapes of Wrath*), Thornton Wilder (*Our Town*, *The Bridge at San Luis Rey*), D.H. Lawrence (*The Rainbow*), Virginia Woolf (*Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*).

Post-Modern Period (1945-?)



- Critical dispute over whether an actual period or a renewal and continuation Modernism post-WWII.
- Influenced by Freud, Sartre, Camus, Derrida, and Foucault.
- Deconstruction: Text has no inherent meaning; meaning derives from the tension between the text's ambiguities and contradictions revealed upon close reading.
- Some believe it leads directly to the counter-cultural revolution of the 1960s.

Post-Modern Period (cont.)



Samuel Beckett (*Waiting for Godot*), Gabriel Garcia Marquez (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*), William Burroughs (*Naked Lunch*), J.D. Salinger (*A Catcher in the Rye*), Kurt Vonnegut (*Slaughterhouse Five*), Thomas Pynchon (*Gravity's Rainbow*), John Updike (*Rabbit Run*), Phillip Roth (*Portnoy's Complaint*, *American Pastoral*), J.M. Coetzee (*Life & Times of Michael K*), Joyce Carol Oates ("Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?"), Margaret Atwood (*The Handmaiden's Tale*), Cormac McCarthy (*Blood Meridian*), Allen Ginsberg (*Howl and Other Poems*), Charles Bukowski (*The Last Night of the Earth Poems*).