5V

Literature

Literary History

From Chaucer to Brontë

From Beowulf to Jane Eyre

Inhoud

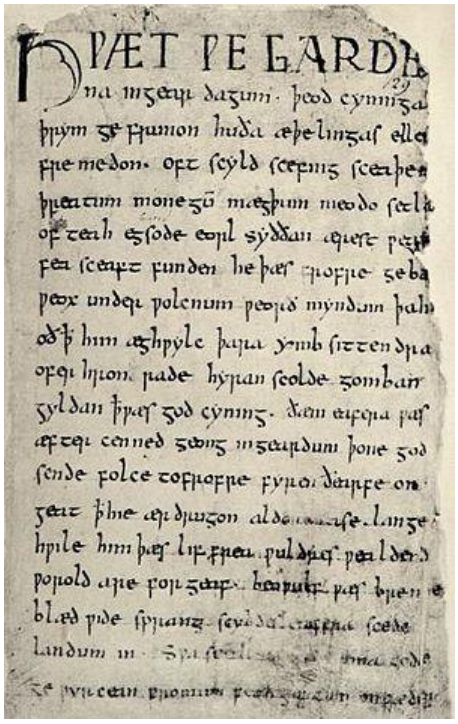
The Old English period (ca. 500-1066)

To find the beginnings of the history of the English nation, we must go back to the fifth century A.D. It was then that Germanic tribes, who had left their homes on the Continent to find a new place to live, first appeared on British shores. They met with surprisingly little resistance. For four hundred years Britain had been a province of the Roman Empire, and the original inhabitants of Britain, the Celts, had been largely dependent on the Roman armies for their protection. When these were withdrawn in 410, they soon found they were unable to prevent the newcomers from settling in Britain permanently. The invaders, traditionally divided into Angles, Saxons and Jutes, arrived in ever growing numbers and in the course of the following centuries they gradually drove the Celts westwards until they had occupied the larger part of what is now England. These Germanic invaders are the founders of the English nation, and it is their language that forms the basis of English as it is spoken today.

For several hundreds of years Anglo-Saxon England enjoyed a period of relative peace and prosperity. The country was gradually converted to Christianity and its monasteries became centres of culture and learning. Then, in 793, the famous monastery of Lindisfarne was destroyed by Scandinavian pirates, the monks killed, its treasures carried off. This attack marked the beginning of a new wave of foreign invaders. The Vikings arrived in much the same way as the English had done themselves. At first they merely raided coastal areas, robbed people and buildings of whatever they thought valuable and made off again. Soon, however, they came to stay. The Danelaw, as the area controlled by the Vikings was called, grew larger and larger and by the end of the ninth century England was in acute danger of becoming Scandinavian territory altogether. Disaster was prevented by the most important of Anglo-Saxon kings, Alfred the Great, who gained a decisive victory over the Danish army in 871. After his death Danish influence increased again, and in the eleventh century England had several Danish kings. In 1042 the crown once more fell to an Englishman. Edward the Confessor had spent the years of Danish rule as an exile in Normandy in Northern France, and this circumstance was to bring about one of the most abrupt changes in the course of English history.

The Long Man of Wilmington, a 70m figure cut in the chalk soil of the South Downs. Its date and origins are unknown, with theories ranging from the Saxon king Harold to a pre-Christian fertility god.

Beowulf (manuscript ca. 975-1025)



In coming over to Britain from their homes in what is now northern Germany, the Angles, Saxons and Jutes brought with them their own poems, tales of kings and heroes, of grim fighting, glory and honour. None of these works had ever been written down. They were passed on by word of mouth from generation to generation and were sung in the halls of kings and nobles by minstrels. At a later stage a number of these early poems were committed to paper, but we must assume that many others got lost.

Beowulf is an Old English epic poem. It may be the oldest surviving long poem in Old English and is commonly cited as one of the most important works of Old English literature. A date of composition is a matter of contention among scholars; the author was an anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet.

The poem is set in Scandinavia. Beowulf, a hero of the Geats, comes to the aid of Hrothgar, the king of the Danes, whose mead hall in Heorot has been under attack by a monster known as Grendel. After Beowulf slays him, Grendel's mother attacks the hall and is then also defeated. Victorious, Beowulf goes home to Geatland (Götaland in modern Sweden) and later becomes king of the Geats. After a period of fifty years has passed, Beowulf defeats a dragon, but is mortally wounded in the battle. After his death, his attendants cremate his body and erect a tower on a headland in his memory.

Thus reduced to a summary of a few lines, the story of *Beowulf* seems childishly simple, too simple, perhaps, to form the subject of the greatest of Old English poems. But it is told in a dignified and impressive way, moving slowly, with many noble speeches and fine descriptions. In form the poem is typical of all early Germanic poetry. There is no rhyme and no fixed rhythmical pattern. Each line is divided into two half-lines, each containing two stressed syllables that begin with the same sound (*alliteration*).

Assignment 1: Read the fragment from Beowulf on p. 192 of your textbook. What happens here? Who is 'the man of the Weather-Geats'? Who is 'she'?

Assignment 2: Every age creates its own heroes: conversely, one way of studying a particular period is to look at the qualities it values most and the people who are supposed to represent them.

Choose five people, from film, TV, show-business, the arts, etc. who can be described as "heroes of our time".

Discuss in each case the special qualities by which they distinguish themselves. Can any general conclusions be drawn? Are there any qualities that are also present in Beowulf? Or others that are conspicuous by their absence?

The Middle English Period (1066-1500)

When in 1042 Danish rule over England came to an end, the old royal house resumed the throne and Edward, called 'the Confessor' because of his pious life, became the next King of England. He had spent the years of Danish rule in Normandy, and his tastes and habits were wholly French. He had no children and his death in 1066 left the throne vacant. Among those ready to claim it were Harold Godwinson, the most powerful of the English nobles, and Duke William of Normandy, who, it seems, had been named by Edward as his successor. When Harold was crowned, William decided to take prompt action. In I066 his troops crossed the Channel. The fate of Britain was decided in the Battle of Hastings, scenes from which were depicted on the famous Bayeux tapestry. Harold was killed, his army defeated, and William the Conqueror became the first king in a new era in British history.

The changes resulting from the Norman Conquest made themselves felt in virtually every aspect of English life. William proved to be a highly efficient ruler. He set out to organize society along the lines of the feudal system of his own country. Most prominent positions in the kingdom were now held by Normans; French, or rather the Norman French dialect, became the language used in the higher circles of society and in all matters of law and government, while English continued to be spoken by the common people. For several hundreds of years the two existed side by side, but by the fourteenth century English had re-established itself as the one national language. By then, however, it had changed so much, taking over many thousands of words of French origin, that when we compare a few lines from *Beowulf* with a passage from Chaucer, it is as if a new language had been born.

In literature, too, the Conquest had far-reaching consequences. Poetic form changed, for one thing. Especially in the south of the country, where French influence was strongest, the alliterative line was replaced by the French type with end-rhyme and fixed syllable patterns. But new developments were not limited to form only. The influence of French culture is reflected in the whole character of Middle English literature. The typically Germanic poetry, with its main themes of war, death and glory, gave way to more refined and elegant types. The courtly love tradition gave women, almost totally absent in Anglo-Saxon verse, a prominent place in the works of the Middle English period. The heroic ideal was now found in the figure of the knight, who combined courage and strength with gentle manners and reverence for women in general and his own lady in particular. Among the most popular genres were the ballads and the romances, tales of love and adventure, often centred round King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

Geoffrey Chaucer (ca. 1340-1400)

- The Canterbury Tales (1476)

The most important poet of the Middle English period is Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340-1400). Facts about his life are few. We know he was a courtier, and was sent on diplomatic missions abroad on a number of occasions. In later life he held minor government posts. All this time he also wrote poetry and enjoyed considerable popularity.

His greatest work is *The Canterbury Tales,* a frame story in which he introduces us to a company of twenty-nine pilgrims who have come together at a London inn. They are preparing to go on a pilgrimage to the grave of Archbishop Thomas Becket, who had been murdered by knights of king Henry II in 1170, and made a saint three years later. They agree to hold a story-telling contest, and the winner will be treated to a free dinner. The innkeeper is to accompany them and act as judge. His account of the rules of the game makes us realize what a gigantic project Chaucer must originally have had in mind: each pilgrim was to tell two tales on the way to Canterbury, and another two on the way back, which would bring the total number of tales to some hundred and twenty. It is hardly surprising that the work remained unfinished. Apart from the Prologue we have twenty-four Tales, some of which are incomplete. But even these, with their great variety, their sharp observation and their humour are enough to give Chaucer a permanent place among the great English poets.

The General Prologue is Chaucer's portrait gallery of pilgrims. In passages ranging from five or six lines to well over sixty, he brings them to life, giving us details about their appearance, their background, way of life and ideas. He pretends to admire every single one of them, no matter how bad they may be. But for the careful reader there is always a gentle irony that exposes them for what they really are, and in this way *The Canterbury Tales* becomes a fascinating panorama of medieval society.

One of the most interesting figures among the Canterbury pilgrims is the Wife of Bath. In a time when woman's inferiority to man was a generally accepted fact, Dame Alison stands out as a truly remarkable character. She considers herself an expert in all matters of love, sex and marriage and the long Prologue to her Tale shows her to be quite outspoken on the subject. Her experience is the result of five marriages ('apart from other company in youth'). Of her husbands, she tells us, two were bad and three were 'good' (which means, we are given to understand, that they were 'rich and old'). Apparently none of them was a match for her tremendous energy, for she cheerfully informs us 'how she made them work at night'. Only her last husband, a handsome young student from Oxford, did she marry for love, and the account of the battle for sovereignty in marriage is one of the most entertaining parts of her Prologue.

The Wife of Bath

A worthy woman from beside Bath city
Was with us, somewhat deaf, which was a pity.
In making cloth she showed so great a bent° — skill
She bettered those of Ypres and of Ghent°. — cloth-making centres
In all the parish not a dame dared stir° — move
Towards the altar steps in front of her,
And if indeed they did, so wrath° was she — angry
As to be quite put out of charity[0]. — that she had lost all Christian kindness
Her kerchiefs[0] were of finely woven ground; — head-coverings
I dared have sworn they weighed a good ten pound,
The ones she wore on Sunday, on her head.
Her hose° were of the finest scarlet red — stockings
And gartered tight; her shoes were soft and new.
Bold was her face, handsome, and red in hue°. — colour
A worthy woman all her life, what's more
She'd had five husbands, all at the church door,
Apart from other company in youth;
No need just now to speak of that, forsooth.
And she had thrice been to Jerusalem,
Seen many strange rivers and passed over them;
She'd been to Rome and also to Boulogne,
St James of Compostella and Cologne,
And she was skilled in wandering by the way.
She had gap-teeth, set widely, truth to say.
Easily on an ambling horse° she sat — ladies' horse
Well wimpled up°, and on her head a hat — well-veiled
As broad as is a buckler or a shield;

She had a flowing mantle that concealed

Large hips, her heels spurred[0] sharply under that.

In company she liked to laugh and chat

And knew the remedies for love's mischances[0],

An art in which she knew the oldest dances[0].

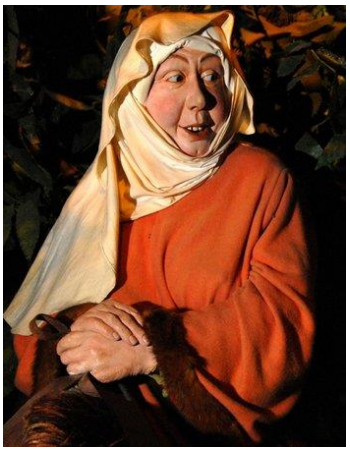
met sporen

bad luck

fijne kneepjes

General prologue, II. 445-76

translation Nevill Coghill



Assignment 3 Chaucer's way of describing his pilgrims is one of seeming objectivity: he mentions facts and represents opinions, leaving it to the reader to draw his conclusions. It is only when we realize that by stressing certain points, and perhaps not mentioning others that may be just as important, Chaucer's pictures are in fact far from objective.

Chaucer's method of characterization can be seen at work in the case of Dame Alison of Bath: her true character is revealed through a number of details that may seem irrelevant at first sight. What does, for example, her behaviour at church (II. 5-8) tell us about her character? What about the list of holy places she has been to? Find three other examples of this sort of indirect description and say what Chaucer is trying to tell us about her.

Assignments 4 Go to your book (Stepping Stones Activity Book B, or online material: Exercises 5 upto and including 8) and answer the questions on **The Nun's Priest's Tale**.

The Renaissance (ca. 1500-1800)

Around 1500 English history entered upon a new and important phase: the Renaissance. This does not mean, of course, that society took on an entirely new aspect in that particular year. Many of the features that we now call typical of the Renaissance period had their roots in the Middle Ages; but it was not until the early sixteenth century that these new developments had become sufficiently strong to affect the character of society as a whole.

The word 'Renaissance' means 'rebirth', and the term is mostly used to refer to the renewed interest in the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome that arose at the time. The works of the great classical authors had never been wholly forgotten, but they had been looked upon primarily as the products of a civilization that was pagan in character, and therefore to be rejected. When Renaissance scholars set out to study classical culture, they did so with an open mind, casting off the prejudices of medieval Christianity. For them Greek and Roman culture came to be an ideal, an example to be applied to their own times, and classical influence can be seen in many forms of Renaissance art and thought. Among the most prominent of these *humanists,* as they came to be called, were the Dutchman Erasmus and the Englishman Thomas More, whose description of an ideal society *Utopia* is still widely read today.

In a wider sense the term 'rebirth' points to a number of fundamental changes in the way man looked upon himself and upon his place in the world around him. The nature of these changes may perhaps be brought out most clearly by comparing medieval and Renaissance ideas. In the developments outlined below, the first key phrase refers to the Middle Ages, the second to the Renaissance.

1 From a collective to an individual attitude

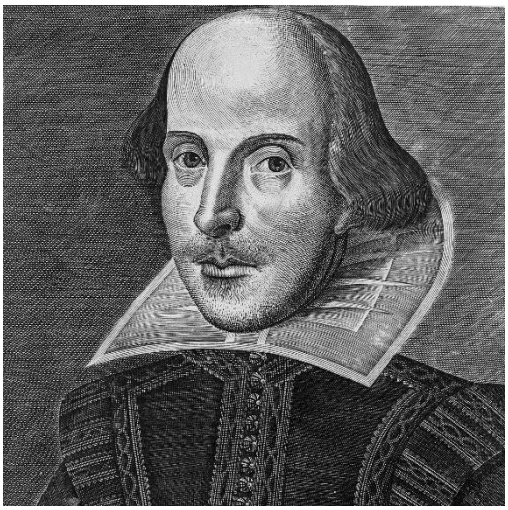
In the Middle Ages people were seen, and saw themselves, as members of a larger body: they belonged to a family, a guild, a religious community, a nation. Gradually, however, man came to view himself as an individual being, whose thoughts, feelings and actions had a value and an importance of their own. This growing self-awareness is reflected in many areas. In religion, it led to the Reformation and the rise of Protestantism, with its emphasis on the individual relation between man and God. It is also seen in the beginnings of the capitalist system, based on private enterprise and the interests of the individual merchant. In the arts, too, we find a growing self-consciousness. Most medieval art had been anonymous, but the Renaissance artist saw his work as a personal achievement, and proudly attached his name to it. The emphasis on individual ability led to a desire to develop one's talents in every possible direction. The ideal Renaissance man was expected to be a soldier, a poet, a hunter, a scholar and a musician in one.

2 From a theocentric ('God-centred') to an 'anthropocentric' ('man-centred') outlook

One of the first things that a reading of, for example, Chaucer's Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* will make clear, is how important the role of the Church in medieval society was. Man was constantly reminded that life on earth was but a preparation for death and the judgment to come, which would send him either to heaven or to hell. In the Renaissance religion had by no means disappeared; but the description of the period as 'the discovery of man and the world' indicates that the idea of death no longer prevented man from exploring and enjoying life as fully as possible. The famous Renaissance motto *carpe diem* ('seize the day') is not the opposite of the medieval *memento mori;* rather it is its result. It was *because* Renaissance man was acutely aware that all men must die that he was determined to make the most of life.

3 From dogmatic belief to critical investigation

Medieval ideas about man and the world around him were relatively static. The great truths were held by the Church, which provided religious explanations for most things, and there could be no questioning of these official doctrines. In the Renaissance, however, we find a growing desire for intellectual independence. Scholars and scientists were no longer prepared to accept the explanations offered by the Church uncritically. They insisted on basing their views not on authority, but on their own investigations. A crucial role in this revival of learning was played by the new printing press, introduced in England at the end of the fifteenth century. It now became possible to spread ideas over a larger area at a low cost, and in the communication of ideas it soon proved to be of tremendous importance. Almost inevitably this attitude led to conflicts with the Church, as in the famous case of Galilei, whose theory that the earth revolves round the sun was in direct contrast with the official view that the earth formed the centre of the universe. But although Galilei was sentenced to imprisonment on account of his views, the Church eventually lost its authority in matters of Science. And it is in this rejection of authority and the insistence that conclusions should be based on experiments only that we find the beginnings of Science in the modern sense of the word.



William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

With William Shakespeare (1564-1616) English drama reaches its greatest heights. In spite of the many stories surrounding his person, facts about Shakespeare's life are few. He was born in Stratford-on-Avon, where his birthplace has become one of the most popular tourist attractions in Britain. In 1582 he married Ann Hathaway, by whom he had three children. Of the next ten years of his life we know very little. For reasons unknown to us, he set off for London to become an actor and try his hand at play-writing. His attempts, apparently, were successful enough, for in 1598 he is referred to as one of England's leading dramatists. 'Will Shakespeare and the Lord Chamberlain's Men', as the company were called, performed at the court of Queen Elizabeth and her successor, James I, even adopted the company, which was now allowed to call itself the 'King's Men'. Besides fame, his theatrical career also brought Shakespeare material success. He bought some land and various houses in his native Stratford and also had a financial interest in two London theatres. About 1610, once more for reasons we can only guess at, he decided to put an end to his theatrical activities, and he retired to Stratford, where he died in 1616 and was buried in the local church.

Shakespeare's work was meant to be seen and heard, not read, and the first official edition of his plays dates from 1623, seven years after his death, when two of his former fellow-actors collected them in what has come to be known as the First Folio.

Sonnet 18

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate
Rough-winds do shake the darling buds of May
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed,
And every fair from fair sometime declines
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed:
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Assignment 5: Answer the following questions.

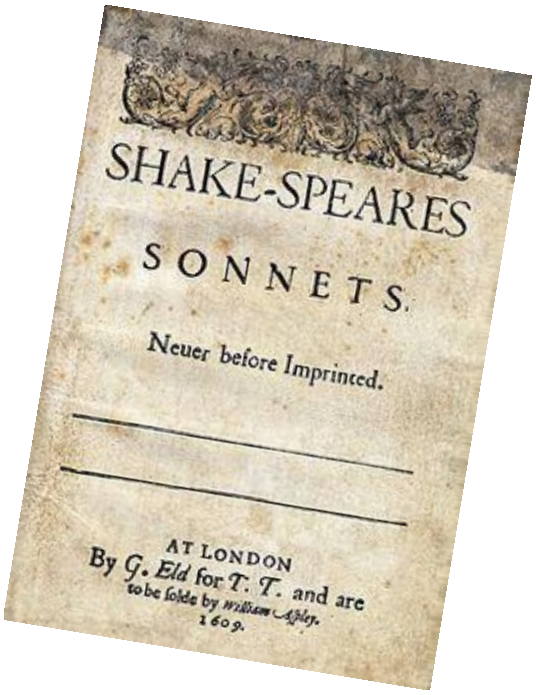
1 a Whom does Shakespeare indicate by words like ‘thee’, ‘thou’ and ‘thy’?
b What is obviously meant by ‘the eye of heaven’?
c What other reference is there to the same idea in the poem?

2. a The ‘thee’ of line 1 compares favourably with an English summer day. Mention 3 points that illustrate this.
b How is the weather compared to the mood of Shakespeare’s beloved?

3. In line 7 the word ‘fair’ is used in the sense of ‘beautiful’.
a What does Shakespeare mean here in line 7?
b In what two ways may this change take place?
c Give one example each, from the text, of how this might work out in nature.
d How can this change be applied to people?

4. As you should know, a sonnet is usually subdivided into an octave and a sestet, with a clear break in between (volta of chute). The octave and the sestet are generally divided into two quatrains and two tercets. In a Shakespearian sonnet, however, you generally find a subdivision of the sestet into one quatrain and one couplet.
a What is the subject of the octave and what of the sestet?
b What is the function of the couplet?
c The word “ow’st” is a form of either the verb “ to own” (bezitten) or “ to owe” (schuldig zijn). Of which of these two is it a form and explain why you think so.

5. a To what aspect of summer does he contrast his beloved in line 9?
b When could one say that one wanders in the shade of Death (line 11)?
c Why is ‘Death’ spelled with a capital letter?
d How can a mortal man, Shakespeare, say that the beauty of his beloved will be eternal?
e Does Shakespeare express his opinion about his own poetry anywhere?
f What is meant by ‘this’ in the last line?
g Do you think there is a grain of truth in Shakespeare’s claim that he has made the person he loves eternal?


SHAKE-SPEARES
SONNETS.
Neuer before Imprinted.
AT LONDON
By G. Eld for T. T. and are
to be solde by William Aspley.
1609.

The Age of Reason (1660-1800)

The period from 1660 to 1800 in English literature is known by various names: the Neoclassical period, the Augustan Age, the Age of Reason. The names are suggestive; they tell us not only how we look back on the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, but also how the people looked upon themselves, and one way of learning something about the general character of the period is to have a closer look at the terms used to refer to it.

Probably the most common name is the Neoclassical Period. The eighteenth century was the great age of classicism. The influence of ancient Greece and Rome, already strong during the Renaissance, had now grown into an absolute authority. The classics represented the highest ideals in life, art and literature, and to follow them was the best advice to be given to any writer.

A name the eighteenth century often applied to itself was the Augustan Age. The word refers to the Roman emperor Augustus, during whose reign the Roman Empire enjoyed a period of great prosperity. Englishmen of the eighteenth century found themselves in a similar position: arts and sciences flourished, and growing trade brought wealth into the country. They felt them. selves to be the true successors of the ancients. Western civilization, they believed, was now at a higher level than ever before, and the question of whether it was not actually superior to the ancient world itself was a widely discussed topic.

The self-confidence and optimism suggested by the term Augustan Age is also reflected in the most general name for the period: the Age of Reason. As it was used at the time, the word 'Reason' did not just mean 'intellectual'; it also implied things like 'common sense' and 'wisdom'. It might be defined as 'a calm and balanced judgment, not hindered by personal emotions'. Every man, it was thought, had some degree of reason in him, and if only it was used and developed in the right way, the powers of the human mind were nearly infinite. This optimistic view was partly inspired by rapid developments in the sciences, such as the achievements of Sir Isaac Newton. The flow of scientific discoveries led to the belief that all phenomena of nature, and even religion, could be explained in a rational way. And if that was possible, it followed that in the end all the major problems of mankind could be solved.

A brief glance at the world outside, however, showed that this utopia was still some way off, and that human actions were all too often guided by other things than Reason alone. This explains why satire, both in prose and in verse, is the most popular genre of the period. Perhaps more than any other age, the eighteenth century shows a combination of high ideals together with a painful awareness that the actual world falls short of them.

This portrait of the Neoclassical period formed the official 'face' of English literature during the greater part of our period. It was found among the educated and the cultured, in the higher circles of society, in the fashionable London coffee-houses where men of letters used to meet. It is part of what in the discussion of the ballad was called the Great Tradition.

But it was by no means the only face of the literature of the time. When we turn to a book like Robinson Crusoe, it seems as if we are entering a world that is totally different from the one described above: the world of the middle class, dominated by trade, money, and those strict religious views associated with Puritanism. These people had no part in the classical tradition. Nor were they much interested. For them, it was linked with ideas and a way of life they rejected as wicked and sinful. They were no great readers, except of religious works. And by the time their labours had earned them sufficient money to leave them time to read, they wanted a literature of their own, books about people they could recognize, preferably with a clear moral at the end. And it is here that we find Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, perhaps the first English novel. At the time of its publication, it was not considered a work of art in any way. The English novel still had a long way to go before it was taken seriously as a literary form. But Defoe's famous story may serve to remind us that, by the side of all the Neoclassical works, the eighteenth century also produced the first examples of a genre that, eventually, was to surpass all others in popularity.

The Rise of the Novel: Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe (1719)*

Opinions vary as to who must be called the first true novelist in English, but many people will award this title to Daniel Defoe (1660-1731). Defoe was a journalist, businessman, manufacturer, government spy as well as a good many other things besides. Estimates of his total output of books and pamphlets range from 400 to 700. His chief fame, however, rests on a single book: Robinson Crusoe (1719).

Knowing that his Puritan readers were inclined to look upon everything that was not literally true as lies, Defoe presented his book as an autobiography. His own name did not appear on the title-page; Instead we are told that these are 'The Strange and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner, (...) Written by Himself'. The story of Robinson Crusoe is based on the account of one Alexander Selkirk, a Scotsman who, after a quarrel with the captain of the ship he was on, was left behind on the isle of Juan Fernandez, off the coast of Chile, and stayed there from 1704 till 1709. He was at last picked up by a passing ship and taken back to England, where his story soon became famous.

Robinson Crusoe, then, was passed off as fact, and Defoe takes great pains to make the story look as realistic as possible. He is not interested In the psychological aspects of Robinson's stay on the island. In true journalistic fashion, he gives the facts, and gives them as fully and accurately as possible

From the very start, the book was a great success. Crusoe was the sort of man the middle class could recognize: he was a man like themselves, practical, economical and with a keen sense of how to get on in the world. Money and business play a dominant role in his life, and some critics have described Crusoe as the proto-type of the modern capitalist.

The story of a man all by himself on an uninhabited island has had a strong appeal for many generations of readers. So strong indeed that the figure of Robinson Crusoe has come to live a sort of life of its own, outside the context of Defoe's book. In a greatly abridged and simplified form, with all

the religious aspects left out, the book has been turned into a children's classic, for one thing. Crusoe has been seen as a symbol of modern imperialism, as a kind of noble savage living happily far away from the corruptions of society, as a romantic hero in perfect harmony with nature. Of course, Defoe's own Robinson Crusoe was nothing of the kind. But any book that can survive for more than two hundred and fifty years in so many different forms must have something very special.

Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1727)

The most famous prose satire of the eighteenth century is Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Trovefs (1727). In the book captain Lemuel Gulliver presents us with quasi-authentic descriptions of various parts of the world which he visited in the course of his seafaring life. We accompany Gulliver to a number of wholly imaginary countries, inhabited by all sorts of fantastic creatures. Thus the first voyage takes Gulliver to the Empire of Lilliput, whose people are no more than six inches tall. The second book describes his adventures In Brobdingnag, a country of giants. Book three, bearing the title 'A Voyage to Laputa, Balnibarbi, Glubbdubbdrib, Luggnagg and Japan' consists of a number of shorter pieces. The most controversial part of Gulliver's Travels is the last book, in which he finds himself in the country of the Houyhnhnms, a race of horses governed entirely by Reason; they keep as slaves and beasts of burden Yahoos, vicious and disgusting creatures showing a disturbing likeness to human beings.

Although Gulliver's Travels provides plenty of humour, we soon realize that the book is much more than a collection of comic episodes. Gulliver's adventures are not presented for their own sake; they are used as a means to comment on the human race in general, and on the English in particular. All the creatures Swift describes in the four books to some extent represent mankind. But his portraits are never straightforward: he reduces and magnifies his scale to the point of absurdity; he pretends to admire the ridiculous and to ridicule the admirable, he persuades the reader to agree completely with Gulliver at one point in the story, and find himself totally opposed to him at another; he distorts reality, turns things upside down and gives Idealized or unfair pictures. But at the centre there is always man himself, and when we have looked into each of the bewildering collection of mirrors that Swift holds up to us, there is only one conclusion to be drawn: how little and how badly has mankind used its powers. In trying to create a world for himself to live in, man has made a pretty poor job of it. *Gulliver's Travels* is the perfect remedy against human pride for by the time Swift has done with us, there is preciously little left to be proud of.

The Romantic Period (1800-1830)

During the second half of the eighteenth century the stability of the Augustan Age was gradually lost in a period of social change and growing unrest. The Industrial Revolution was turning England from an agricultural nation into an industrial one, and large numbers of farm workers were forced to seek employment in the new factories in the towns, which often resulted in long hours and miserable working conditions for those who were lucky enough to find a job there, and poverty and wretchedness for those who were not.

The first phase of industrialization brought wealth and prosperity to the country at large, but the enthusiasm with which it was received by some people was not shared by all. There was also a growing feeling that the prosperity of a small group was bought with the poverty of many. The outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 was a source of inspiration to those people who felt that the whole structure of society should be changed. The ideals of freedom, equality and the abolition of all class distinctions appealed strongly to young people all over Europe, including most of the English Romantic poets.

The Romantic Period in English literature is traditionally said to have begun in 1798. In that year William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge published the *Lyrical Ballads,* a volume of poetry in which they broke radically with all that was left of the eighteenth century tradition, and proposed instead a poetry of simplicity, both in form and in contents, guided no longer by Reason, but by the imagination. The book marks the beginning of one of the great eras of English poetry, dominated by five major poets: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Byron.

For all their differences, the Romantic poets share a deep trust in the non-rational forces of emotion, intuition and imagination, based on a profound conviction that reason and intellect are not enough to comprehend the world. The Romantic poet is no longer the voice of polite society, giving voice to 'what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed', in the famous words of the eighteenth century poet Alexander Pope. He speaks for himself, an individual voice addressing the individual reader. This highly subjective attitude, coupled with a dissatisfaction with the world around him, often leads to a choice of subjects that have a strong emotional appeal, things that may be presented as higher, purer or better than the actual world around him. The following list of subjects is characteristic of much Romantic poetry, although, it must be added, there is hardly one poet in whose work all of them are found together.

- The Romantic Period produces some of the greatest nature poetry in the English language. Nature was seen not merely as something to be admired, but as a life-giving force that is present both in man himself and in the world around him, a power that may have an active and positive influence on the human mind.

- This attitude to nature led to an idealization of those people who live closest to it. Simple country people came to play a prominent role in the work of many poets of the period.

- Disappointment with the present often inspired a renewed interest in an idealized past. The Romantic Period saw a revival of the old country ballads, which were eagerly collected in their original form and imitated in a more literary manner (the so-called 'art-ballad').

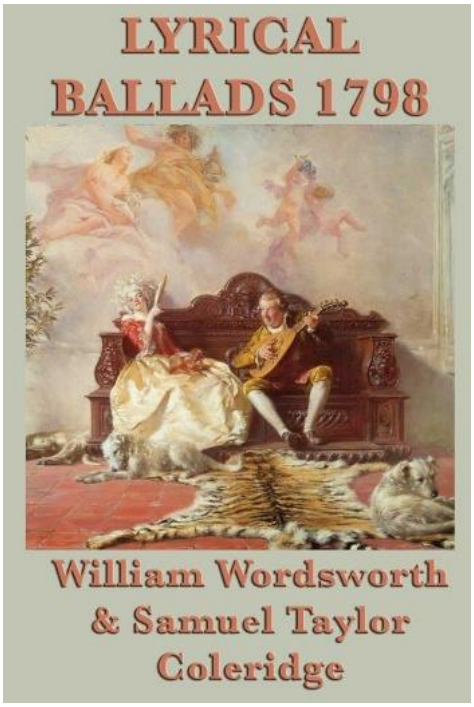
- The anti-intellectual attitude is reflected in the popularity of supernatural elements, often derived from folklore, fairy tales, mythology etc.

- A special place in the Romantic imagination is occupied by the child. In their search for purer values they saw the child as the supreme example of innocence uncorrupted by the world, still standing close to God and eternity.

- Parallel to the escape in time we often find an escape in place. Many poets of the period felt strongly attracted to exotic cultures, and they frequently used distant countries as settings for their poems.

Early industry in the country- side, a pithead near an estuary', painting by John La Porte from 1809. The scene farms a realistic counterpart to the nature poetry of the Romantic poets, and it serves to remind us that this poetry was in many ways a reaction against growing industrialization.

William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge



For many readers of verse, William Wordsworth is England's greatest nature poet. Nature lies at the very heart of his work, and in some of his longer philosophical poems his relation towards it takes on an almost religious character. Man, Wordsworth believed, is part of nature; he shares his life with all things around him, and the life-giving forces within himself are the same as those active in the outside world. He should try, therefore, to live in harmony with the world of nature and once he has achieved that harmony, nature will be a guide to wisdom and goodness.

The poet whose name is traditionally linked with Wordsworth's is Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Together they wrote the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), a volume of poetry that is usually regarded as the beginning of the Romantic Period.

The most famous of Coleridge's contributions to the *Lyrical Ballads* is *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Using the old ballad form, he makes us listen to the long and gruesome story of an old sailor, a tale that has all the qualities of a nightmare.

Assignment 6:

Now go to page 179 in your textbooks and p. 138 in your Activity Books to study Coleridge's poem *Frost at Midnight*. Do assignments 7 upto and including 10.

The Regency (1811-1820)

By 1811, the recurrent madness of England's King George III reached the point where his son George, Prince of Wales, was appointed Regent. The short decade that took his name was the last gasp of Georgian exuberance before the morality of the Victorian era.

The Prince

The Prince, "Prinny", set the tone for the period with his lavish expenditures and indolent lifestyle. His marriage to Caroline of Brunswick had been a disaster from the beginning and the prince cultivated a string of mistresses who grew older and fatter with him. In 1820, after becoming king, George tried to divorce his wife for adultery. The scandalous trial entertained the country, but his claim was not upheld. Their one child, Princess Charlotte, died in 1817.

War

The British army had been fighting the French on the Iberian Peninsula since 1809. The eventual Duke of Wellington commanded the British forces for most of this time and eventually defeated this wing of Napoleon's army. Napoleon himself was busy with his disastrous campaign in Russia. He surrendered in 1814, was exiled to Elba, escaped the following year and made one last attempt to retain his empire at Waterloo, where Wellington and the Allied forces prevailed.

Literature

The Regency period was the heyday of the Romantic poets, led by the scandalous Byron and Shelley and the more mild-mannered Keats. Sir Walter Scott, who began writing epic poetry, turned his hand to historical novels such as Waverly and Ivanhoe. And Jane Austen delighted the country with her timeless accounts of the manners and morals of the Regency era.

Society

London was the centre of the Regency universe. The Season began with the opening of Parliament, usually in March and lasted until late June, when the haut ton fled to their country estates. Young girls made their "come out" to the aged Queen, and then started off on the great husband hunt. Women visited with their friends, patronized the fashionable shops and showed off their finery at lavish halls, the theatre and the opera. Gentlemen, when not busy at their clubs, courted the ladies and pursued "manly" sports.

The Other Side

Life during the Regency was not all glamor and excitement. Dickens' descriptions of the miserable conditions in the Victorian slums are equally applicable to the Regency. Social reformers worked for prison reform and changes in the poor laws, while evangelical religions gained in popularity. There was growing agitation for political reform from both the rising middle class and the increasingly vocal labourers.

The End

George III died in 1820 and Prinny ascended to the throne as George IV. He reigned only 10 years; upon his death in 1830, his next living brother became William IV. When he died in 1837, he was succeeded by the child of his predeceased younger brother - the Princess Victoria. Born in the waning years of the Regency (1819), she reigned as Queen until 1901.

A marriage based on love was rarely an option for most women in the British Regency, as securing a steady and sufficient income was the first consideration for both the woman and her family. This is most likely why this period yielded so many examples of literary romance: it gave many women the opportunity to live vicariously through the novel's heroine, who generally married someone she loved deeply.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was published in 1818, also falling within the Regency era. Some consider it to be the single piece of British literature that best reflects the interests and concerns of the time, specifically the fascination with and fear of the science and technological advances of the times. It is a classic example of horror fiction.

Jane Austen

Jane Austen (16 December 1775 - 18 July 1817) was an English novelist whose works of romantic fiction, set among the landed gentry, earned her a place as one of the most widely read writers in English literature. Her realism, biting irony and social commentary have gained her historical importance among scholars and critics.

Language in Historical Perspective

Differences between the writing of Jane Austen and twentieth-century writers — differences in spelling, vocabulary and syntax — create a *formality* in Austen's writing not present in most modern novels. It should not be confused with ornate or elaborate expression. Read the following passage, from *Emma:*

"A straightforward, open-hearted man like Weston, and a rational, unaffected woman like Miss Taylor, may be safely left to manage their own concerns. You are more likely to have done harm to yourself, than good to them, by interference."

"Emma never thinks of herself, if she can do good to others," rejoined Mr. Woodhouse, understanding but in part. "But, my dear, pray do not make any more matches; they are silly things, and break up one's family circle grievously."

"Only one more, papa; only for Mr. Elton. Poor Mr. Elton! You like Mr. Elton, papa,--I must look about for a wife for him. There is nobody in Highbury who deserves him--and he has been here a whole year, and has fitted up his house so comfortably, that it would be a shame to have him single any longer--and I thought when he was joining their hands to-day, he

looked so very much as if he would like to have the same kind office done for him! I think very well of Mr. Elton, and this is the only way I have of doing him a service."

"Mr. Elton is a very pretty young man, to be sure, and a very good young man, and I have a great regard for him. But if you want to shew him any attention, my dear, ask him to come and dine with us some day. That will be a much better thing. I dare say Mr. Knightley will be so kind as to meet him."

"With a great deal of pleasure, sir, at any time," said Mr. Knightley, laughing, "and I agree with you entirely, that it will be a much better thing. Invite him to dinner, Emma, and help him to the best of the fish and the chicken, but leave him to chuse his own wife. Depend upon it, a man of six or seven-and-twenty can take care of himself."

Assignment 7: Answer these questions.

1. Characters in Austen's novels usually address one another in a formal way, even when they are close friends. Find two examples in this passage.
2. 'But, my dear, pray do not make any more matches,' Mr Woodhouse says. What would a modern character say instead of 'pray'?
3. What does Emma mean by 'the same kind office'? How has the word 'office' changed in modern usage?
4. Comment on the use of 'pretty' in the passage. How has its usage narrowed?
5. How would we, in a less formal manner, say: I have great regard for him'?
6. Find two examples of archaic spellings in the passage.
7. Mr. Knightley describes Mr Elton as 'a man of six or seven-and-twenty'. How do we say this today?

Love and marriage in Regency England

Throughout history, parents used their children, both daughters and sons, as assets in their efforts to gain and maintain wealth, connections, and power. The Age of Enlightenment (18th century) brought a radical shift in attitudes toward marriage. The idea that a daughter would marry according to her father's choice fell out of fashion, and a man who would force a young woman into a disagreeable partnership was deemed contemptible. The new way of the world was for young people to make their own marriage choices with parents left with (hopefully) the right to veto socially or economically unsuitable candidates.

Arranged marriage lingered longest among the upper classes where it was assumed a young woman would learn to love, or at least tolerate, the husband chosen by her father. Even so, few high society parents contrived mercenary alliances for their children. Conversely, not all gentry families permitted their offspring to marry as they chose. Eldest sons, who were set to inherit family lands and fortunes, found themselves subject to more parental sanctions than younger siblings.

In the midst of all these changes, a new certainty emerged: marriages based on compatibility, affection, and even love, were more likely to stand the test of time than marriages arranged purely for material gain.

This new attitude complicated matters for parents who now had to engineer circumstances for their daughters to meet the right sort of eligible men. The perceived rarity of such men encouraged something of a husband-hunting hysteria among parents eager to see their daughters well-settled.

Despite the new attitudes of the Enlightenment, one societal truth remained unchanged. It was the duty of a young woman to marry. The Whole Duty of a Woman suggested that there were three acceptable 'States and Conditions' of womanhood: the virgin, the married and the widowed. "An old Maid is now thought such a Curse as no Poetic Fury can exceed, look'd on as the most calamitous Creature in Nature."

To avoid that dreaded state of spinsterhood, a girl needed to make a sensible match. What constituted a sensible match? In short, one which provided three key qualities:connections, cash and compatibility.

During the late Georgian and Regency eras, everyone knew their rank in society and where they stood in relation to everyone else in their social circles. Unions between equals were expected, and in many families required. Allowing an individual of inferior social standing into the family circle, and thus the social circle, was considered a betrayal of those within their strata.

Particularly among the upper classes, these attitudes meant people often married partners with whom their family enjoyed alliances, or to whom they were related. Marriage between first cousins, neither forbidden by the church nor law, were common.

The lure of pedigree lost some of its luster when tarnished by debt. Many titled and influential families were plagued by declining fortune and debt. Young women, though, were warned to be wary of men hunting for an heiress to shore up failing family finances as much as young men were cautioned against female fortune-hunters.

A wealthy man might be excused for marrying a poorer woman, particularly if she were pretty and had good manners. A wealthy woman of any age would be thought to have thrown herself away to marry a man of lesser means.

Pride and Prejudice

Chapter 1

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

"My dear Mr. Bennet," said his lady to him one day, "have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?"

Mr. Bennet replied that he had not.

"But it is," returned she; "for Mrs. Long has just been here, and she told me all about it."

Mr. Bennet made no answer.

"Do you not want to know who has taken it?" cried his wife impatiently.

"You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it."

This was invitation enough.

"Why, my dear, you must know, Mrs. Long says that Netherfield is taken by a young man of large fortune from the north of England; that he came down on Monday in a chaise and four to see the place, and was so much delighted with it, that he agreed with Mr. Morris immediately; that he is to take possession before Michaelmas, and some of his servants are to be in the house by the end of next week."

"What is his name?"

"Bingley."

"Is he married or single?"

"Oh! Single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!"

"How so? How can it affect them?"

"My dear Mr. Bennet," replied his wife, "how can you be so tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them."

"Is that his design in settling here?"

"Design! Nonsense, how can you talk so! But it is very likely that he may fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must visit him as soon as he comes."

"I see no occasion for that. You and the girls may go, or you may send them by themselves, which perhaps will be still better, for as you are as handsome as any of them, Mr. Bingley may like you the best of the party."

"My dear, you flatter me. I certainly have had my share of beauty, but I do not pretend to be anything extraordinary now. When a woman has five grown-up daughters, she ought to give over thinking of her own beauty."

"In such cases, a woman has not often much beauty to think of."

"But, my dear, you must indeed go and see Mr. Bingley when he comes into the neighbourhood."

"It is more than I engage for, I assure you."

"But consider your daughters. Only think what an establishment it would be for one of them. Sir William and Lady Lucas are determined to go, merely on that account, for in general, you know, they visit no newcomers. Indeed you must go, for it will be impossible for us to visit him if you do not."

"You are over-scrupulous, surely. I dare say Mr. Bingley will be very glad to see you; and I will send a few lines by you to assure him of my hearty consent to his marrying whichever he chooses of the girls; though I must throw in a good word for my little Lizzy."

"I desire you will do no such thing. Lizzy is not a bit better than the others; and I am sure she is not half so handsome as Jane, nor half so good-humoured as Lydia. But you are always giving her the preference."

"They have none of them much to recommend them," replied he; "they are all silly and ignorant like other girls; but Lizzy has something more of quickness than her sisters."

"Mr. Bennet, how can you abuse your own children in such a way? You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion for my poor nerves."

"You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these last twenty years at least."

"Ah, you do not know what I suffer."

"But I hope you will get over it, and live to see many young men of four thousand a year come into the neighbourhood."

"It will be no use to us, if twenty such should come, since you will not visit them."

"Depend upon it, my dear, that when there are twenty, I will visit them all." Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three-and-

twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. Her mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news.

Chapter 2

Mr. Bennet was among the earliest of those who waited on Mr. Bingley. He had always intended to visit him, though to the last always assuring his wife that he should not go; and till the evening after the visit was paid she had no knowledge of it. It was then disclosed in the following manner. Observing his second daughter employed in trimming a hat, he suddenly addressed her with:

"I hope Mr. Bingley will like it, Lizzy."

"We are not in a way to know what Mr. Bingley likes," said her mother resentfully, "since we are not to visit."

"But you forget, mamma," said Elizabeth, "that we shall meet him at the assemblies, and that Mrs. Long promised to introduce him."

"I do not believe Mrs. Long will do any such thing. She has two nieces of her own. She is a selfish, hypocritical woman, and I have no opinion of her."

"No more have I," said Mr. Bennet; "and I am glad to find that you do not depend on her serving you."

Mrs. Bennet deigned not to make any reply, but, unable to contain herself, began scolding one of her daughters.

"Don't keep coughing so, Kitty, for Heaven's sake! Have a little compassion on my nerves. You tear them to pieces."

"Kitty has no discretion in her coughs," said her father; "she times them ill."

"I do not cough for my own amusement," replied Kitty fretfully. "When is your next ball to be, Lizzy?"

"To-morrow fortnight."

"Aye, so it is," cried her mother, "and Mrs. Long does not come back till the day before; so it will be impossible for her to introduce him, for she will not know him herself."

"Then, my dear, you may have the advantage of your friend, and introduce Mr. Bingley to her."

"Impossible, Mr. Bennet, impossible, when I am not acquainted with him myself; how can you be so teasing?"

"I honour your circumspection. A fortnight's acquaintance is certainly very little. One cannot know what a man really is by the end of a fortnight. But if we do not venture somebody else will; and after all, Mrs. Long and her daughters must stand their chance; and, therefore, as she will think it an act of kindness, if you decline the office, I will take it on myself."

The girls stared at their father. Mrs. Bennet said only, "Nonsense, nonsense!"

"What can be the meaning of that emphatic exclamation?" cried he. "Do you consider the forms of introduction, and the stress that is laid on them, as nonsense? I cannot quite agree with you there. What say you, Mary? For you are a young lady of deep reflection, I know, and read great books and make extracts."

Mary wished to say something sensible, but knew not how.

"While Mary is adjusting her ideas," he continued, "let us return to Mr. Bingley."

"I am sick of Mr. Bingley," cried his wife.

"I am sorry to hear that; but why did not you tell me that before? If I had known as much this morning I certainly would not have called on him. It is very unlucky; but as I have actually paid the visit, we cannot escape the acquaintance now."

The astonishment of the ladies was just what he wished; that of Mrs. Bennet perhaps surpassing the rest; though, when the first tumult of joy was over, she began to declare that it was what she had expected all the while.

"How good it was in you, my dear Mr. Bennet! But I knew I should persuade you at last. I was sure you loved your girls too well to neglect such an acquaintance. Well, how pleased I am! and it is such a good joke, too, that you should have gone this morning and never said a word about it till now."

"Now, Kitty, you may cough as much as you choose," said Mr. Bennet; and, as he spoke, he left the room, fatigued with the raptures of his wife.

"What an excellent father you have, girls!" said she, when the door was shut. "I do not know how you will ever make him amends for his kindness; or me, either, for that matter. At our time of life it is not so pleasant, I can tell you, to be making new acquaintances every day; but for your sakes, we would do anything. Lydia, my love, though you are the youngest, I dare say Mr. Bingley will dance with you at the next ball."

"Oh!" said Lydia stoutly, "I am not afraid; for though I am the youngest, I'm the tallest."

The rest of the evening was spent in conjecturing how soon he would return Mr. Bennet's visit, and determining when they should ask him to dinner.

Assignment 8

Read Chapters 1 & 2 of *Pride and Prejudice*, then answer the following questions.

1. Describe the characters of Mr and Mrs Bennet. Use quotes from the text to support your answer.
2. What is Mrs Bennet's goal in these chapters? Explain your answer.
3. How would you describe the relationship of Mr and Mrs Bennet? Do you consider them to be a good match? Explain your answer.
4. What do we learn about marriage in Regency England in general from this fragment. Use quotes to support your answer.
5. What is the right etiquette for women to become acquainted with men?
6. What is the position of the Bennet family in society, based on these chapters?
7. The first line of the novel is meant ironically. Explain the irony here.

The Victorian Age (1830-1900)

The nineteenth century saw England at the heights of its powers. Never before had its economic and military strength been so impressive, and never before had the country played such a prominent role in world affairs. Britannia truly ruled the waves, and London was the proud capital of an empire where the sun never set, ruled over by a woman who was to give her name to one of the greatest periods in British history: the Victorian Age. When she came to the throne in 1837 she found a country where trade and industry were flourishing, and whose bankers, merchants and manufacturers saw the globe as their province. The Industrial Revolution, which had started in the later eighteenth century, had made Britain the first industrialized country in the world. New inventions such as the steam engine and the railway helped to create new chances for increased productivity, and the Victorians made full use of them. The Midlands were now the most advanced industrial area in Europe; Britain had become the 'workshop of the world'.

In view of all this it is scarcely surprising that many Englishmen were inspired with a strong sense of pride, optimism and self-confidence. They had never had it so good. Some of them, that is. For prosperity had been achieved at a cost. The Industrial Revolution had caused drastic changes in the structure of English society. It had given some ambitious, enterprising people opportunities to make a fortune; but it had also created a huge industrial proletariat, living in vast slum areas in the most miserable conditions. Industrialization had boosted the prosperity of the country as a whole, but it had also widened the gap between the rich and the poor. Many people at the time realized that the whole framework of society was in danger of collapsing if nothing was done to improve the plight of the poorer classes. The urgency of the problem led to many demands for social reform, not only from discontented workers, but also from the higher classes of society. The result was a number of Reform Bills over a period of time, dealing with a variety of subjects including child labour, a reduction of working hours, basic education and the right to vote. Even though such measures were often little more than first steps, they did bring about considerable improvements.

Politically and economically, then, the Victorian Age was a period of growth and expansion and generally the spirit of the age was one of optimism and confidence in what man could achieve. In other areas, however, new developments were more disturbing. The findings of modern Science did not always run parallel with traditional beliefs. The publication of Charles Darwin's Origin of Species in 1859 caused widespread controversy. Some people saw the theory of evolution as one more illustration of the popular idea of progress and perfectibility, but for many others it questioned the things they had always believed in: the biblical

account of the creation of the world, man's place in the universe, even the very foundations of religion itself. Evolution became the subject of countless 'angel-or-ape' disputes, and for many Victorians it meant doubt and anxiety, uncertainty and pessimism.

Most of the developments sketched above are reflected in the literature of the time. The nineteenth century is the age of the novel. Audiences were larger than ever before, partly due to improved education but especially to the instalment system, in which novels appeared in cheap weekly or monthly parts before being published complete. A host of major and minor novelists set out to satisfy the tastes of the middle classes who now formed the backbone of society; among them were Dickens and the Brontë sisters, whose work is discussed in detail in the following chapters.

In their descriptions of contemporary society, most authors show at least an awareness of the social problems of the day. Dickens in particular had a genuine concern for the poorer classes, and in his early novels he consciously uses his powers as a novelist to show the need for social reform.

In poetry, the spirit of the Romantics lingered on, but without the intensity and power of earlier poets like Wordsworth and Keats. All too often poetry became little more than a pleasant way of escaping the realities of everyday life. But here, too, one occasionally finds a more profound note, a struggle between faith and doubt, hope and disillusion, which shows that what is now often called the Victorian crisis in thought had not gone unnoticed.

Queen Victoria died in 1901, and her death marked the end of an era. The world had changed; other countries had emerged as powerful economic and military rivals. The glorious days of English supremacy in the world were coming to an end. Few people realized it at the time, and those who said so were not believed. It took a world war to bring their message home.

Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens was born in Portsmouth, where his father was a clerk in the Navy Pay Office. John Dickens was a friendly, hard-working man, but totally unable to live within his income. Later, in his partly autobiographical novel David Copperfield, Dickens was to present him in the figure of Mr Micawber, a kind but irresponsible optimist, who, in spite of the fact that he is always short of money, remains confident that 'something will turn up'.

By the time Charles was twelve, the family had moved to London. His father's spending habits had once more got him into trouble, and he was arrested for debts and taken to the Marshalsea Prison. It was decided that in order to bring in some money Charles should leave school and go to work at Warren's Blacking Factory, where his job was pasting labels on bottles at six shillings a week. Even though this period lasted only for a couple of months, it was of tremendous importance. The experiences in the blacking warehouse, and the deep sense of shame they inspired, were to haunt Dickens for the rest of his life.

When his father inherited enough money to pay his debts and was released from prison, Charles left the blacking factory. After a job as a clerk at a lawyer's office he became a parliamentary reporter and occasionally wrote articles and stories for various papers. His first great success as a novelist came with *The Pickwick Papers*. It was published in cheap monthly parts, a method that brought him a large audience among all social classes, and one he was to use for the greater part of his later works.

With new chapters of Pickwick still appearing in print, Dickens started upon *Oliver Twist*, the first of his attacks on social wrongs in early Victorian England. The book established his reputation as asocial reformer, and made him the most popular novelist of his days.

During the years that followed Dickens produced an impressive number of books, including *Nicholas Nickleby, A Christmas Carol, David Copperfield, Hard Times, Great Expectations* and many others. He started giving highly successful public readings from his own works, combining his talents as a writer and as an actor. In the course of the eighteen sixties his health began to give way under the pressure of his work. His last novel, The Mystery of Edwin Drood remained unfinished; on June 8, 1870, he suffered a stroke and died the following day. He was buried in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.

Assignment 9

Dickens is known to have discussed the problems of the poor in his work.

1. Which other novelists (English or other, older or more modern) do you know also deal with the problems of the weak in society in their work?
2. Which novels do you know deal with the social problems of their time?
3. Which other formats (film, music, TV series, etc) comment on the social problems of their time?
4. Do you think novelists or other artists who deal with social problems in their work, can make a difference? Explain.

CHARLES DICKENS, from: *Oliver Twist*

Among other public buildings in a certain town, there is one anciently common to most towns°, great or small, to wit, a workhouse°; and in this workhouse, Oliver Twist was born. For a long time after he was ushered into° this world of sorrow and trouble, it remained a matter of considerable doubt whether the child would live at all. For some time he lay gasping° on a little flock mattress, rather unequally poised between this world and the next, the balance being decidedly in favour of the latter°. There being nobody by but a pauper old woman, who was rendered rather misty by an unwonted allowance of beer°, and a parish surgeon° who did such matters by contract, Oliver and Nature fought out the point between them. The result was that, after a few struggles, Oliver breathed, sneezed°, and set up a loud cry.

As Oliver gave this first proof of the free and proper action of his lungs, the patchwork coverlet° which was carelessly flung over the iron bedstead rustled; the pale face of a young woman was raised feebly° from the pillow and a faint voice imperfectly articulated the words, 'Let me see the child, and die.'

The surgeon had been sitting with his face turned towards the fire, giving the palms of his hands a warm and a rub alternatively°. As the young woman spoke, he rose and said with more kindness than might have been expected of him:

'Oh, you must not talk about dying yet.'

'Lor bless her heart, no!' interposed the nurse, hastily depositing in her pocket a green glass bottle, the contents of which she had been tasting in a corner with evident satisfaction°. 'Lor bless her dear heart, when she has lived as long as I have, sir, and had thirteen children of her own, and all on 'em dead except two, and them in the wurkus° with me, she'll know better than to take on° in that way, bless her dear heart! Think what is to be a mother, there's a dear young lamb, do.'

Apparently this consolatory perspective of a mother's prospects failed in producing its due effect°. The patient shook her head, and stretched out her hand towards the child. The surgeon deposited it in her arms. She imprinted her cold white lips passionately on its forehead, passed her hands over her face, gazed wildly round, shuddered°, fell back – and died. They chafed° her breast, hands and temples°, but the blood had stopped forever.

'It's all over, Mrs Thingummy!' said the surgeon at last.

'Ah, poor dear, so it is!' said the nurse, picking up the cork of the green bottle, which had fallen out on the pillow as she stooped° to take up the child. 'Poor dear!'

The medical gentleman walked away to dinner and the nurse, having once more applied herself to the green bottle, sat down on a low chair before the fire and proceeded to dress the infant.

What an excellent example of the power of dress young Oliver Twist! Wrapped up in the blanket°, he might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar, but now that he was enveloped in the old calico° robes which had grown yellow in the same service, he fell into his place at once – a parish child – the orphan° of a workhouse – the humble, half-starved drudge°, despised° by all, and pitied by none.

Oliver cried lustily. If he could have known that he was an orphan, left to the tender mercies of churchwardens and overseers°, perhaps he would have cried louder.

For the next eight or ten months, Oliver was the victim of a systematic course of treachery and deception°. The parish authorities magnanimously and humanely resolved° that Oliver should be 'farmed', or, in other words, that he should be despatched° to a branch-workhouse° some three miles off, where twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders against the poor-laws° rolled about the floor all day, without the inconvenience° of too much food or too much clothing, under the parental superintendence° of an elderly female, who received the culprits° at and for the consideration° of sevenpence-halfpenny per small head° per week. Sevenpence-

dat van oudsher ... te vinden is
namelijk een werkhuis
was binnengeleid
naar adem snakkend
wankelend op de rand van deze wereld en de volgende, waarbij de balans duidelijk naar de laatstgenoemde dreigde door te slaan
een meer dan gewone hoeveelheid bier
plaatselijke dokter
nieste
lappendeken
met moeite
waarbij hij zich de handpalmen beurtelings warmde en wreef
met kennelijk welbehagen
werkhuis
praten
Blijkbaar had dit troostrijke vooruitzicht van wat haar als moeder te wachten stond niet de gewenste uitwerking
huiverde
wreven slapen
zich bukte
in de deken gewikkeld
katoenen
weeskind
halfverhongerde sloeber verachte
overgelaten aan de tedere zorgen van kerkvoogden en werkmeesters
het slachtoffer van stelselmatig verraad en bedrog besloten op grootmoedige en menslievende wijze gestuurd filiaal van het werkhuis jeugdige overtreders van de armenwetten
ongemak
moederlijk toezicht schuldigen
tegen beloning van per kleine man

'Miseries of London – The Thames at Wapping', by Thomas Rowlandson. Dickens's imagination was often caught by grotesque scenes of low life rather than by the more official pictures of Victorian respectability.

halfpenny's worth per week is a good round diet for a child; a great deal may be got for sevenpence-halfpenny, quite enough to overload its stomach° and make it uncomfortable. The elderly female was a woman of wisdom and experience; she knew what was good for children, and she had a very accurate perception° of what was good for herself. So, she appropriated° the greater part of the weekly stipend° to her own use, and consigned the rising parochial generation to an even shorter allowance° than was originally provided for them. Thereby finding in the lowest depth a deeper still, and proving herself° a very great experimental philosopher.

de maag van streek te brengen

had zeer goed in de gaten

eigende zich toe toelage
zette de opgroeiende armlastige generatie op een nog kleiner rantsoen
Door onder de laagste bodem een nog lagere te ontdekken bewees ze dat ze ... was

Everybody knows the story of another experimental philosopher who had a great theory about a horse being able to live without eating, and who demonstrated it so well that he got his own horse down to a straw a day°, and would unquestionably have rendered him a very spirited and rampacious° animal on nothing at all if he had not died, four-and-twenty hours before he was to have had his first comfortable bait of air°. Unfortunately for the experimental philosophy of the female to whose protecting care Oliver Twist was delivered over, a similar result usually attended the operation of *her* system°, for at the very moment when a child had contrived° to exist upon the smallest possible portion of the weakest possible food, it did perversely happen in eight and a half cases out of ten, either that it sickened from want and cold, or fell into the fire from neglect°, or got half-smothered° by accident; in any one of which cases the miserable little being was usually summoned into another world°, and there gathered to the fathers° it had never known in this.

dat hij zijn eigen paard nog maar één strohalm per dag gaf

pittig en onstuimig

smakelijk hapje lucht

ging háár systeem gewoonlijk met een soortgelijk resultaat gepaard erin was geslaagd

door onachtzaamheid half gesmoord werd
tot een andere wereld werd geroepen

tot de vaderen werd vergaderd

It cannot be expected that this system of farming would produce any very extraordinary or luxurious crop°. Oliver Twist's ninth birthday found him a pale thin child, somewhat diminutive in stature°, and decidedly small in circumference°. But nature or inheritance had implanted a good sturdy spirit° in Oliver's breast. It had plenty of room to expand°, thanks to the spare diet° of the establishment, and perhaps to this circumstance may be attributed his having any ninth birthday at all. Be this as it may, however, it was his ninth birthday, and he was keeping it in the coal-cellar with a select party of two other young gentlemen, who, after participating with him in a sound thrashing°, had been locked up for atrociously presuming to be hungry°, when Mrs Mann, the good lady of the house, was unexpectedly startled by the apparition° of Mr Bumble, the beadle°.

'Goodness gracious! Is that you, Mr Bumble, sir?' said Mrs Mann, in well-affected ecstacies of joy°.

'Mrs Mann,' said the beadle, taking out a leathern pocket-book, 'Lead the way in, for I come on business, and have something to say. The child that was half-baptized, Oliver Twist, is nine year old to-day.'

'Bless him!' interposed° Mrs Mann, inflaming her left eye with the corner of her apron°.

'Oliver being now too old to remain here, the board have determined° to have him back into the house. I have come out myself to take him there. So let me see him at once.'

'I'll fetch him directly,' said Mrs Mann, leaving the room for that purpose, and Oliver was presently led in by his benevolent protectress°.

'Make a bow to the gentleman, Oliver,' said Mrs Mann.

'Will you go along with me, Oliver?' said Mr Bumble, in a majestic voice.

With the little brown-cloth parish cap on his head, Oliver was then led away by Mr Bumble from the wretched° home where one kind word or look had never lighted the gloom of his infant years°. Mr Bumble walked on with long strides; little Oliver trotted° beside him, inquiring at the end of every quarter of a mile whether they were 'nearly there'.

Oliver had not been within the walls of the workhouse a quarter of an hour when Mr Bumble informed him that the board° had said he was to appear before it forthwith°.

Not having a very clearly defined notion° of what a live board was, Oliver was not quite certain whether he ought to laugh or cry. He had no time to think about the matter, however, for Mr Bumble gave him a tap on the head, with his cane°, to make him lively, and bidding him follow, conducted him into a large white-washed room, where eight or ten fat gentlemen were sitting round a table. At the top of the table, seated in an arm-chair rather higher than the rest, was a particularly fat gentleman with a very round, red face.

'Bow to the board,' said Bumble. Oliver brushed away two or three tears and, seeing no board but the table, fortunately bowed to that.

'What's your name, boy?' said the gentleman in the high chair.

Oliver was frightened at the sight of so many gentlemen, which made him tremble, and the beadle gave him another tap behind, which made him cry. These two causes made him answer in a very low and hesitating voice°, whereupon a gentleman in a white waistcoat said he was a fool. Which was a capital way of putting him quite at ease°.

'Boy,' said the gentleman in the high chair, 'listen to me. You know you're an orphan, I suppose?'

'What's that, sir?' inquired poor Oliver.

'The boy *is* a fool – I thought he was,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat.

'Hush!' said the gentleman who had spoken first. 'You know you've got no father or mother, and that you were brought up by the parish, don't you?'

'Yes, sir,' replied Oliver, weeping bitterly.

'I hope you say your prayers every night,' said another gentleman in a gruff voice°, 'and pray for the people who feed you, and take care of you – like a Christian.'

'Well! You have come here to be educated, and taught a useful trade°,' said the red-faced gentleman in the high chair.

'So you'll begin to pick oakum° to-morrow morning at six o'clock,' added the surly° one in the white waistcoat.

For the combination of both these blessings in the one simple process of picking oakum, Oliver bowed low by the direction° of the beadle, and was then hurried away to a

een buitengewone of overvloedige oogst zou opleveren
onder de maat in postuur
uitgesproken krap van omvang
wakkere geest uit te dijen

het spaarzame dieet

na met hem deelgenoot te zijn geweest in een flink pak slaag omdat zij de euvele moed hadden gehad te beweren dat ze honger hadden
de verschijning pedel

in een goedgespeeld betoon van vreugde

viel in; terwijl ze haar linkeroog met de punt van haar schort rood wreef
heeft het bestuur besloten

welwillende beschermvrouwe

ellendig

nooit licht had gebracht in de duisternis van zijn kinderjaren draafde

bestuur (ook: plank) onmiddellijk

duidelijk omlijnd idee

wandelstok

zachtjes en aarzelend

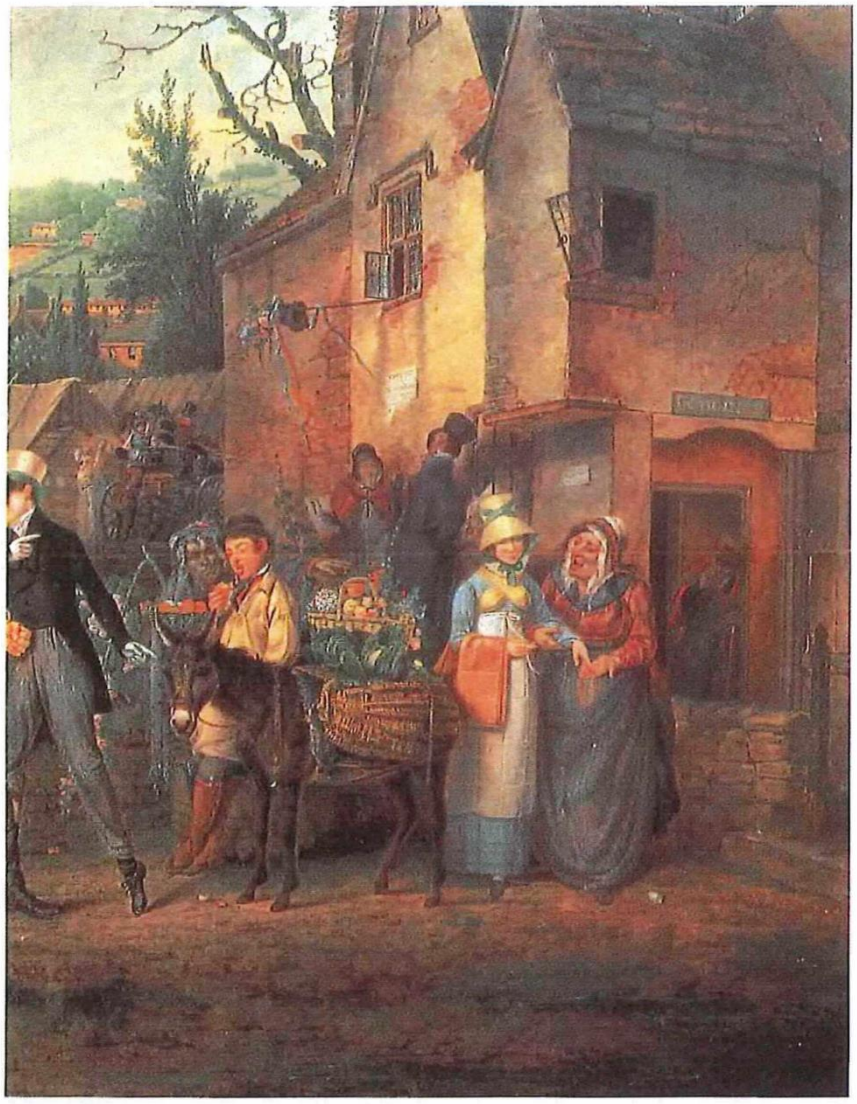
wat een uitstekende manier was om hem op zijn gemak te stellen

op barse toon

om een nuttig vak te leren

touw pluizen norse

op aanwijzing van



Samuel Colman's 'St. James's Fair', of which this is only a detail, forms a visual counterpart to Dickens's methods as a novelist. Like Colman, Dickens does not offer in-depth studies; instead he prefers a broad canvas bristling with activity, showing large numbers of characters, all involved in different actions, many things going on at the same time, and a wealth of unexpected detail.

large ward°, where, on a rough, hard bed, he sobbed himself to sleep. What a noble illustration of the tender laws° of England! They let the paupers go to sleep!

Poor Oliver! He little thought, as he lay sleeping in happy unconsciousness of all around him, that the board had that very day arrived at a decision which would exercise the most material influence over all his future fortunes°. But they had. And this was it:

The members of the board were very sage, deep°, philosophical men, and when they came to turn their attention to the workhouse, they found out at once what ordinary folks would never have discovered – the poor people liked it! It was a regular place of public entertainment° for the poorer classes, a tavern° where there was nothing to pay, a public breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper all the year round, a brick and mortar elysium° where it was all play and no work. 'Oho!' said the board, looking very knowing, 'we are the fellows to set this to rights; we'll stop it all, in no time.' So, they established the rule that all poor people should have the alternative (for they would compel° nobody, not they) of being starved° by a gradual process in the house, or by a quick one out of it. With this view, they contracted with the water-works to lay on an unlimited supply of water°; and with a corn-factor° to supply periodically small quantities of oatmeal°, and issued three meals of thin gruel° a day, with an onion twice a week, and half a roll° on Sundays. They made a great many other wise and humane regulations, having reference to the ladies, which it is not necessary to repeat, kindly

zaal

de meedogende wetten

dat van bijzonder grote invloed zou zijn op zijn toekomstig lot

wijze, diepzinnige

een regelrecht openbaar vermaakscentrum herberg

een bakstenen hemel op aarde

dwingen verhongeren

kwamen ze overeen met de waterleiding om te zorgen voor een onbeperkte aanvoer van water; en met een graanhandelaar om op gezette tijden kleine hoeveelheden havermeel te leveren dunne pap broodje

undertook to divorce poor married people, and, instead of compelling a man to support his family°, as they had theretofore done, took his family away from him, and made him a bachelor! There is no saying how many applicants for relief, under these last two heads, might have started up° in all classes of society, if it had not been coupled with the workhouse, but the board were long-headed° men, and had provided for this difficulty. The relief was inseparable° from the workhouse and the gruel, and that frightened people.

te dwingen zijn gezin te onderhouden

Het valt niet te zeggen hoeveel gegadigden voor hulp, voor wat betreft deze laatste twee punten, er niet naar voren zouden zijn gekomen

schrandere

viel niet te scheiden van

For the first six months after Oliver Twist was removed, the system was in full operation. It was rather expensive at first, in consequence of the increase in the undertaker's bill°, and the necessity of taking in the clothes of all the paupers after a week or two's gruel. But the number of workhouse inmates got thin as well as the paupers, and the board were in ecstacies°.

als gevolg van het oplopen van de rekening van de begrafenisondernemer

dol van vreugde

The room in which the boys were fed, was a large stone hall, with a copper° at one end, out of which the master, dressed in an apron for the purpose, ladled° gruel at meal-times. Of this festive composition each boy had one porringer°, and no more. The bowls never wanting washing. The boys polished them with their spoons till they shone again; and when they had performed this operation, they would sit staring at the copper, with such eager eyes, as if they could have devoured the very bricks° of which it was composed. Boys have generally excellent appetites°. Oliver Twist and his companions suffered the tortures of slow starvation° for three months; at last they got so voracious and wild with hunger° that one boy, who was tall for his age, and hadn't been used to that sort of thing (for his father had kept a small cookshop), hinted darkly° to his companions that unless he had another basin of gruel *per diem*, he was afraid he might some night happen to eat the boy who slept next to him, who happened to be a weakly youth of tender age. He had a wild, hungry eye, and they implicitly° believed him. A council was held, lots were cast° who should walk up to the master after supper that evening and ask for more; and it fell to Oliver Twist.

ingemetselde koperen ketel

opschepte van dit feestelijk brouwsel

... één kommetje

zelfs de bakstenen ... hadden willen verslinden

eetlust de kwellingen van een langzame hongerdood

hadden ze zo'n razende honger

duistere toespelingen maakte

blindelings

er werd beraadslaagd en geloot

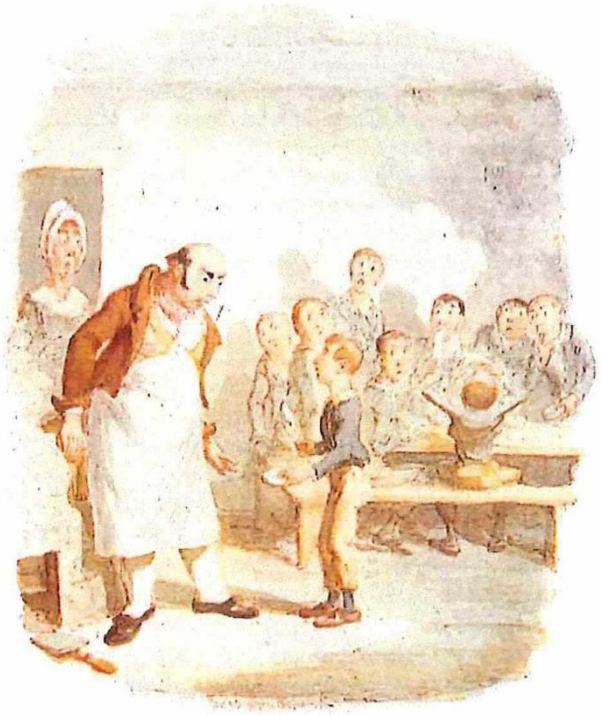
The evening arrived, the boys took their places. The master, in his cook's uniform, stationed himself at the copper. The gruel was served; the gruel disappeared. The boys whispered to each other, and winked° at Oliver, while his next neighbours nudged° him. Child as he was, he was desperate° with hunger and reckless° with misery. He rose from the table and, advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand, said, somewhat alarmed at his own temerity°:

'Please, sir, I want some more.'

wierpen blikken aanstootten

wanhopig roekeloos

vermetelheid



'Oliver asking for more', one of the famous illustrations by George Cruickshank.

The master was a fat, healthy man, but he turned very pale. He gazed in stupefied astonishment° on the small rebel for some seconds and then clung for support° to the copper. The boys were paralysed with fear.

staarde in stomme verbazing
zocht steun tegen

'What!' said the master at length, in a faint voice.

'Please, sir,' replied Oliver. 'I want some more.'

The master aimed a blow° at Oliver's head with the ladle° and shrieked aloud for the beadle.

gaf een klap opscheplepel

The board were sitting in solemn conclave°, when Mr Bumble rushed into the room in great excitement and, addressing the gentleman in the high chair, said.

was in plechtige zitting bijeen

'Mr Limbkins, I beg your pardon, sir! Oliver Twist has asked for more!'

There was a general start°. Horror was depicted on every countenance°.

algemene opschudding
afschuw stond op ieder gezicht te lezen

'For *more*!' said Mr Limbkins. 'Compose yourself°, Bumble, and answer me distinctly. Do I understand that he asked for more, after he had eaten the supper allotted by the dietary°?'

bedaar

hem toebedeeld door de diëtist

'He did, sir,' replied Bumble.

'That boy will be hung°,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat°. 'I know that boy will be hung.'

groeit op voor de galg vest

Nobody controverted° the prophetic gentleman's opinion. An animated discussion took place. Oliver was ordered into instant confinement°, and a bill° was next morning pasted° on the outside of the gate, offering a reward of five pounds to anybody who would take Oliver Twist off the hands of the parish. In other words, five pounds and Oliver Twist were offered to any man or woman who wanted an apprentice° to any trade, business or calling.

sprak tegen
werd onmiddellijk opgesloten biljet
geplakt

leerjongen

'I never was more convinced of anything in my life,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat, as he knocked at the gate and read the bill next morning, 'I never was more convinced of anything in my life than I am that that boy will come to be hung.'

Assignment 10

Answer the following questions on *Oliver Twist*.

1. 'Irony' may be defined as 'expressing your meaning by stating the opposite of what you really want to say, for humorous effect or to make the statement more forceful'. Irony is one of the most striking features of Dickens's style, and this is especially clear in this extract. For example, Mrs Mann is called Oliver's 'benevolent protectress', but the context proves that she does not protect the boys at all, to say the least. Similarly, Oliver is said to be 'left to the *tender* mercies of churchwardens and overseers'. Can you find at least five other examples of this use of irony?
2. What do the gentlemen on the board look like? And what about the master who serves out the gruel? Why does Dickens stress this aspect of their appearance? What criticism is implied here?
3. Can you describe Oliver's character?
4. Is the reader is on Oliver's side? Why do you think that?

The Brontës

Next to Charles Dickens, Charlotte and Emily Brontë are the most widely read of English novelists. Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* and Emily's *Wuthering Heights* have found a place among the classics of the novel. In some respects their place in English literature is a remarkable one. Whereas with most writers the attention of the reading public is mainly focussed on their works, in the case of the Brontës it looks as if their fame is connected as much with the authors themselves as with their books. The story of their lives, so full of tragic intensity, has all the qualities of a Brontë novel, and many people have been fascinated with their background as well as with their novels.

When the Reverend Patrick Brontë settled at Haworth in 1820, he brought with him his wife and six children: Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Patrick Branwell, Emily Jane and Anne. The family's first year at the parsonage also brought the first sorrows. Mrs Brontë died in the summer of 1821. Her place was taken by her sister Elizabeth Branwell, or aunt Branwell as she came to be called, who had helped to nurse her during her last months and was to stay with the family for the rest of her life.

The Brontë children lived an isolated life. They did not mix with other children of the village, but kept to themselves. One of the villagers later remembered how 'the six little creatures used to walk out, hand in hand, towards the glorious wild moors which in after days they loved so passionately'.

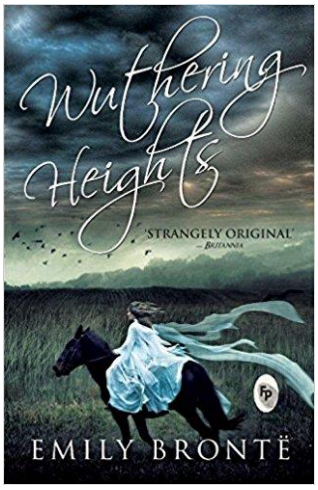
In 1824 Patrick Brontë decided it was time for his eldest daughters to receive a more formal education than he and Aunt Branwell could give them at home, and Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte and Emily, who were then between six and eleven years old, were sent to the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge. The school was largely a charitable institution; discipline was strict, teaching unfriendly and living conditions poor.

In *Jane Eyre* the school appears under the name of Lowood Orphanage and in describing Jane's miserable stay there, Charlotte clearly drew on her own experiences at Cowan Bridge. The head of the school, the Reverend Carus Wilson, believed that poor girls should constantly be reminded of the low station in life, and should be taught to endure hardships without complaining. As a result, the girls often suffered cold, hunger and fatigue. Maria Brontë had never been in strong health, and life at Cowan Bridge proved too much for her. She developed tuberculosis and was brought home only to die a few days later. Elizabeth fell ill, too, and her death came just over a month after her sister's.

The fate of his two eldest daughters left Patrick convinced that Charlotte and Emily would be better off at home, and for the next five years the four remaining Brontë children were together at the parsonage. They were often left to find their own amusements, and they spent their time wandering

across the moors, reading such books as their father's library could provide and writing little plays, poems and stories.

The year 1847 saw the publication of Charlotte's *Jane Eyre*, Emily's *Wuthering Heights* and Anne's *Agnes Grey*. Charlotte's book was an immediate success. The story of the poor governess Jane Eyre and her love for her upper class employer Mr Rochester appealed to a large audience, and left literary circles in London guessing who this mysterious author Currer Bell might be. Reactions to *Wuthering Heights* were mostly negative. The character of Heathcliff especially came as a shock to Victorian respectability. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that people began to appreciate the outstanding merits of the book, and it is now generally considered superior to anything Charlotte ever wrote.



Anne's novels were not of the same order as those of her sisters. If they are at all read today, it is because of the fame of her two sisters.

Tragedy hit the family again in 1848. Within a period a period of 10 months, Branwell, Emily and Anne died .

Charlotte, the only remaining child, died in 1855 at the age of 39. Her father Patrick Brontë died in 1861. The Brontës' parsonage in Haworth is now a museum, Charlotte's and Emily's novels are still read by many fans today and the stories have been turned into various plays, films and TV-series.

Assignment 11

Now go to page 174 in your textbooks and p. 130 in your Activity Book A to study Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Do assignments 1 upto and including 4.

NB see video in Prezi on The Victorian Period for explanation of Gothic elements.