

A Chronology of English Literature

Information below was paraphrased and synthesized from M.H. Abrams' *A Glossary of Literary Terms*

PERIOD

1. Old English—450-1066

2. Middle English—1066-1500

THE RENAISSANCE —1500-1660

3. Elizabethan Age—1558-1603

4. Jacobean Age—1603-1625

NEO-CLASSICAL PERIOD—1660-1785

The neo-classical writers believe that the writers of ancient Greece and Rome established the models of literature. Literature is an art that requires talent but must be practiced and developed. Style had to practice correct form and *decorum* that follow the rules of each genre.

5. The Restoration—1660-1700

MAJOR AUTHORS

1. Unknown—*Beowulf*

2. Marie de France—*Lais*
Chretien de Troyes—*Erec et Enide*
Chaucer—*Canterbury Tales*

3. Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe, Sir Francis Bacon, Ben Jonson

4. John Donne. Authors in the group above continue to write in the Jacobean Age.

5. John Dryden, William Wycherley, William Congreve, the satirist Samuel Butler, the philosopher John Locke

CHARACTERISTICS AND TRAITS

1. The literature of the early centuries of this period was in the oral tradition. After the Anglo-Saxon conversion to Christianity, a written literature began to develop. *Beowulf* was the first text written in the Anglo vernacular

2. These pieces were mostly written in French because they were written by the Norman invaders. Later in this period English and Scottish writers began to write in the English vernacular.

3. This is the period of the reign of Elizabeth I, a period of rapid development in trade and international interaction. It is from this point forward until the early 20th century that England establishes itself as a world power.

4. Shakespeare deals with international relations in some of his plays. Donne deals with religious themes while referencing seafaring and travel in the backdrop of some of his pieces.

5. *Restoration Comedy* is characterized as a comedy of manners. Literature focuses on urbanity and wit of life centering on the court in contrast with the seriousness of puritan literature.

PERIOD

6. The Augustan Age—1700-1745
7. Age of Sensibility—1744-1785
8. Romantic Period—1785-1832

9. Victorian Period—1832-1901

Period begins with the passage of the first Reform Bill in 1832 and ends with Queen Victoria's death. Social, moral and sexual values are rooted in Puritanism and therefore promote a degree of repression.

MAJOR AUTHORS

6. Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, Joseph Addison
7. Samuel Johnson, Edmund Burke, Edward Gibbon, James Boswell
8. William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Burns, William Blake, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelly, John Keats, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelly, Jane Austen, Sir Walter Scott, Charlotte Bronte, William Godwin, Anne Radcliff.
9. Alfred, Lord Tennyson; Robert Browning; Elizabeth Barrett Browning; Christina Rossetti; Mathew Arnold; Thomas Carlyle; John Ruskin; Charlotte and Emily Bronte; Charles Dickens; William Makepeace Thackeray; George Eliot; Thomas Hardy.

CHARACTERISTICS AND TRAITS

6. Referenced the Roman Augustan writers and their concerns with moderation and decorum. Focus is on social concerns.
7. Authors represent neo-classicist writers and the worldview of the Enlightenment. A turn from neo-classic "correctness" and its focus on judgment and restraint to a focus on instinct and feeling begins to occur, anticipating Romanticism.
8. Writers of the Romantic period reacted against the rigid dictates of form espoused by the neo-classicists. The Romantic writers favored innovation over traditionalism in subject, form, and style. William Wordsworth wrote in the preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* that poets should write about subjects from "common life" in "a selection of language really used by men. He thus rejects the formal poetic language of the classicists. The Romanticists endeavor to write about personal feelings, not simply about the actions of state in a formal matter.
9. Literature is imaginative or didactic. It deals with social, economic, religious, or intellectual issues of the era. Time period is one of rapid and change. Period is characterized by its conflicts and anxieties as England Industrializes and becomes a global power.

10. Edwardian Age—1901-1914

11. Modern Period—1914-1945

10. William Butler Yeats, Rudyard Kipling, George Bernard Shaw, Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, Ford Maddox Ford, HG Wells, Henry James, E.M. Forester

11. Poets—WB Yeats, Wilfred Owen, T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, Robert Graves, Dylan Thomas, Seamus Heaney
Novelists—Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster, Aldous Huxley, Graham Greene, Doris Lessing
Dramatists—GB Shaw, Noel Coward, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter

10. The Literature of this period concerns itself with global issues, human rights, and issues of social class in a complex industrialized society that is heading towards WWI.

11. Modernist writers concern themselves with a world that has been irrevocably upended by social transitions predicated mainly by WWI. The war suggests a great sense of meaninglessness in the face of mass slaughter for the sake of few yards of land in No Man's Land. Traditional social structures like patriotism, morality, religion, and concepts of self no longer are the safe harbors that they were. These writers break from tradition both in subject as well as style. Many writers like Eliot, Woolf, and Joyce consciously violated traditional form to create new art. They violated conventional social discourse to challenge the status quo.

