

English Poetry

Textbook : *English Poetry (1) The
Sixteenth Century*

English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century

Sixteenth Century England witnessed the rise of the • **Renaissance**, that is, a rebirth of learning. It was marked by a growing interest on the part of the scholars in the language and literature of the classical worlds of the Greece and Rome. Originally, the interest in the ancients goes back to the Middle Ages in the Scholars' pursuits of Latin Studies. But what did happen in the **Renaissance** was a shift of emphasis of classical studies from the Roman to the Greek. As a result, the predominating vision of life moved more towards the **Hellenistic** than the Latin studies. In the new **Hellenistic** spirit Man was seen as a creature capable of perfection to whom anything was possible.

The Renaissance

However , the **Renaissance** came to England late on the century and it coincided with the **Reformation** (a great religious movement against certain abuses in the Roman Catholic church ending in the formation of Protestant churches).

The sixteenth century witnessed enormous changes in both language and literature . Poetry in the Renaissance received a great share of emphasis in the new zeal for learning . Accordingly , there were great things to achieve in the realms of **lyric , songs , blank verse and sonnet** .

Types of Poetry

1. **The Lyric** : is a poem which expresses the subjective feelings and thoughts of a person . Such kind of poems is usually written for singing . The lyric in all its forms (**song , madrigal, and sonnet**) was the finest and most typical of the Renaissance poetry . It was employed by the courtly poets of the 16th century mainly by **Sir Thomas Wyatt , Henry Howard ,etc..** They borrowed , imitated and translated from Italian and French poets as well as from one another. •

Forms of lyrical poetry

- **A. Song** : The sixteenth century poets wrote their lyrics mainly to be sung with the voice and to the harp , lute or other musical instruments .So , the 16th century poetry is melodious in general so that it could be easily sung or put to music.

b. Madrigal

A song for several singers usually without musical instruments. Originally , it was a pastoral song , and it became immensely popular in the 16th century.

c. Sonnet

It was the most popular form of the lyric with the Elizabethans. It is a poem of fourteen lines with a formal rhyme . It was originally used by the two Italian masters , Dante and Petrarch in the 13th century and was reintroduced by Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard , and soon it became fashionable in Renaissance poetry. The sonnet was used to write love poetry to an idealized woman , and gradually it was used for narrative poetry whose themes were usually pursuing the beloved , losing , finding and celebrating her beauty.

2. Blank Verse

Poetry that has a regular rhythm , usually with ten syllables and five stresses in each line , but which does not rhyme .It was used by the poet –dramatists of the Elizabethan age. •

Predominant Themes

1. **Courtly love** : in Renaissance poetry ,love was treated as a kind of god to be worshipped and served. The service of love and beloved was deemed to have an educative effect. Thus , poetry expressed the courtly sentiment of the idealized love , the delight and the melancholy of love . The poet is a lover who is totally devoted to his lady .He idealizes her, accepts her rejection and rebukes lovingly. So, poetry was full of the lover's suffering, sighs and tears. The beloved is usually an arrogant mistress who rules with tyranny over the lover. She is extremely beautiful , and the poet would dwell on her exceptional charm and beauty. •

2. Time

The 16th century poets made a connection between the beauty of the beloved and the contrary effect of time on her beauty. This theme usually takes the form of an argument in which the poet tries to convince his beloved to make use of time and youth before she loses them . This theme is known as **Carpe diem** which means **seize the day**.

3.The Effect of Time on the Poet's Personal experiences

The 16th century was a period of insecurity and violent political changes . Thus, people in general and poets in particular felt insecure and this made them divide into two groups :

- A. Those who chose to live for the moment and enjoy their lives before death.
- B. Those who risked their lives by attacking openly the political order , by using **Satire and Allegory**.

Poetic Devices

1. Natural elements to express the theme of life and love. •
2. Metaphor •
3. Pastoral convention : According to this device the poet •
implicitly dispraises town life by handling it in contrast with
the life of the country side
4. Allegory : a poetic device in which one thing is represented •
in the guise of another.
5. •
Simile