

# **Module: Literary Texts**

**Level : 2<sup>nd</sup> year**

**Teacher: Dr. Nassima Amirouche**

## **Lecture 4:**

### **1. ELIZABETHAN POETRY**

One of the literary historians called Elizabethan age as a nest of singing birds about the composition of poetry in this period. There were many poets who contributed to develop this form of literature and it reached the peak of its development. The poets not only adopted and innovated the forms of poetry and wrote on the varied themes. The poetry of Elizabethan era mirrors the spirit of Age. It reflects the spirit of conquest and self-glorification, humanism and vigorous imagination, emotional depth and passionate intensity.

The poetry of his period is remarkable for the spirit of independence. The poets refused to follow set rules of poetic composition. Consequently, new poetic devices and new linguistic modes developed. All varieties of poetic forms like lyric, elegy, ode, sonnet etc. were successfully attempted. Thematically, the following main divisions of poetry existed during this period:

#### **1.1 Love Poetry**

The love poetry is characterized by romance, imagination and youthful vigour, Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, Spenser's *Amoretti*, Daniel's *Delia*, Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and his sonnets are noticeable love poems of this period.

#### **1.2 Patriotic Poetry**

The ardent note of patriotism is the distinctive characteristic of Elizabethan poetry. Warner's *Abbicen's England*, Daniel's *Civil Wars of York and Lancaster*, Drayton's *The Barons War* and *The Ballad of Agincourt* are some memorable patriotic poems.

#### **1.3 Philosophical Poetry**

Elizabethan age was a period both of action and reflection. Action found its superb expression in contemporary drama. People thought inwardly. The tragedies of Shakespeare represent this aspect of national life. Brooke's poems, *On Human Learning*, *On Wars*, *On Monarchy*, and *On Religion* have philosophical leanings.

#### **1.4 Satirical Poetry**

It came into existence after the decline of the spirit of adventure and exploration, of youthful gaiety and imaginative vigour towards the end of Elizabeth's reign. Donne's *Satires* and Drummond's *Sonnets* are some fine examples of this type of poetry. In the reign of

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James I life's gaiety was lost. A harsh cynical realism succeeded. Poetry had grown self-conscious. Poetry had crept under the shadow of the approaching civil conflicts.

The poetry of this age is original. The early classical and Italian influences were completely absorbed and the poetry of this period depicts the typical British character and temperament.

## 1.2 Poets of the Age

Wyatt and Surrey traveled widely in Italy. They brought to England the Italian and classic influence. They modeled their poetry on Italian pattern. They are the first harbingers of the Renaissance in English poetry. They are the first modern poets. The book that contains their poems is Songs and Sonnets, known as the *Tottel's Miscellany*. The brief introduction of the major poets of the age is necessary to be discussed along with their remarkable works.

### I. Sir Thomas Wyatt.

Wyatt brought to English poetry grace, harmony and nobility. He followed the Italian models and attempted a great variety of metrical experiment – songs, sonnets, madrigals and elegies. He was the first poet, who introduced sonnet, which was a favorite poetical form in England with Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Arnold and many others. He first of all introduced personal or autobiographical note in English poetry. Wyatt's true ability as a poet is revealed not by the sonnets but by a number of lyrics and songs that he composed.

*The heart and service to you proffer'd  
With right good will full honestly,  
Refuse it not, since it is offer'd,  
But take it to you gently.*

*And though it be a small present,  
Yet good, consider graciously  
The thought, the mind, and the intent  
Of him that loves you faithfully.*

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## II. Earl of Surrey

Surrey is a disciple of Wyatt rather than an independent poetical force. His sonnets are more effective than those of Wyatt. The former followed the Petrarchan pattern of sonnet, whereas the latter modified it and made it typical English. The Petrarchan form is perhaps more impressive, the modified English form the more expressive.

*O happy dames, that may embrace  
The fruit of your delight,  
Help to bewail the woeful case  
And eke the heavy plight  
Of me, that wanted to rejoice  
The fortune of my pleasant choice;  
Good ladies, help to fill my mourning voice.*

## III Sir Philip Sidney

Sidney was the most celebrated literary figure before Spenser and Shakespeare. As a man of letters he is remembered for *Arcadia* (a romance), *Apology For Poetry* (a collection of critical and literary principles) and *Astrophel and Stella* (a collection of sonnets). These 108 love sonnets are the first direct expressions of personal feelings and experience in English poetry. He analyses the sequence of his feelings with a vividness and minuteness. His sonnets owe much to Petrarch and Ronsard in tone and style.

## V. Edmund Spenser

Edmund Spenser is rightly called the poet's poet because all great poets of England have been indebted to him. C. Rickett remarks, —Spenser is at once the child of the Renaissance and the Reformation. On one side we may regard him with Milton as —the sage and serious Spenser, on the other he is the humanist, alive to the finger tips with the sensuous beauty of the Southern romance. Spenser's main poetical works are:

- The Shepherd's Calendar (1579), two eclogues, March and December, are prescribed in your syllabus for detailed study.
- Amoretti (1595), a collection of eighty eight Petrarchan sonnets

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- Epithalamion (1559), a magnificent ode written on the occasion of his marriage with Elizabeth Boyle
- Prothalamion (1596), an ode on marriage
- Astrophel (1596), an elegy on the death of Sir Philip Sidney
- Four Hymns (1576) written to glorify love and honour
- His epic, *The Faerie Queen* (1589 – 90).

### **Amoretti I: Happy ye leaves when as those lilly hands**

*Happy ye leaves when as those lilly hands,  
Which hold my life in their dead doing might  
Shall handle you and hold in loves soft bands,  
Lyke captives trembling at the victors sight.  
And happy lines, on which with starry light,  
Those laming eyes will deigne sometimes to look  
And reade the sorrowes of my dying spright,  
Written with teares in harts close bleeding book.  
And happy rymes bath'd in the sacred brooke,  
Of Helicon whence she derived is,  
When ye behold that Angels blessed looke,  
My soules long lacked foode, my heavens blis.  
Leaves, lines, and rymes, seeke her to please alone,  
Whom if ye please, I care for other none.*