

# LESSON 1

## Anglo-Saxon Epic Poetry

English literature may be said to begin with *Beowulf*, a poem written over twelve hundred years ago. Composed around 700, it existed for future ages in only one original manuscript, made 300 years later. The poem presents the legendary history of the Anglo-Saxons, and its author would have been descended from the original tribes of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes who invaded Britain from the European continent in the fifth century. Those people spoke the Germanic language in which the poem is written.

Like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of ancient Greece, *Beowulf* is an epic. An epic is a long narrative poem that records, in grave and stately language, the exploits of a larger-than-life hero who usually embodies national ideals. This great Anglo-Saxon epic described the achievements of their courageous ancestor, Beowulf, "the strongest man who ever lived." Beowulf had lived several hundred years earlier, at a time before the Germanic tribes had emigrated from Europe. Thus, the poem is set on the European mainland, in what is modern Denmark and Sweden.

In the primitive and harsh environment of Beowulf's world, the hero occupied a place of great importance, for his qualities of strength and wisdom and courage might save the people from the evils that threatened them. Because of the Anglo-Saxons' constant intertribal wars, life in this period was brief and strife-ridden. As a result, the Anglo-Saxons believed in the inevitability of fate (or what they called *word*) as the ruling force in human destiny and in the certainty of death. The sense of fatal doom that pervaded the Anglo-Saxon world is reflected in the somber tone of *Beowulf*.

Despite life's hardships and transience, however, the Anglo-Saxon hero could attain some degree of immortality through fame—by being remembered by others for his sense of honor and his heroic deeds. Loyalty to one's lord was an important Anglo-Saxon ideal, and courage and bravery were highly valued since by demonstrating valor, fame could be achieved. Boasting was a hero's dare to destiny and a commitment to courageous action.

*Beowulf* is 3,182 lines long, approximately 80 or 90 pages in book length. The story consists of two parts. The first concerns Beowulf's successful battle with the monster Grendel and with Grendel's mother. The second relates the aged Beowulf's victory over a dragon and his subsequent death and funeral. Only portions of the epic are printed here in a modern English translation.

We enter that bleak, remote world at night, at Herot, the great banquet hall of the Danish king Hrothgar [hroth'gar]. This particular evening has been spent in feasting and revels. Yet, unknown to the revelers, outside in the surrounding marshland the monster Grendel is prowling.

## Bede

The Venerable Bede is considered the father of English history. During his lifetime he was without doubt the most learned scholar in all of western Europe. Bede, who was a monk, passed his days teaching in the monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow in northeast Britain where he had been sent at the age of seven to study. There he wrote biographies of church figures, a treatise on the physical sciences, a work on arithmetic, and his famous *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, which he completed in 731.

The *History* is our most valuable record of the earlier Anglo-Saxon period. Composed in Latin (Bede knew Greek and Hebrew as well), it provides many fascinating glimpses of the people of the time. One such glimpse is of Caedmon, the earliest known poet in English literature. Caedmon's *Hymn*, written sometime between 658 and 680 at Whitby Abbey in Northumbria, is the oldest English poem to have been preserved. The following excerpt from Bede's *History* relates the story of Caedmon's miraculous composition of this Old English poem.

## Anglo-Saxon Lyric Poetry

Only a scant 30,000 lines of the poetry- of the Anglo-Saxons have survived, and more than a tenth of that is made up by *Beowulf*. Because monks were almost the only people who knew how to write then, it should not be surprising that much of the remainder is religious poetry. A few specimens of the poetry that has survived are, nevertheless, not religious, treating such subjects as a battle and a lament of a woman for her absent husband.

"The Seafarer" is another example of such secular, or nonreligious, Old English poetry. An anonymous poem included in *The Exeter Book*, a famous collection of Anglo-Saxon poetry compiled in about 975, "The Seafarer" is especially noteworthy for its lyrical nature. It expresses the emotions of an old sailor who realizes the sadness of life, its difficulties, and its brief duration. In expressing his feelings the speaker also portrays the miseries and attractions of life on the Irish and North seas. Of the 123 lines that make up the complete poem, the most representative portions follow.

## **LESSON 2**

### **Folk Ballads**

Although most people in the British Isles were unable to read or write for centuries after the Norman Conquest in 1066, they, like human beings **everywhere**, told stories to one another. We have inherited their folk ballads, the stories they told in verse and usually sang. Transmitted orally from generation to generation, most of the English and Scottish ballads we know date from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries but were not collected and printed until the eighteenth century.

Love, adventure, courageous feats of daring, and sudden disaster are frequent topics of folk ballads. Folk ballads relate **out-of-the-ordinary** incidents—ones that might make headlines now, such as a shipwreck or an accidental death. Despite such tragic subjects, ballads rarely contain opinions on what has happened. The narrative usually dramatizes a single incident with little attention to characterization, background, or description. Why do the characters act as they do? How did they get into such a plight? We must read between the lines and supply our own answers, as we hear the little dramatic scenes unfold. Indeed, the ballad presents action as sparsely as possible, often through dialogue—the speech of the characters involved. We should not, however, think that ballads are simple or shallow. They may be brief and sparse—economic—but they contain sharp psychological portraits and much folk wisdom.

The original authors of ballads are unknown; in fact, a given ballad may exist in several versions, because many different people told and revised the ballad as it traveled from village to village. Nevertheless, when a version seemed just right, its teller would be urged to recite the story again and again without changing a thing.

It is important to remember that most ballads were originally sung. But even when read—preferably aloud—enough remains to place the best of the folk ballads among the most haunting narrative poems in British literature. After all, folk ballads have lasted this long partly because they are dramatic stories particularly well told.

### **Geoffrey Chaucer 1343?-1400**

Geoffrey Chaucer (along with William Shakespeare and John Milton) comes to most scholars' minds when they list the three greatest poets of the English language. Chaucer's most important work, *The Canterbury Tales*, vividly demonstrated the literary potential of the English language in the 1300s. It also preserved for all future ages a realistic, detailed, and comprehensive panorama of daily life at that time.

Like the other two—Shakespeare, the actor, and Milton, the public servant—Chaucer led an extremely busy life. In fact, he was so active in public affairs that we may reasonably wonder how he found time to write as prolifically and as well as he did. The son of a wealthy London wine merchant, Chaucer had the good fortune to serve as a page in the royal household while in his early teens. Later, he married one of the queen's ladies-in-waiting, was sent as the king's emissary to France and Italy, and held various positions in the home government: controller of customs, justice of the peace, member of Parliament, clerk of the king's works, and deputy forester for a royal forest. Yet despite the demands that such responsibilities placed on him, Chaucer somehow found time to produce an astonishing body of prose and poetry. He died while **still** at work on his poetry and was buried in Westminster Abbey in London. Around his burial spot has grown up the famous Poets' Corner.

Chaucer's **poetry** is generally divided into three periods. The earliest poetry is in the artificial manner of the great French poets of the day: dream visions and allegories, which were more to the taste of medieval than of modern people. This French period was followed by an Italian period, inspired by the poet's own journeys to Italy as a royal emissary. Influenced by the vigor of three great Italian writers—Dante, Petrarch, and especially, Boccaccio (all of whom are represented in Part Two of this book)—Chaucer brought to his own verse a new strength. During this phase he produced one of his two masterpieces:

*Troilus and Criseyde*, a long narrative poem based on Boccaccio's retelling of a classical love story set during the legendary Trojan War. The greatest of Chaucer's achievements—and one of the glories of all literature—was a product of his final, English period: *The Canterbury Tales*. At last Chaucer broke away from French and Italian models and fully realized his own style in his native tongue.

Chaucer's works are in Middle English, the English of London in the 1300s. Middle English did not have the prestige of the French language introduced to England by the Normans or of the Latin used by the Roman Catholic Church. Chaucer changed all that.

*The Canterbury Tales* is a long poem made up of general introduction ("The Prologue") and twenty-four stories, told in verse, by a cross section of English men and women. They tell their stories as they travel one April from an inn in a London suburb southeastward for fifty miles to the cathedral city of Canterbury. They are on a pilgrimage, a journey to a sacred place; Canterbury Cathedral is the site where Thomas a Becket had been murdered by order of King Henry II in 1170 to the shock of the religious world. The pilgrims' stories are framed by the narrative of the journey. That is, the tales are connected by links that relate what happens among the pilgrims traveling together. In using a frame, Chaucer borrowed from European literature such as Boccaccio's *Decameron* (see Part Two of this book).

The individual stories are of many different kinds: religious stories, legends, fables, fairy tales, sermons, and courtly romances. Short story writers in the following centuries learned much about their craft from the poet Geoffrey Chaucer.

In "The Prologue," which begins on the following page, the poet introduces us to the pilgrims who gather at the Tabard Inn at the start of the journey. The pilgrims fall into the three dominant groups that made up medieval society in England: the feudal group, the church group, and the city group. In the excerpt from "The Prologue," we will meet representatives of each group:

<i>The Feudal Group</i>	<i>The Church Group</i>	<i>The City Group</i>
Knight	Nun	Merchant
Squire	Monk	Wife of Bath
Yeoman	Friar	Host (Innkeeper)
Franklin	Cleric	
Plowman	Parson	
Miller	Summoner	
Reeve	Pardoner	

The famous opening lines of "The Prologue" appear first in the original Middle English (page 44). A modern translation of those lines and of a large excerpt from the remainder of "The Prologue" follows. The Middle English contains many words **with** two dots over the *e*. The dots remind us that we should pronounce every syllable in Middle English. Thus *bathed* (line 3) has two syllables, not one as in the modern English *bathed*, and the original line of poetry consequently has the ten syllables of iambic pentameter verse.

### **Sir Thomas Malory 1405-1471**

Although several Englishmen named Thomas Malory lived during the 1400s, most evidence suggests that the writer Sir Thomas Malory was the same hot-blooded Thomas Malory who had represented Warwickshire in Parliament in 1455. Those were troubled times, and the Member of Parliament had found himself supporting the wrong side—the Lancasters—in the war to determine which family would rule England, the War of the Roses. Charged with various crimes, he spent much of his later life in jail. He may have been a political prisoner rather than an actual perpetrator, but he nevertheless died in jail. It was in there that the "knyght presoner," as the author called himself, composed the great English prose work that related the heroic adventures of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table.

Malory's account of the legend is a reworking from English, French, and Latin sources. In this narrative Malory translated and gave order to that diverse body of Arthurian romance that had grown up in England and France since Anglo-Saxon times. William Caxton, the first English printer, published Malory's work in 1485 as *Le Morte d'Arthur*, French for "The Death of Arthur."

Did King Arthur really exist? When the Anglo-Saxons invaded Britain in the fifth century,

they pushed the inhabitants of that island northward into present-day Scotland and westward into Ireland and Wales. Those older, displaced inhabitants were the Celts. Arthur was presumably a sixth-century chieftain of one of those Celtic tribes, fighting from Wales against the invading Germanic tribes. Hundreds of years later, that primitive chieftain caught the imagination of the Middle Ages. Indeed, the nonreligious literature of the Middle Ages from the twelfth century onward—on the European continent even more than in England itself—was filled with the tales of King Arthur, around whom the medieval ideal of chivalry flourished. Malory, it would seem, wanted to recapture the Arthurian romantic ideals that his age was already losing, for as he wrote, knighthood was coming to an end.

*Le Morte d'Arthur* chronicles Arthur's history from his mysterious birth to his dramatic death. In the adventure that follows, he is a young man mastering the skills of knighthood, guided by an older and wiser counselor, the magician Merlin.

## **LESSON 3**

### **William Shakespeare 1564-1614**

William Shakespeare, poet and **playwright**, is said to be the world's favorite author. No other writer's plays have been produced so often and read so widely in so many different countries. Shakespeare's contemporaries first admired him for his long narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594). In the latter half of the seventeenth century and in the eighteenth century, he was revered for his dramas. Poets and critics in the nineteenth century considered him the "genius of the English race," and in the twentieth century he is regarded as the greatest of all writers for the stage.

Not much is known about Shakespeare's early life. He was born in 1564, probably on April 23, in the small country town of Stratford-on-Avon. His father was a prosperous glove maker and held several important positions in the town government. His mother, Mary Arden, was the daughter of a wealthy landowner. By the age of seven, Shakespeare was probably attending the local grammar school.

In 1582 when he was eighteen, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, the twenty-six-year-old daughter of a farmer who lived about a mile from Stratford. Over the next three years the couple had a daughter, Susanna, and twins, Hamnet and Judith. From 1585 to 1592, a period some scholars call "the lost years," virtually nothing is known about Shakespeare's life. From 1592 on, however, the records are much fuller. Sometime during the lost years Shakespeare moved to London and became part of the city's busy theatrical life. By 1594 he was a shareholder, or part owner, in one of London's most popular acting companies, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, and at least six of his plays had been produced. (Each shareholder contributed in some way to the company. Shakespeare was both a writer and actor; he is said to have played the ghost in *Hamlet*. The more popular his plays, the larger his share of the company's income.) In 1599 the company built the Globe Theatre, the most famous of Elizabethan theaters.

After Queen Elizabeth's death in 1603, the Lord Chamberlain's Men were sponsored by King James I and became known as the King's Men. In 1608 the company acquired a second theater in Blackfriars, a fashionable district of London. Shakespeare seems to have retired from acting about this time; his name does not appear in the lists of players after 1607. Between 1608 and 1613 Shakespeare wrote his last five plays: *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*, and *Henry VIII*. While he was writing these plays, Shakespeare lived mostly in Stratford, where he was regarded as one of the town's most important citizens. He died on April 23, 1616, and is buried in Holy Trinity Church in Stratford.

What makes Shakespeare the world's favorite author? No other writer—playwright, poet, or novelist—has seen more deeply into the many manifestations of human nature. In an uncanny way Shakespeare understands why people behave the way they do. Young and old, women and men, good and evil, beggars and kings: All live in his plays. All speak in voices so right and so true that again and again they emerge as solid as life, as much at home in our time as in Shakespeare's own.

In addition to his plays and two narrative poems, Shakespeare wrote a sequence of 154 sonnets. It was probably written in the 1590s, when Sir Philip Sidney's sequence, *Astrophel and Stella*, was so popular. Unlike the other sequences of his day, Shakespeare's cycle seems to tell a story. The plot is vague and fragmentary, involving a young nobleman, a "dark lady," a poet, and a rival poet. The sonnets that follow are addressed to the young nobleman. Shakespeare urges the man to marry and to have children, who will immortalize his virtues while time and age take their toll. The "plot" of the "story" is not as important as

Shakespeare's themes regarding time, beauty, and love.

### *SHAKESPEAREAN THEATER*

Although there is no precise record of when Shakespeare wrote each of his thirty-seven plays, it is likely that by 1600 he had completed *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Julius Caesar*, as well as twelve or thirteen others. But even greater work lay before him: *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*—all masterpieces written from 1600 to 1607.

Shakespeare's plays are divided into three groups—comedies, histories, and tragedies. Most of the comedies are romantic fantasies, designed to delight and amuse their audiences. The histories illustrate the moral lessons to be learned from the crimes of ambitious and treacherous leaders of state. In his later histories he combined sober events with lively comedy. The tragedies deal with death, morality, and destruction and show how the breaking of a moral law inevitably leads to disaster.

Most of Shakespeare's plays were first performed at the Globe, a theater located across the Thames River from London in the suburb of Southwark. The Globe was an octagonal building, with a thatched roof covering only the perimeter of the area. Under the roof were three levels of galleries that surrounded a yard about sixty-five feet in diameter. The galleries looked down on the stage, a rectangular platform of twenty-seven by forty-three feet that occupied about a third of the yard at one end. The main stage had a large trap door through which actors who played the parts of ghosts and spirits could rise and disappear. At the back of the main stage was a small curtained inner stage used for indoor scenes. Above the inner stage were two galleries. The first level could be used as a balcony, bedroom, or castle wall. Musicians performed from the second level, and sound effects, such as thunder or the ringing of a bell, came from a hut on top of the stage roof.

Those who could afford it watched the plays from seats in the galleries. For a penny, less wealthy spectators, called groundlings, could stand in the yard. The yard was open to the sky, and the stage was lit by daylight. Performances were given in midafternoon before an audience of about two thousand. No curtain rose to indicate the start of the play or fell to signal the close of an act. To begin the play, actors entered by one of two doors at the rear of the stage, and when they left the stage, the scene was over. Within seconds the next scene would begin, with new actors appearing to describe the new setting.

Costumes in the Shakespearean theater were always colorful and elaborate versions of Elizabethan "modern dress," whether they were for *Macbeth*, set in the eleventh century, or for *Julius Caesar*, in 44 B.C. Scenery was almost nonexistent. One tree might signify a forest; a chair might represent a throne room. Shakespeare compensated for the lack of scenery by giving his characters beautiful descriptive passages to speak, and Elizabethan audiences listened closely to the actors' words.

The plays moved at a rapid speed, advancing from scene to scene with scarcely an interruption. Elizabethan actors probably performed much as actors do today, but they spoke their lines much more quickly than modern performers. Presenting a sixteen- to twenty-thousand-word play in about two hours left no time for dawdling.

Elizabethan audiences were accustomed to several dramatic conventions of the time. No women appeared on the stage; women's and children's roles were played by boys who, although they were apprentices to the company, were skillful and highly trained. Soliloquies and asides were two other conventions. In a **soliloquy** the actor is alone on stage, speaking to himself and revealing to the audience his inner thoughts and feelings. In an **aside** the actor speaks words that the other characters on stage are not supposed to hear.

## **LESSON 4**

### **John Donne 1572-1631**

The life of John Donne is filled with contradictions. Born into a Roman Catholic family, he left that faith in his young manhood. Later, he returned to religion, ending his days as Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral). That position, the presiding official of the cathedral, is one of the highest offices in the Church of England, which had been established by Henry VIII after his break with the Catholic Church. Donne acquired the reputation as perhaps the greatest preacher of his age. He was a vivid, dramatic, and spellbinding speaker, and many of his sermons survive as testimony to his enormous popularity. Yet this is the same man who had been a worldly and sophisticated youth in London, a welcome visitor at Elizabeth's court, a soldier and adventurer, and an author of some of

the most appreciated love poetry in the language.

Although John Donne lived most of his life during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth I and King James I, his poetry is not like Elizabethan verse. Donne does not always present harmonious images and predictable meters. Rather, he often startles us with his images. Therefore, Donne is most often grouped with writers who come slightly later in the 1600s, a group known from the 1700s on as the metaphysical poets. Donne and the other metaphysical poets (such as George Herbert, Andrew Marvell, and Henry Vaughn) wrote very intellectual verse, speculating about the realms of philosophy. They wrote both love lyrics and religious, or meditative, poems in this highly intellectual style, showing off their wit and learning, demanding that readers become immersed in each poem. In fact, in the 1700s and the 1800s literary critics considered Donne's poetry too intellectual, but in the 1900s Donne has found favor again. Now critics applaud Donne's style: the conversational tone of his poetry, the rigorous and often witty pursuit of an argument, the sturdy sound of the verse, and the extraordinary imagery drawn from unusual sources. All these elements tend to give Donne's poetry a distinctly modern flavor. John Donne now generally ranks as the finest English poet between William Shakespeare and John Milton

### **Ben Jonson 1572-1637**

Reared to the bricklayer's trade and without the benefit of a formal university-education, Ben Jonson, by force of will, made himself a great scholar of the classics and consequently affected English literature for nearly two hundred years. He was an active and hot-tempered man—a soldier, a duelist, and a brawler—who mellowed only in middle age.

**Jonson's** major contribution to poetry was to adapt the poetic forms that had been used by the classic writers of ancient Rome (see Part Two of this book). Whether writing terse satire or lyrical songs, Jonson was influenced by poets who had composed centuries before in Latin. As a result, Jonson disciplined English, ridding it of floweriness and overwhelming metaphors. He introduced to English specific and strong language, great order and balance, plainness and restraint. He was the forerunner of English neoclassicism, a revival of the style and attitude of classical literature.

As Donne had his imitators—poets of the so-called metaphysical school, who wrote in his manner—so Ben Jonson inspired a host of imitators and followers, collectively known as the Tribe of Ben, or the Sons of Ben. These followers, generally aristocrats who had also been supporters of the doomed Charles I, were, in addition, the founders of the Cavalier school of English poets. Robert Herrick, Richard Lovelace, and others who formed this group aspired to write the clear, deftly turned lyrics that Jonson had mastered. Indeed, the influence of Ben Jonson was felt during the entire century—through example, through critical pronouncements, and through the memory of the poet's formidable personality. It was felt most strongly at the century's end in the work of John Dryden, who passed on Jonson's return to classicism as the dominant literary manner of the eighteenth century.

Jonson was also an excellent playwright. His first dramatic success, *Every Man in His Humor*, was performed by Shakespeare's acting company in 1598, with Shakespeare himself playing a prominent role. From 1605 on, Jonson produced elaborate dramatic spectacles in the court of King James I, who then in 1616 made Jonson the poet laureate (the official poet of the nation). However, Jonson's once vast reputation as a dramatist suffered by constant comparison with his peerless contemporary, for what writer could stand to be compared continually with Shakespeare? During Shakespeare's lifetime Jonson resented such persistent comparisons, and even spoke slightly of his competitor. Yet after the greater **playwright's** death in 1616, when friends were assembling Shakespeare's plays for publication, they turned to the rival dramatist Ben Jonson to write the dedication. What he wrote appeared in the opening pages of the collected plays in 1623- It is a tribute by one **playwright** to another and is as eloquent and generous as it is fair-minded.

### **John Milton 1608-1674**

As Chaucer towers over the **literary** world of medieval England, and as Shakespeare is the supreme writer of the Elizabethan Age, so John Milton is the outstanding English poet of the seventeenth century.

At an early age this citizen of London realized his purpose: "By labor and intent study

{which I take to be my portion in this life) joined with the strong **propensity** of nature, I might perhaps leave something so **witten** to **aftertimes** as they should not willingly let it die.<sup>11</sup> Milton's labor and study extended from his years as a student at St. Paul's School in London, through university years at Cambridge, through five years of reading day and night in English, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, and Italian, and on through two more years of travel abroad that ended in 1639, when he was over thirty. Already that long period of study had combined with the "strong propensity of nature"—his poetic gifts and inclinations—to produce distinguished poetry, including *Lycidas*, the finest elegy in English, written upon the death of a close friend.

Despite this extensive preparation, Milton's poetic performance was interrupted by the outbreak of civil war in England. Milton was a Puritan. As a staunch supporter of the Parliamentary cause against the **[loyalists**, the poet devoted **twenty** years out of the prime of his life, from 1640 to 1660, to defending the Puritan Commonwealth against its enemies and detractors. During that long interlude he wrote primarily prose pamphlets on matters relating to the new government; what little poetry Milton managed during these years was inspired by current events. Indeed, as Latin Secretary in Cromwell's government, he labored so diligently in preparing documents in the official language of the state that his eyesight began to fail him. By 1652 he was blind.

When the Royalists managed finally, in 1660, to triumph over Cromwell's followers and restore the monarchy, the poet found himself also in figurative darkness, with all that he had worked for repudiated by the English people. For a while his very **life** was in danger, but through the help of men like Andrew Marvell in time he was pardoned for his earlier activities in support of **antimonarchy** elements. He **survived** with a fine and with a substantial loss of **property**.

**In poverty**, Milton then moved to a village west of London where he began his masterpiece, conceiving and memorizing portions of it at night, and dictating what he had created to secretaries in the morning. In that laborious way he wrote *Paradise Lost*, a work of over ten thousand lines, the greatest epic in our language.

The two sonnets that follow were written before *Paradise Lost*. They are deeply personal expressions of Milton's belief in the existence of a divine order to which he subordinates his own ambition.

## **John Dryden 1631-1700**

John Dryden was the outstanding English poet from the Restoration in 1660 to the end of the **century**. He was born to a Puritan family in London and was graduated from Cambridge University in 1654. His earliest successful poem, *Heroic Stanzas*, extolled the virtues of Oliver Cromwell, the leader of the movement to rid England of a monarchy. Yet with Cromwell's death and the return of the monarchy, **Dryden** (like many others in search of order) **immediately** gave his allegiance to Charles II, the new Stuart king. That allegiance to Charles and later to his Catholic brother James II never faltered, even after the Stuarts had been driven into exile in 1688 and Dryden himself had been deprived of the title poet laureate that they had bestowed on him twenty years earlier.

Dryden wrote verse in several forms: odes, poetic drama, biting satires, and translations of classical authors. Unlike many of his predecessors, Dryden wrote in celebration of noteworthy occasions more often than in response to more personal experiences. Among **Dryden's** most important legacy to the poets of the next century was his master}' of the heroic couplet, paired lines of rhyming iambic pentameter. Another major contribution is Dryden's dignified, unaffected, and always musical language. Both of Dryden's poetic hallmarks are evident in these lines from *Absalom and Achitophel*, a poem written in support of King Charles II, whom he compared to King David from the Bible:

Now what relief can righteous David bring? How fatal 'tis to be too good a king! Friends he has few, so high the madness grows: Who dare be such, must be the people's foes: Yet some there were, even in the worst of days, Some let me name, and naming is to praise.

Dryden wrote notable prose as well, including literary criticism of Shakespeare, Chaucer, and others that is as sound in judgment now as when he conceived it. In fact, he is sometimes considered the father of English criticism. His prose is the first that strikes us as modern: It is written in a manner that resembles speech.

**Dryden** wrote "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day," which begins on the following page, in memory of a Roman woman and Christian **martyr** who has traditionally been regarded as the patron saint

of music and the inventor of the organ. He composed the poem in the form of an ode for a celebration in her memory on November 22, 1687. Originally a Greek choral song in honor of gods and goddesses, the ode as developed by Dryden is a lyric poem of irregular line lengths and stanzas, addressing a serious subject, and written in a dignified **style**. In 1739 the composer George Frederick Handel composed a score to accompany this ode.

## **LESSON 5**

### **Jonathan Swift 1667-1745**

Jonathan Swift is generally thought to be the greatest prose writer of the eighteenth century. He was a man whom many considered a misanthrope (one who hates humankind) because his writings were deeply critical of humanity. It was, however, his deep love for humanity that caused him to criticize it, and his great dream was to cure the ills of his age through humor.

Swift was born of English parents in Ireland and was educated at Trinity College, Dublin. In 1689, with hopes of beginning a political career, he traveled to England to become private secretary to Sir William Temple, a wealthy aristocrat, essayist, and former ambassador to Holland. Swift hoped that Temple, a trusted friend of King William, would return to political life. However, Temple was content to be an occasional adviser to the king, and a few years later a disappointed Swift returned to Ireland to become a minister. After a short, unhappy time in a country parish, Swift returned to Temple's employment and served as his secretary until Temple's death in 1699.

It was in Temple's house that Swift began to write. He first composed awkward odes in the ancient, classical style of Pindar (see Part Two of this book), but soon realized that he had a gift for humorous prose on religious and political themes. By 1697 he had written *A Tale of a Tub*, a comic piece that ridiculed the extravagances of religion, literature, and academia. It was published in 1704 together with *The Battle of the Books*, a mock debate between ancient and modern authors. *A Tale of a Tub* established Swift's position as a great wit and genius of the age, and he began a short collaboration with Joseph Addison and Richard Steele on their popular journal, *The Taller*.

After Temple's death, Swift returned to Ireland to be a pastor in a small Protestant parish. In 1710 he became a powerful advocate of the new Tory government, and in 1713, in recognition of his skillful articles and pamphlets in defense of Tory policies, Queen Anne appointed Swift dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. For the more than thirty years until his death, Swift served as dean of St. Patrick's and as champion of the Irish cause. He wrote many pamphlets to protest the suffering of the Irish under their British rulers, and he taught the Irish the power of the boycott when he encouraged them to refuse to accept English goods that competed with their own industries. In his later years Swift underwent a mental decline to which he finally succumbed in 1745. His friends stayed loyal to him, and the Irish people continue to this day to celebrate him as a hero. The generosity of spirit, deep learning, and harsh but humane humor that informed his writing were a great gift to the literary tradition.

### **Alexander Pope**

In an age of satire, Alexander Pope was the greatest verse satirist. His achievements are especially notable in light of the hardships he had to overcome. Born a Catholic, he was therefore barred from attending a university or receiving a government post, the source of income on which many writers of the day depended. In addition, he had contracted tuberculosis of the spine in childhood and was permanently crippled, never growing beyond four feet six inches tall and suffering from severe pain throughout his life.

Pope recognized his own limitations, and from an early age he labored to overcome them. He began by giving himself the strict classical education that most other young men received at school, and at the age of twenty-one he published a group of pastoral, or nature, poems. Almost immediately he was hailed as a literary prodigy and brought into a tight London literary circle that included Swift, Addison, Steele, and the poets John Gay and John Arbuthnot. His *Essay on Criticism* (1711) impressed Londoners with its evidence of learning and good judgment, and by the age of twenty-five Pope was acknowledged England's greatest living poet. By 1718 he was the first English author to support himself solely by his writings.

Pope's poems rapidly developed from the gentle lyrics of his earlier years into biting satires of English society and politics. Like his friend Jonathan Swift, he saw the age as one

badly in need of the correction that satire could offer. Unfortunately, his satires gained him many enemies; who brutally attacked not only his poetry but also his religion and his physical deformities. When he was not busy writing poems and cultivating the magnificent garden at his estate at Twickenham [twit'nam], he was busy defending himself from his enemies, who had labeled him "the wicked wasp of Twickenham," title that unfairly portrays him as a mean-spirited man who lashed out at all around him. Fortunately, the loyalty of his friends attests to the fact that he was more gentle and generous than his critics liked to portray.

Pope believed that moral and artistic correctness went hand-in-hand and that one could best practice this correctness by following the models of the ancient Greek and Roman authors (see Part Two of this book). He felt that many of the ills of society could be cured by looking back to classical civilization. All of his poetry reflects these values, whether it be the informative *Essay on Criticism*; *The Dunciad*, his sparkling satire of literary pretension; or the philosophical *Essay on Man*. It is not Pope's philosophy, however, but the brilliance of his poetic art that qualifies him as one of the greatest poets in the English language. The compression of his language, its clarity, glitter, exactness, and beauty, lyrical by turns, satiric by turns—all these qualities unite to form verses that only a master craftsman could create.

Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, one of his greatest comic poems, was based on an actual event. A wealthy baron named Lord Petre had cut a lock of hair from the beautiful Arabella Fermor's head and refused to give it back. A great scandal ensued. At the urging of his friend John Caryl, to whom he addresses the poem, Pope created a miniature masterpiece of satire out of the event.

Although Pope was certainly mocking the extravagance of the drawing room society that is his subject, his careful observation of the details of that society shows that he also had an appreciation of its beauties. Belinda, the heroine of the poem, is a fully developed character, and her world, despite its frivolity, is a complete one.

Pope wrote two versions of *The Rape of the Lock*. In 1712 he published a two-canto version, a tremendously popular poem that Joseph Addison considered to be perfect. In 1713 Pope began a second, expanded version of five cantos, which included supernatural characters and an elaborate card game. In 1717 he made his final revisions by adding a speech on good humor. The original two-canto version Addison so admired is presented here.

### Samuel Johnson 1709-1784

The second half of the eighteenth century, the period between Pope and Wordsworth, is often called the Age of Johnson. It was so named after Samuel Johnson—critic, poet, playwright, lexicographer, essayist, and biographer—the period's most learned, versatile, and influential **literary** figure. He was renowned as a superb conversationalist and respected as a moralist with a special insight into human experience. Johnson may not have been the greatest writer of his time, but his conservative values and his deep sensibility reflected the age and had a profound impact on it.

Johnson was born in the northern cathedral town of Litchfield, where his father ran a small bookstore. The family was poor, and his father's lack of money forced Johnson to leave Oxford University without taking a degree. Success for Johnson, as for Pope, came only with hardship, and for most of his life Johnson struggled against poverty. After he left Oxford, he supported himself and his new wife with a number of teaching and journalism jobs, none of which were a financial success and none of which could satisfy his **literary** ambitions. By the 1740s, however, he began to produce works of considerable importance, including the essays for his popular periodicals, *The Rambler* and *The Idler*, which critics praised as equal if not superior to Addison and Steele's *Spectator*. With the publication of the great *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), his reputation was secure. *Lives of the Poets* (1779-1781), ten volumes of critical biographies written in his later years, had a deep influence on the critics who followed him. Unlike earlier biographers, Johnson insisted on the truth in his biographies, including the subjects' shortcomings.

In all his writings Dr. Johnson (so-called because of the honorary degrees bestowed upon him by Oxford and Dublin) held to a few general principles: A writer must both please and instruct; he must not offend against morality or religion; he must neither copy others nor attempt anything so original as to be odd. Even those who do not agree with these principles must admit to the wit and grace with which Johnson elaborated them.

In 1746 Johnson published the *Plan* of his *Dictionary*, dedicating it to Lord Chesterfield, at that time an important secretary of state. Although Chesterfield showed some initial interest and

made several suggestions, he offered no patronage, or monetary- assistance, and Johnson was forced to proceed without Chesterfield's help. After the *Dictionary* was completed, Chesterfield published two articles praising it (perhaps hoping that Johnson would, even after Chesterfield's neglect, dedicate the work to him). Johnson responded with a famous letter, which appears on the following page.

### **Robert Burns 1759-1796**

Robert Burns, still celebrated as a Scottish national hero, wrote simple lyrics that continue to capture the imagination of readers around the world. Although dignified literary circles immediately recognized Burns's genius, his poetic voice was that of the Scottish peasant. Even when he was fully accepted by Edinburgh high society he never lost his connection to the land and to the simple people who inspired his poetry.

Burns, the son of a poor farmer, spent his childhood reading not only the great body of English literature but also all the traditional Scottish poets. Although he liked to portray himself as an artist whose work was the spontaneous overflow of natural feeling, he was actually quite well educated by the time he began to write, and his work reflects his wide reading. Songs that seem naive are actually elaborately crafted lyrics based on a long Scottish tradition. Poems that appear to be simple commentaries on day-to-day life are in reality subtle satires in the best neoclassical tradition. Burns was not altogether unaware of the conflict between his image as poet of the common people and the reality of his acceptance by high society. Although he spent much time in Edinburgh after the brilliant success of his first volume of poems, he soon realized that once the novelty of being the "peasant-poet" wore off, the upper classes with whom he mingled might lose interest. In 1788 he returned to farming and became a devoted father and family man, but he continued to write and edit several collections of Scottish songs.

Burns wrote many poems in standard English, but his best work is in Scottish dialect that, if difficult to understand today, nonetheless evokes the true spirit of the Scottish peasant. There is a heartiness to his language, a generosity that is underscored by a tenderness for both the natural and the human worlds. Burns was a great believer in the values of the American and French revolutions: democracy, equality, and justice. These values infuse both his long lyrics and his more than three hundred songs. The songs, on which his reputation rests, celebrate the joy of being human, of loving, working, laughing with friends, or standing up for one's country. On the basis of his songs, which talk of common people in common language, Burns is often called a pre-Romantic, a precursor to Wordsworth. Sadly enough, Burns's devotion to his country and to the peasant life was the cause of his early death. He had developed a heart disease from overly strenuous work on his father's farm as a boy, and he finally succumbed to it at the age of thirty-seven. But Burns the poet lives on in spirit when every year on New Year's Eve people join hands and sing his beautiful song, "Auld Lang Syne."

## **LESSON 6**

### **William Wordsworth 1770-1850**

William Wordsworth in collaboration with his friend and colleague Samuel Taylor Coleridge was the first poet to announce the literary ideals of the English Romantic Age. Wordsworth was born in England's Lake District, a land of breathtaking scenery, and the most beautiful region in the entire country. His mother died when he was eight, and he, along with his three brothers, was sent to study at the excellent grammar school at **Hawkshead**, also in the Lake **District**. There he grew up, free to wander through the countryside, hiking and skating. As we shall see, these early opportunities to commune with nature would have a profound effect on much of Wordsworth's poetry. He received a fine education, both at the grammar school and at Cambridge University, from which he was graduated in 1791.

While in France during 1791 and 1792, he became an ardent supporter of the French Revolution, which he (and many other liberal Englishmen) enthusiastically interpreted as championing the cause of human liberty. During this time he also fell passionately in love with a French girl, Annette Vallon. Though he wished to remain in France because of the revolution and because of his love for Annette, lack of money forced his departure for England. The outbreak of war between England and France in **1793** prevented

Wordsworth's immediate return to France, and his conscience plagued him, his loyalties divided between the two countries. Then he grew ever more disillusioned with the course of the French Revolution as events there became increasingly violent and the revolution departed drastically from the original democratic ideals he had so admired. Guilt over his **inability** to marry Annette, unhappiness at not finding suitable employment, and the growing certainty that the French Revolution was not the example for humankind that he had once thought it could be brought Wordsworth to the brink of mental collapse. He fell into a period of deep depression.

In 1795, almost three years after returning from a second visit to France, he came into enough money to move into a small cottage with his sister, Dorothy, who was his close friend and confidant. Soon afterward, he met Coleridge, and this meeting resulted in what is certainly the most significant friendship in all of English literature. **With** the companionship and support of Dorothy and Coleridge, who deeply admired Wordsworth's poetry and convinced him of its worth, Wordsworth recovered from the despair that had engulfed him for several years.

"All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." This remark occurs in the course of Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* of 1800. **Spontaneity**, excess, power, and emotion:

Those are the traits of Romanticism, subscribed to by Wordsworth in that slim volume of poems entitled *Lyrical Ballads*, first published in 1798. written jointly by him and Coleridge. That book is the cornerstone of English Romanticism. Late in the eighteenth **century** other poets—Gray and Burns and Blake—had reacted against the stria demands of neoclassicism. Yet none rebelled as consciously, as consistently, and as influentially as did Wordsworth, working closely with his friend Coleridge. Wordsworth's Preface, written for the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800, explains the principles underlying his and Coleridge's new approach to poetry and may thus serve as the formal announcement of a new **literary** age.

Dryden, Pope, and Johnson—giants of neoclassicism—had seen poetry as an aristocratic pursuit, calculated rather than spontaneous, more a matter of wit than power, an endeavor more of the mind than the heart. Through poetry, aristocrats spoke to aristocrats. To Wordsworth, however, and to Coleridge, poetry was more properly regarded as people speaking to people—and not in heroic couplets but in whatever form might be suitable to a particular occasion. Wordsworth, in particular, called for the use of natural, commonplace diction in literary works.

Unlike the neoclassicists, Wordsworth was convinced of the importance of subjectivity in poetry. He believed that poetry "takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity." In other words, true

poetry, conceived in spontaneous emotion, takes on meaning and shape as the poet contemplates the subject. Thus poetry reflects the poet's subjective reactions and reasoned reflections. Nor should poets choose for their subjects lords and ladies, with all their courtly affectations. Instead, they should write, so Wordsworth felt, of mumble and rustic<sup>1</sup> people, whose feelings were genuine and unspoiled, living out their lives close to nature. Clearly nature, which had been a major element of the poet's youth, had a substantial influence *on* Wordsworth's poetic inspiration. The response of the individual human mind to the simple, universal truths and beauty revealed in nature fascinated Wordsworth. He focused on the natural and ordinary in an attempt to explore the relationship between nature and our inner life.

Wordsworth spent most of his long life back in the beautiful Lake District with his wife, Mary (who had been a childhood friend), and his beloved sister, Dorothy. Although he continued to compose poetry into old age, his greatest poems had been written by then, most of them done in a single remarkable decade—between 1797 and 1807—while he and Coleridge were consciously altering the direction of English literature.

### **Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1772-1854**

Samuel Taylor Coleridge is the other great figure besides Wordsworth in what is known as the first generation of Romantics. These two poets (distinguished from the so-called second generation: Byron, Shelley, and Keats) were close friends and collaborators, though their personal lives were in marked contrast and their literary accomplishments explored quite different areas of human experience.

Coleridge was born in England's Devonshire **countryside**. His father was a **clergyman**, and

when he died, Samuel, then nine years old, was sent to school in London. While he was still quite young, tales such as *Robinson Crusoe* and the *Arabian Nights* enthralled Coleridge, and from an early age he enjoyed the worlds of fantasy and the exotic. At school he was an outstandingly brilliant student and, in 1791, went on to study at Cambridge **University**. There, however, he became increasingly unhappy and disillusioned with university life. In 1793 he left school to enlist in the army under the alias Silas Tomkyn Comberbacke, a pseudonym whose first initials were the same as his real ones. It was immediately apparent that Coleridge was completely and hopelessly unfit for army service, and, through the intervention of his brothers, he was discharged. Though he returned to Cambridge, he left the **university** in 1794 without obtaining a degree.

As a young man Coleridge was quite an idealist—in particular about the French Revolution. Only later, as the course of the revolution changed undeniably, did his idealism give way to disillusionment and disappointment.

In 1795 Coleridge met Wordsworth for the first time. The meeting proved momentous, and Wordsworth and his sister, Dorothy, soon moved to Somerset **to** be near Coleridge, who lived in the neighborhood with his wife, Sara. The two poets spent endless hours in each other's company and began their famous poetic collaboration. For Coleridge this period—leading up to their publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798—was the happiest and most fulfilling of his life.

While Wordsworth's life was in its broadest outlines serene, Coleridge's was tormented, in part because early in life he developed rheumatism. Opium was then a standard medical treatment for such a painful malady, and in the course of persistent attacks, Coleridge became dependent on the drug. "Yet to my fellow men," he wrote, "I may say that I was seduced into the *accursed* Habit ignorantly."

Despite a life filled with illness and depression, Coleridge did a prodigious amount of work. He was the greatest literary critic of his age and one of the two or three greatest critics in the history of English literature; no one has more acute things to say on Shakespeare than does Coleridge.

### **George Gordon, Lord Byron 1788-1824**

Though his poetry is now regarded as the least representative of **the** Romantic movement with which he is identified, the image that his contemporaries had of George Gordon, Lord Byron was of the arch-Romantic, extraordinary in almost every way. Byron was uncommonly handsome; Coleridge said he had scarcely ever seen "so beautiful a countenance." However, Byron had a handicap—a club foot—that both physically and psychologically distressed him all his life. To compensate for this impairment he became an outstanding athlete: a masterful swimmer, horseman, boxer, cricket player, and fencer,

A descendant of two aristocratic but flamboyant and violent families, Byron unexpectedly inherited his title at the age of ten when his great-uncle, known as the Wicked Lord, died. Thereupon he was sent to Harrow, a famous private school. Later, as a student at Cambridge University, he was known for his lavish and fashionable life style and flamboyant behavior; he even kept a tame bear as a pet. After graduating from Cambridge, he embarked upon an adventurous journey, traveling on horseback across Portugal and Spain and on to distant lands that few Englishmen had visited, including such unfamiliar places as Asia Minor and mountainous Albania. Returning, he effortlessly wrote a poem in Spenserian stanzas, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*—a travelogue, narrated by an eloquent but emotional fictitious tourist—that made him the toast of London society. In his own words, "I awoke one morning and found myself famous." That was when he was twenty-four. In addition, Byron the poet was also a champion of liberal political causes, and, as a member of the House of Lords, he became an active spokesman for the extreme liberal faction of the Whig party. In this capacity- he bravely defended the rebelling Nottingham weavers whose jobs had been threatened by new textile machines.

Soon, however, his fame had turned to **notoriety**, as the dashing young poet became the center of scandals, including an early and much publicized separation from his very proper young wife. In 1816, when he was twenty-eight, Byron went into self-imposed exile, never to return to England. The<sup>1</sup> rest of his brief life was lived on the Continent, mostly in Italy. During his travels he befriended the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, with whom he developed a productive intellectual relationship. Always an outspoken defender of personal and political freedom, Byron died shortly after his thirty-sixth birthday, having exhausted his energies training Greek troops fighting for independence from Turkey. His life is assuredly a romantic one: His scandalous behavior, idealism, attractiveness, defiance of **conventionality**, and superlative gifts all contribute to our notion of Byron as

the quintessential Romantic. Yet in **literary** terms he now seems the least Romantic of the five great poets who best exemplify that movement of the early nineteenth century<sup>7</sup>. While Byron wrote about the connection between nature and the individual, his treatment of this theme, unlike Wordsworth's, focused on nature as a refuge for the human soul stricken with melancholy and alienation. Furthermore, he did not approve of any of his Romantic contemporaries except for Shelley. He believed that he, himself, and the other Romantics, were "upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system." Byron's love poems seem reminiscent of the Cavalier poets of the seventeenth century—easy graceful compliments in the manner of a Richard Lovelace. His greatest literary achievements seem more in the spirit of Alexander Pope and John Dryden, **two** neoclassicist poets whom Byron himself acknowledged as his masters. In short, Byron—that arch-Romantic in **life**—in literature is deeply indebted to neoclassicism for his most impressive poetry.

Why then is Byron considered a Romantic poet? The answer to this question lies in his chief contribution to his age, namely the creation of the so-called Byronic hero, a character who embodied the yearnings of all Romantics. Readers knew enough about Byron's life—the scandals associated with his name, his passionate nature, his fierce hatred of oppression, and his self-imposed exile from England—to assume that the characters he created were all self-portraits. In most ways they were not; for Byron was usually a **witty**, gregarious, generous, and loyal man of the world. Nonetheless, that hardly mattered; what mattered was the **extraordinary** influence the Byronic hero had on the poet's contemporaries and on successive generations of English and American writers. Ahab, the obsessed sea captain in the American novelist Herman Melville's great whaling novel *Moby-Dick*, is a nineteenth-century Byronic hero. In the twentieth century Ernest Hemingway **developed** his own version of the same character type.

What, or who, is a Byronic hero? In the poet's own words, he is one in whom there is mixed much to love and to hate, one whose 'silences formed a theme for other's prate,' or chatter. The Byronic hero was an aloof wanderer, a moody, smoldering individual, isolated from the common run of humanity. An outsider, silent, passionate, gloomy, and mysterious: He seemed to be something new in literature. Actually Byron did not invent this character who scorned convention; in some ways he is a descendant of Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost*. Yet it was Byron who ineradicably impressed the character on the world's imagination: the restless, doom-driven, alien spirit, harboring some nameless, mysterious guilt from the past as he moves with quiet scorn and defiant individualism through the present.

### **Percy Bysshe Shelley 1792-1822**

His belief in human perfectability, his conviction that beauty and love could guide life's meaning, and his radical but perceptive social and political philosophies distinguish Percy Bysshe Shelley as the greatest idealist among the Romantic poets. Although his ancestors were wealthy and conventional members of the Sussex aristocracy, Shelley proved to be a nonconformist throughout his life. As a young student at Sion House Academy and then at the famous private school of Eton, he developed attractions to science and especially to gothic romances that were to influence his adult preoccupations and writing. While attending Eton Shelley began to read radical literature and decided to devote his life to opposing hypocrisy and injustice. Shortly after entering Oxford University he was expelled for refusing to deny authorship of a pamphlet entitled "The Necessity of Atheism." His expulsion created a breach with his father that was never mended.

Shelley then went to London, where his sisters were in school. There he met young Harriet Westbrook, a classmate of his sisters, whom he soon married in order to rescue her from what he regarded as her father's tyranny. In keeping with Shelley's interest in humanitarian causes, they spent their honeymoon in Ireland, participating in the movement for the reform of government and Catholic emancipation. Returning to London, Shelley met the radical philosopher William Godwin, whose theories had already influenced him as a student. Having drifted apart from Harriet, Shelley fell in love with the philosopher's daughter, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, who was to be his second wife. (Mary Godwin, while still in her teens, wrote the novel *Frankenstein*, a work that proved more popular during the poet's lifetime than anything he himself had written.)

Shelley's was in many ways an unhappy life. His health was poor, and, in spite of his sensitive and inquisitive nature, his motives were often misunderstood. He himself acknowledged that his good impulses often backfired on him and were "the source of all sorts of mischief." He was regarded by most of his contemporaries—those who did not know him personally—as scarcely less than a monster. It was known that his controversial views had led to his expulsion from

Oxford, that his father had disinherited him, that his first wife had apparently committed suicide in despair, and that the courts had taken custody of his children from that marriage.

As a result of his strong commitment to unconventional social views, Shelley was considered a revolutionary and was treated like a pariah. In 1818 he, like his fellow poet Byron, exiled himself from England in disgust. Before he was thirty, he was drowned in a boating accident during a violent storm off the coast of Italy, and his body was found washed ashore with a volume of Keats and another of Sophocles in his pockets. He was cremated on the beach, and his ashes were buried in the Protestant cemetery in Rome, near the grave of the poet John Keats. At his death Shelley's volumes of poetry remained for the most part unsold, his public undiscovered.

Despite financial difficulties and personal worries of his own, Shelley had always been singularly generous to others. After Shelley's death the poet Lord Byron wrote to his London publisher, "You were all brutally mistaken about Shelley." In Switzerland and Italy Byron had come to know the younger poet well. He was, so the lord insisted, "the best and least selfish man I ever knew. I never knew one who was not a beast in comparison."

Now Shelley—who had almost no audience when he died—is justly regarded as one of the greatest of the English Romantics, a fierce idealist whose verses illustrate his hope for the future and his devotion to human betterment. William Wordsworth believed that "Shelley is one of the best *artists* of us all: I mean in workmanship of style." Furthermore, Shelley wrote an impressive amount of poetry, and in an outstanding number of forms. *Adonais*, an elegy on the death of John Keats, is one of his finest works, and *Prometheus Unbound*, a dramatic poem in the manner of Greek tragedy, is another masterpiece. He also wrote sonnets, satires, odes, allegories, hymns, a splendid play in the Elizabethan manner—and, in prose, marvelous travel letters and a wonderful though uncompleted piece of literary criticism ("A Defense of Poetry"). At his death he was in the midst of a poem, *The Triumph of Life*, that might well have developed into the greatest work in a charged and compressed career.

Ozymandias [oz i man'de as] was the Greek name for Ramses II, the pharaoh who ruled Egypt during the thirteenth century B.C. During his rule Ramses II conducted an extensive building program and was responsible for the largest statue in Egypt, which bore the inscription: "I am Ozymandias, king of kings; if anyone wishes to know what I am and where I lie, let him surpass me in some of my exploits."

Ramses II was also known as the pharaoh who **oppressed** the Israelites. Shelley—always an ardent challenger of oppression—depicts the ironical outcome of the pharaoh's legacy in this sonnet, a favorite poetic form of the Romantics.

### **John Keats 1795-1821**

All three of the great "second generation"<sup>11</sup> of Romantic poets died young. Byron died at the age of thirty-six, Shelley died when he was twenty-nine. But John Keats was only **twenty-five** when he died. Moreover, he had not been precocious; his earliest poems, written in his late teens, are conventional and unpromising, and, in fact, most of Keats's great work was done in a single year, 1819, when he was twenty-three. Thereafter, the debilitating effects of tuberculosis made writing impossible. Yet already, in that short time, the young man had composed poetry that places him among the five or six greatest English poets—**work** far superior to anything Chaucer or Shakespeare or Milton had done at a comparable age.

Keats's ancestry and background would **have** seemed hardly conducive to forming a poet. Byron was an aristocrat, educated at the best schools. Shelley, too, was born into an old, aristocratic family, which assured him leisure to pursue the life of the mind. Keats's father, however, was a hostler, grooming horses at a London livery stable. The elder Keats died from a fall from a horse when his son John was eight; Keats's mother, the daughter of the stable's proprietor and also of modest origins, died when he was fourteen. As a boy Keats was sent to a nearby private school where the headmaster's son, who was one of his teachers, encouraged his literary interests. After the death of Keats's mother, however, the young man's guardian took him out of school. There was to be no Cambridge or Oxford in the life of this orphan but rather an apprenticeship to a surgeon and **apothecary**, or druggist, at a time when medicine enjoyed none of the prestige as a profession that it does now.

Nonetheless, Keats the humble medical student was soon to meet various **literary** personalities in London. Leigh Hunt—an editor who was a political radical and a friend of Shelley and Byron—**was** among them. Hunt encouraged the young man in the writing that he had already begun, and Keats soon abandoned medicine in favor of poetry. As noted, those early efforts at verse were not impressive. Keats had not even started to write until he was eighteen. Suddenly, at **twenty-one**, he produced his first great poem (and one of the greatest sonnets in the language): "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer."

From that time on, Keats consciously and triumphantly fashioned himself into a major poet, growing almost month by month in ability. His letters reveal that growth less as a miracle than as something worked for, something brought about. The result was that in the space of nine months in 1819, from January through September, he was able to produce a dazzling succession of outstanding poems: *The Eve of St. Agnes*, "La Belle Dame sans Merci," six superlative odes, and more astonishing sonnets. Then, soon after this period of intense creative activity, illness made the poet set down his pen.

During the fall of 1818, Keats had fallen deeply in love with Fanny Brawne, an attractive and lively girl who was devoted to the poet. Although they became engaged, Keats's extreme commitment to his poetry, his lack of money, and, especially, his increasingly poor health made it impossible for them to marry. His mother and youngest brother had died of tuberculosis. Keats himself contracted the disease—a terrifying and dreadful nineteenth-century malady. Friends took him to Italy, in hopes that the warmer climate would prolong his life, but his condition was hopeless. He died in Rome early in 1821 and was buried there, in the same cemetery where Shelley's remains would be placed the following year.

Keats's poetry is distinctive for its unusual physical concreteness and its rich appeal to all of the senses. While many Romantic poets—including Wordsworth and Shelley—describe objects, Keats actually *presents* them. In this way he is able to stimulate the reader's senses as though the object were actually present. Furthermore, Keats believed that the poet should subordinate his own identity in order to enable the poem's subject to emerge fully. His ability to capture his subject's unique characteristics often allows the reader to experience a feeling of direct identification and participation. Finally, though Keats is known as a sensuous poet, his greatness also lies in the fact that he was an outstanding philosophical poet whose works portray experience as a complexity of unavoidable, inherent contradictions and opposites.

The first two Keats poems presented are sonnets and provide us with an opportunity to examine Keats's use of both the Petrarchan (Italian) and Shakespearean (English) sonnet forms. Keats composed "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" after his friend and former schoolteacher, Charles Cowden Clarke, introduced him to a translation of the Greek poet Homer. The translation was by George Chapman, an Elizabethan poet. The two friends read the translation together through the night. Keats returned home at dawn, and Cowden received this sonnet with the morning mail.

## **LESSON 7**

### **Alfred, Lord Tennyson 1809-1892**

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, was the most eminent and most revered of the Victorian poets; his poems found their way into almost every Victorian home. In the words of writer Thomas Carlyle, his contemporary, Tennyson was "one of the finest looking men in the world," and he possessed "a right valiant, true-fighting, victorious heart; strong as a lion's, yet gentle, loving, and full of music."

One of twelve children of a country minister, Tennyson grew up in the quiet village of Somersby in Lincolnshire, an area in eastern England known for its beautiful countryside. His father had an excellent library—where the young Tennyson began his study of the English classics. He also began writing poetry at a very early age, producing a six-thousand-line epic by the age of twelve; at eighteen he published an anonymous collection of poetry with two of his brothers. Tennyson learned classical and modern languages from his gifted father in preparation for the university. His father also made the young Tennyson memorize and recite all of the odes of the Roman poet Horace before allowing him to leave for Cambridge University.

At Cambridge Tennyson joined a circle of young intellectuals whose center was the brilliant student Arthur Henry Hallam. Hallam and Tennyson developed a close friendship, as Hallam encouraged Tennyson's interest in poetry and became engaged to Tennyson's sister. While still at the university Tennyson made a promising debut as a young poet with the publication *Poems, Chiefly lyrical* (1830). Then calamity shadowed Tennyson's life. His father's fatal illness forced Tennyson to leave Cambridge without finishing his degree. His next publication, *Poems*, met with stinging criticism early in 1833. And in that same grim year his friend Hallam died unexpectedly in Vienna at the age of twenty-three.

Hallam's death threw Tennyson into a deep and long depression. Nearly a decade passed before he published any poetry, and some of his friends believed that grief had caused

him to abandon poetry forever. In fact, he was working out his grief by perfecting his craft during what he later called his "ten years' silence."

He broke that silence in 1842 by publishing new work that soon established him as the leading poet of his time. And in 1850, after years of intermittent labor, he published his great elegy to Hallam, *In Memoriam A. H. H.*, recording the shattering effect on his spirit of Hallam's death seventeen years before. He also married in that year and was named Wordsworth's successor as poet laureate.

Tennyson continued to write throughout his long and productive life, experimenting with a great variety of poetic forms. Among his most popular works is *The Idylls of the King*, a series of poems celebrating the legend of King Arthur. Tennyson worked on the dozen poems that make up *The Idylls* over a period that spanned **fifty** years, beginning the work shortly after Hallam's death and publishing the last poem in the series in 1885.

Toward the end of his career, Tennyson was knighted by Queen Victoria; this honor, never before given to a writer, indicates the enormous esteem in which Tennyson was held by the people of his **country**. To his contemporaries Tennyson was the great consoling voice of their age, a prophet who managed through suffering to reconcile the upheavals of the nineteenth century with an abiding belief in God and in human **worth**. Modern readers turn to Tennyson's poetry less for its reassurances than for its heartbreaking beauty, its musicality, and its haunting sense of the transitory nature of **life**.

As we learn in Homer's epic the *Iliad*, the Greek hero Ulysses fought for ten years in the siege of Troy. With the war finally won, he set out for his home in Ithaca, a voyage Homer recounts in the *Odyssey*. Adventures along the way delayed Ulysses' return for another decade. At last, the warrior reestablished himself as king of Ithaca and was reunited with his faithful wife, Penelope, and son, Telemachus [tslem'ekss]. Tennyson's "Ulysses" carries the story further, presenting **the** thoughts of the aging hero long after the joys of welcome have faded

### **Charles Dickens 1812-1870**

Charles Dickens was the most popular British author of the Victorian Age, and more than a hundred years after his death, his work is still popular both in print and in dramatic and musical versions. The magic that millions still find in Dickens' novels can be traced, at least in part, to the eccentric, colorful array of characters that he created: the gullible Pickwick of *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-1837), the villainous **Fagin** of *Oliver Twist* (1837-1839), the pathetic Little Nell of *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-1841), the miserly Scrooge of *Christmas Carol* (1843), the shiftless Micawber of *David Copperfield* (1849-1850), the honorable Sydney Carton of *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), the bitter Miss Havisham of *Great Expectations* (1860-1861).

The basis for many of these characters lies in Dickens' own experience. In fact, many people believe that his father was the model for Micawber and that his mother inspired Mrs. Nickleby in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-1839). Dickens was born in Portsmouth in southern England, the second of eight children. His father was a clerk who worked for the navy. The family repeatedly moved in order to escape creditors. When his father was finally sent to a debtors' prison, Charles, then **twelve**, began working in a warehouse pasting labels on pots of shoe blacking. After a sudden inheritance improved the family's fortunes, Charles found work as a lawyers clerk and then as a reporter. His literary career began with the success of *Sketches by Boz*, a collection of vignettes about life in the city that he wrote for a London newspaper. *Boz* led to *The Pickwick Papers*, his first novel.

While Dickens has entertained millions with his novels, he also intended them as a means of social reform. Human welfare could not keep pace with the technological advances of his time, and Dickens did much to expose evil byproducts of industrialization: child labor, debtors' prisons, ruinous financial speculation, inhuman legal procedures, and mismanagement of schools, orphanages, prisons, and hospitals.

Dickens' many novels add up to a vast panorama of human nature and specifically of Victorian life. One excerpt from one novel is a very small sample indeed. The following selection from *Oliver Twist*, however, can be read as a serial installment. An excerpt from the second chapter, the selection introduces Oliver, an orphan who must depend on the mercies of public support. When he turns nine, Oliver becomes too old for the orphanage. He is brought by Mr. Bumble, a parish official, to a workhouse, a kind of prison where the

poor must work for a meager upkeep. When we meet him, Oliver has been given a slice of bread so that he will not look hungry when he appears before the parish board of directors to be introduced **formally** to his new home.

### **Thomas Hardy 1840-1928**

Thomas Hardy was born in Dorsetshire in southwestern England. He was educated locally and was apprenticed to an ecclesiastical architect. For much of his early life, Hardy wavered between careers in architecture and in literature, winning prizes in architecture and design while also composing poems, essays, and short stories. The success of his writing caused him finally to abandon architecture in his early thirties.

Hardy's home and the surrounding districts played an important role in his literary career. The region is agricultural, and across its rugged surface stand monuments of the past: Saxon and Roman ruins and the great boulders of Stonehenge, which extend back into prehistory. Before the Norman invasion of 1066, the area had been the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex. Hardy revived the name to describe the setting for a long string of novels, among them *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), his first popular success; *The Return of the Native* (1878); *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886); and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891). The novels all set a harsh vision of life against the bleakly beautiful landscape that Hardy knew well. His characters are subject to a blind fate that, like the landscape, is indifferent to human pain and suffering.

The failure of Hardy's most pessimistic—and possibly his greatest—novel, *Jude the Obscure* (1895), angered him and contributed to his decision to abandon the form of the novel. Hardy felt that he had expressed his philosophy of life as well as he could within a novel, and after 1896 he turned to verse exclusively.

Hardy wrote *The Dynasts* (1903-1908), a patriotic verse play about the Napoleonic Wars. He then turned his attention to lyric poems that combine strict form and musical patterns with everyday, nonpoetic language. This poetry represents a second literary career for Hardy, already ranked among the greatest Victorian novelists. This last of the great Victorians, as Hardy has been called, died in 1928. His ashes are buried in Westminster Abbey, but, because of his lasting relationship with his home district, his heart is buried in Wessex.

### **George Bernard Shaw 1856-1950**

George Bernard Shaw ranks next to Shakespeare among English playwrights, and yet he did not begin to write drama until he was middle-aged. He made up for lost time with an amazing output of forty-seven plays during a creative life that spanned the Victorian and modern eras. A brilliant and opinionated man, Shaw was essentially self-educated, and he did a splendid job of teaching himself what he needed to know. Above all else, he was always vigorously engaged with the world around him; his long, productive life bristled with vitality, intelligence, and a consuming passion for ideas.

Irish by birth, Shaw came to England at the age of twenty and lived in and near London throughout the rest of his life. After writing several unsuccessful novels, the young Shaw turned to reviewing books and paintings in order to earn a living. He first became known as a music critic; from his mother, an aspiring singer, he had learned much about music, and he combined this knowledge with excellent taste and a sparkling prose style to become the most influential music critic of his day.

Shaw's lively intelligence did not confine itself to art, fiction, and music. At an early age he became committed to the cause of social reform. He joined the Fabian movement, a type of socialism founded in England in the 1880s to reform the social, economic, and political systems gradually through peaceful, democratic measures. Although he was shy by nature, Shaw turned himself into an outstanding public speaker. He continued to participate actively in politics the rest of his life. However, he found a particularly satisfying forum for his ideas in reviewing drama and, eventually, in writing plays of his own.

In the 1890s Shaw became recognized as London's wittiest and most stimulating drama critic. He took drama very seriously; in particular, he idolized the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen, whose unsparing critique of middle-class life revealed to Shaw the potential impact of drama upon society. After writing his influential essay "The Quintessence of Ibsenism" (1891), Shaw began to try his own hand at writing plays. The result, *Widowers' Houses* (produced in 1892), proved to be the first of many plays to come in the years ahead.

At first Shaw's plays were too controversial for English theatergoers, who were accustomed to light or sentimental entertainments but not to provocative examinations of moral and social issues. However, Shaw continued to write and publish his plays, usually accompanying them with lengthy and argumentative prefaces that expressed his ideas on a wide range of subjects. Eventually he established himself as the leading English playwright of the modern period with such works as *Arms and the Man* (1894), *Candida* (1895), *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1898), *Man and Superman* (1903), *Major Barbara* (1907), *Pygmalion* (1912), *Heartbreak House* (1917), and *Saint Joan* (1923). For those achievements the playwright was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925.

For the most part, Shaw's plays are comedies of ideas, works that present complex and often controversial themes within the framework of entertaining plots, appealing and unpredictable characters, and witty dialogue. Shaw's works are insistently rational, coolly ridiculing the conventions and prejudices of his time.

*Pygmalion* [pig **mal'yan**], written in 1912 and first produced in England in 1914, remains one of his most popular works. The title refers to a mythological king of Cyprus named Pygmalion, who carved a statue of a woman so beautiful that he fell in love with her. Aphrodite, the goddess of love, answered the lovesick king's prayers by bringing his statue, Galatea, to life. Shaw's play concerns a professor of phonetics (the study of the sounds of speech) who attempts to remold a cockney flower seller from the London slums into a refined lady by teaching her how to speak proper English.

*Pygmalion* gave Shaw a platform for many of his concerns. He was passionately interested in the English language and the varieties of ways in which people spoke (and misspoke) it. Shaw longed to simplify and reform English; he once pointed out that the rules of spelling in English are so inconsistent and confusing that the word *fish* could conceivably be spelled "ghoti" if the speller used the sound of *gh* in *enough*, the sound of *o* in *women*, and the sound of *ft* in the suffix *-Hon*. The text of *Pygmalion* reflects some of his efforts at simplifying English usage—principally his omission of apostrophes in contractions such as *fve* and *dont*. *Pygmalion* also allowed Shaw to present ideas about other topics that concerned him—such matters as social equality, male and female roles, and the relationship between what people seem to be and what they really are. Like his other successful plays, *Pygmalion* wins us over with its charm and then startles us out of our preconceptions with its keen intelligence.

### **William Butler Yeats 1865-1939**

Considered by many to be the greatest poet writing in English in this century, William Butler Yeats remained a productive author throughout his lifetime. While many poets produce their finest work during their early years, Yeats was one of those rare poets who create their greatest poems after the age of **fifty**.

The son of a painter, Yeats was born in Sandymount, Ireland, and attended school in Dublin. He loved to read and daydream, especially during his summers at his grandparents' home in the wild country of County Sligo on Ireland's northwest coast.

Yeats studied painting but soon abandoned his studies to become a professional writer. His interest in Irish culture led him to collect and publish Irish legends and write poems and plays based on Irish myths. As a result of this work, Yeats soon became a central figure in the Irish Renaissance, a turn-of-the-century movement to revive an Irish national language and celebrate Celtic traditions. In 1889 Yeats published his first volume of poems. Later, with his friend Lady Augusta Gregory, he founded the Irish National Theatre **Society**, and he began to write plays based on Irish legends.

However, Yeats's interest in Ireland was not merely literary and linguistic. Inspired by the beautiful Maud Gonne, a leader of the Irish National Movement, which sought to free Ireland from British rule, Yeats developed an interest in Irish politics. Gonne was his Joan of Arc, his Helen of Troy, and he courted her unsuccessfully for over thirteen years. After her marriage to another Irish political leader, Yeats finally admitted defeat in love and turned his full attention to his work. He himself eventually married years later.

During the 1920s Yeats gained even more prominence in both political and **literary** circles. He became a senator in the Irish Free State in 1922 and received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923. In 1925 Yeats published his major philosophical and historical prose work, *A Vision*.

Yeats began his poetic career as a Romantic and finished it as a poet of the modern world. His early work was strongly influenced by Blake and Shelley, the Pre-Raphaelites (see page 405), the French Symbolists, and Irish **mythology**. These early poems were

often simple, musical, romantic, and dreamlike. In the middle of his career, his poetry became less dreamlike and more direct and realistic; his imagery became more economical and his tone more conversational. In the last stages of his poetic career, his interest in a universal system of historical cycles dominated his work. Although some of his later works are obscure and complex, the best of these poems touch universal concerns and demonstrate a brilliant balance **between** emotion and intellect.

### **T. S. Eliot      1888-1965**

Thomas Stearns Eliot was one of the most influential writers of his time and a pioneer among the first modern poets, who are now referred to as Modernist. These poets belonged to and wrote for a generation whose view of life was radically altered by World War I, which has undermined many people's faith in the systems that had once ordered human existence. Eliot sought to make sense of modern life. He was determined, as he put it, "to see both **beauty** and ugliness, to see the boredom, the horror and the glory."

Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri, where his grandfather had founded Washington University. His family was strict, religious, and literary. Shy and frail as a boy, Eliot studied literature and philosophy at **Harvard** University, wrote for college magazines, and took boxing lessons at night. After receiving his Master's degree in 1910, he studied at Oxford and at the Sorbonne in Paris.

Eliot moved permanently to England in 1915 and became a British subject seven years later. **Still**, he remained American in many ways. He sometimes signed his name Thomas (Missouri) Eliot, and he loved American folk songs, comic strips, and the movies of the Marx Brothers. Marrying in 1915, Eliot eventually became a successful partner in a publishing firm.

T. S. Eliot's early poems capture the alienation and spiritual bankruptcy felt by many writers of his time. He returned frequently to these matters in his first volume of poetry, *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), as well as in his subsequent works, *The Waste Land* (1922) and "The Hollow Men" (1925). After these works, however, Eliot's poetry began to show the stirrings of religious faith. "Ash Wednesday" (1930), written after his conversion to the Church of England, portrays his climb from despair to hope and from disillusionment to belief. In his masterpiece, the *Four Quartets* (1943), he affirms his belief in spiritual values in the midst of war.

Eliot's poems are known for their concrete images, irregular rhythms, shifting moods, and "patchwork" presentation of religious, historical, mythological, and literary references. His poetry also mixes elevated language with slang and colloquial expressions. Eliot believed that poetry should not state emotions directly; rather, the poet should select images that trigger these emotions in the reader. According to his theory of art, the poet's personal emotions are of no artistic worth in themselves. What matters is the art that reworks these emotions into universal patterns and symbols.

In 1948 Eliot was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, becoming the first American-born poet to be so honored. However, Eliot found success with other forms of writing besides poetry. He published influential literary criticism, and, like Yeats, wrote poetic dramas. Among his best-known **plays** are *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), *The Family Reunion* (1939), and *The Cocktail Party* (1950).

## **LESSON 9**

### **Joseph Conrad      1857-1924**

Joseph Conrad was one of the first truly modern British novelists. In 1878 when he first arrived in England at the age of twenty, he spoke virtually no English. Yet he wrote his first novel, *Almayer's Folly* (1895), in English and continued to use his adopted language to create a string of great novels including *Lord Jim* (1900), *Nostramo* (1904), and *Victory* (1915).

Conrad was born Josef Teodor Conrad Nalecz **Korzeniowski** in Russian-occupied Poland. His father was exiled to northern Russia because of activities on behalf of Polish independence, and both his parents died before Conrad was ten. Conrad left Poland at the age of sixteen and, inspired by books about the sea, became an apprentice seaman first for France and then for England. He sailed to Asia, South America, and Africa, exotic locales that would later become settings for his fiction. In 1886 he became a British subject and a ship's captain. After the publication of his first book, Conrad married, left the sea, and devoted himself to his family and to his literary career.

Conrad wrote fiction about the sea and the "**mysterious** corners" of the world that had captivated his youth. His stories and novels convey the glamour and terror of the nomadic life of a nineteenth-century seaman. Yet they are much more than adventure stories. Dark seas, winding inlets, and dense jungles serve as backdrop and symbol for **Conrad's** real concerns—the contrast between **individuality** and human communication, between illusion and reality. Life at sea provides a model for Conrad's ideal **of** human interdependence; exotic ports-of-call represent the dark, unknown areas of human experience where characters wrestle with moral choices that will shape their lives. Conrad experimented **with** unusual, sometimes multiple, points of view to demonstrate the complexity of experience and the difficulty of human communication. His first-person storytellers are often intermediate narrators, characters who are not directly involved in the action and, therefore, can provide both first-hand information and objective detachment. At his dramatic climaxes characters and readers alike arrive at what Conrad called a "moral discovery [that] should be the object of every tale."

The sea, the jungle, and the moral **tug-of-war** that they represent are all present in "The Lagoon." As with all of Conrad's best work, this **story** requires that the reader patiently follow the seemingly pointless turns and the seemingly unrelated events that are the scattered clues to Conrad's vision of reality. Gradually patience is rewarded as the various pieces fall into a pattern and the reader is faced with a moment **of discovery**.

### **James Joyce 1882-1941**

James Joyce, an Irish novelist who experimented with language, plot, and characterization, earned a place as one of the most influential writers of the modern period. Joyce was concerned with inner reality, the psychological reactions people have to their surroundings. Many "events" in his fiction take place in the minds of the characters. These events, not action in the typical sense of the word, may be suggestions or realizations inspired by an outside stimulus. Certainly Joyce's characters move and act in the world, but the author directs our attention inside, **to** the mind and its response to external happenings.

Joyce was born **into** a large family in Dublin, Ireland, and attended school and college there. A fine student, he was an avid reader of classical and modern literature, and he mastered a number of languages, including Latin. Feeling stifled by his surroundings, Joyce left his homeland permanently and spent most of his time in Trieste, Paris, Zurich, and Rome. For a time he supported himself by teaching languages.

Much of Joyce's fiction is autobiographical. *Dubliners* (1914) is a collection of stories dealing with the life and the character of Dublin, the city he called "the center of paralysis." In fact, Joyce set all of his work in Dublin and uses the city as a microcosm, or miniature model, of the world. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) is based on Joyce's life up to 1902. It is a moving account of an adolescent's struggle for maturity and independence as well as a statement on the meaning of art. *Ulysses* (1922) is the story of a day in the lives of three Dubliners, including Stephen Dedalus, the hero of *Portrait*. The novel makes frequent allusions to Homer's *Odyssey* and observes parallels between the ancient and modern worlds. The cyclical nature of history is explored again in *Finnegans Wake*, in which one Dublin family represents humanity throughout history.

The psychological aspect of Joyce's work and his experiments with literary form often challenge his readers. For this reason and because of his frankness, Joyce had great difficulty getting his work published, *Dubliners* was rejected by twenty-two publishers before being printed; *Ulysses* was banned for many years in England and America. As a result, Joyce did not make money from his writing. He died penniless in Switzerland after fleeing German-occupied France during World War II.

"Araby" is one story from *Dubliners*. It is not as difficult as some of Joyce's other work. It is typical, however, because much of the plot takes place within the mind of the main character. Like most of Joyce's best fiction, the story has for a climax a stunning realization that changes a character's way of looking at life.

### **Virginia Woolf 1882-1941**

In her critical essays Virginia Woolf set standards for modern fiction, and she met those standards in a string of finely detailed introspective novels and stories. Woolf grew up **in** a home where famous intellectuals and artists were frequent guests. Her father, Sir Leslie Stephen, was the first editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and he introduced his children to great minds and great books. As an **adult** Woolf founded the Hogarth Press with her husband,

Leonard Woolf, who was also a writer. They published much of their own work and became the center of the Bloomsbury Group, a circle of famous artists, writers, and philosophers that was named for a London neighborhood.

Woolf began her writing career as a **literary** critic. She used her reviews and essays to promote her strong opinions about what fiction should be. For example, she thought that writers could get close to real life only by basing their work in their own feelings. In 1915 she began to put her theories into practice in her first novel, *The Voyage Out*. She continued to refine her style in eight other novels—among them *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927)—and four Woolfs work was a deliberate attempt to break the conventions of fiction. She saw life not as a series of carefully arranged bright lights but as "a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end."<sup>1</sup> In other words, life is not a neatly arranged series of major events but a process we live every day. To be faithful to this idea, her fiction avoids plot as we know it and instead swirls through the consciousness of characters, revealing the essence of their lives. With James Joyce, Woolf was among the first to use this stream-of-consciousness technique. Her stories are quiet episodes seen through the minds of the characters. The intention was to "examine for a moment an **ordinary** mind on an ordinary day," to uncover people as they really are. By pouring out one thought after another in a **steady** stream, characters reveal who they are and what they feel. Mabel Waring is such a character, and in "The New Dress" she reveals herself to us through a constant stream of memories, thoughts, and observations.

### **George Orwell 1903-1950**

George Orwell wrote fiction and nonfiction that was inspired by a strong social conscience. He was born Eric Blair in Bengal, India. His father was a minor customs official who sacrificed to send his son to **preparatory** schools in England. Eric felt inferior among his wealthier schoolmates, and human relationships were always difficult for him. The class distinctions that he learned at school also made him sympathetic to the working class and to victims of injustice. Such attitudes later influenced some of his most successful writing, which includes novels, essays, and autobiographical nonfiction.

Instead of going to college, Orwell joined the Indian Imperial Police in Burma in southeast Asia. He worked there five years and developed a permanent distaste for imperialism, or the maintenance of a colonial empire such as the colonies England had in Asia. This experience also provided the material for *Burmese Days* (1934), his first novel, and the well-known essay "Shooting an Elephant." After returning to Europe, Orwell held a number of menial jobs that kept him on the edge of **poverty**. From this experience he wrote *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933). In 1936 he was wounded while fighting for the Loyalists (those fighting against **military** dictatorship) in the Spanish civil war. He recorded his observations of the war and his disillusionment with the infighting of the Loyalists in *Homage to Catalonia* (1938).

Orwell was inspired by his experiences in Spain and by World War II to write the novels for which he is best known. *Animal Farm* (1945) is a fable and a satire on dictatorships. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) is Orwell's prophetic warning about the spread of totalitarianism. Both novels demonstrate his chief concern as a writer: to alert humanity to the evils of political tyranny.

"Why I Write" is an excerpt from Orwell's autobiographical work, *Such, Such Were the Joys* (1945). The essay recounts the various influences on the author's youth and on his writing career. Orwell's statements about writing reveal a great deal about the craft. They also show us a sensitive, **solitary** man who felt a unique sense of **responsibility** as a writer.

### **Doris Lessing born 1919**

Doris Lessing's varied career has encompassed realistic novels, psychological novels, and science fiction. Unsatisfied with the lack of humanity in the fiction writers of the 1950s, Lessing turned for inspiration to older novels such as Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Stendhal's *Red and the Black*. "I was looking," she wrote, "for the warmth, the compassion, the humanity, the love of people which illuminates the literature of the nineteenth century and which makes all these old novels a statement of faith in man himself."

Lessing was born in Iran of British parents. When she was five, the family moved to Rhodesia in southern Africa. She grew up in a sparsely populated district, and being alone much of the time, she read a great deal. Lessing moved to England in 1949. A year

later she published her first novel, *The Grass Is Singing*, a story that takes place in Rhodesia.

In her early work Lessing chose a direct, traditional style of narrative. Her subjects were her African experiences and various social issues, especially the problems of women in modern society. With *The Golden Notebook* (1962) she began to experiment with the psychological novel, a form she continued in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971). Over a period of years, Lessing also produced *Children of Violence*, a multivolume work about the harsh realities and the effects of war.

"I hold the view," Lessing has said, "that the realist novel, the realist story, is the highest form of prose writing." "A Mild Attack of Locusts" illustrates Lessing's realism. The story interweaves a deep knowledge of the Rhodesian farmlands with a sensitive portrayal of complex human beings.