

An Analytical Study of English Lyrics and Sonnets

For B. A. Pass and Honours Courses

REVISED EDITION

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GRANTHA TIRTHA

Publishers & Book Sellers

PREFACE

An Analytical Study of English Lyrics and Sonnets is mainly intended for the students of English Honours and B A (pass) of level the University. It is an enlarged edition of the book published first in 1985. It has been enriched with added materials relevant to the subject, which will provide additional information on the subject to the students and others concerned.

The book contains texts and their analyses with critical interpretations so that the students for whom it is designed are inspired to read the texts carefully. The introductory chapters of the book will impart to them a detailed idea about the age with its literary background, to which the sonneteers and the lyricists belong. The study of the chapters will provide them a concrete idea about sonnets and metaphysical poetry.

The texts have been properly summarised, analysed, interpreted and explained with adequate references and relevant quotations. The notes and annotations on the texts which follow the analysis and interpretation of the texts will prove to be conducive to the understanding and enjoyment of the texts by the students. A special chapter containing probable short and essay-type university questions with answers has been appended to the end of the book.

The book has been written in simple but scholarly style so that it proves to be very helpful to the students. I hope the book will inspire them to read other poems by Wyatt, Sidney, Drayton, Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, Donne, Marvell and Vaughan:

In preparing the manuscript of the book I owe my indebtedness to Prof. P Majumder, Siliguri College, Prof. J K Sen & Dr Sunil Kumar Sarkar, Raiganj College and the late Prof. B Roy of Malda College. I am grateful to Shusanta Bardhan, Vidyasagar College, Suri for his words of inspiration and valuable suggestions for writing this book. Prof. S P Sengupta, who has revised the manuscript of the book, is my guiding inspiration. I always remember the name of Sri Satyanarayan Sarkar, MA, DELT, my teacher, who taught me English and did always encourage me to go ahead with my writing habit and interest.

I am grateful to Sandipda who has taken special interest in the publication of the book. The words of encouragement of Sri Lakshman Pandey, Prodyot Kumar Sarkar, Bhakti Bhusan Choudhuri and Shyamapada Choudhury, remove the monotony during the time of preparing the manuscript of the book. Romio Dey deserves great admiration for neatly composing the manuscript and artistically designing the cover page of the book respectively. I am specially indebted to Mrs Madhabi Pandey, my wife, who corrected the proofs and provided me with valuable suggestions in making the book ready for students. My efforts will be deemed highly prize if it serves the purposes of those for whom it is meant.

Malda, 2015

Dr Kalyan Pandey

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INTRODUCTION

“THE RENAISSANCE”

“The Renaissance”, defines “Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English” as the “revival of art and literature in Europe in the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries based on ancient Greek Learning”. It is the “re-birth of culture throughout Europe in the later middle ages. It was, in fact, a seemingly dramatic revival of interest in the humanities, in science and exploration. It was both a period of renewed scientific interest in classical learning and also a time of intense creative activity. During the Renaissance period, the classical culture of Greece and Rome was discovered. Renaissance men turned away from medieval ideas and ideals, finding inspiration in classical models and attitudes. A balanced development of mind and body was emphasized. In England the age of Queen Elizabeth I is known as the age of “Renaissance”. The Renaissance was essentially a European movement which had its birth in Italy and from there spread to Germany, France and England. It showed in England almost all the characteristics which it had throughout Europe. Thought was liberated and broadened so that it broke its scholastic framework. It gave rise to truly national literature. The Renaissance “period in England was great in what it achieved the sublime in what it dreamed abounding in ripe wisdom and heroic deeds, full of light and beauty and of life”. One significant event, which marked the beginning of “the revival of learning as coming to Italy about 1450, was the Turkish Conquest of Constantinople on the 29th May, 1453. The result was the fusion of fugitive scholars, bringing valuable manuscripts with them and the most obvious haven was Italy. A revival of classical studies had already begun in Italy and the mixing fugitives stimulated and assisted it.

Although Latin writers like Virgil and Ovid had never fallen into neglect. Latin writers like Catullus and Lucretius were rediscovered and the rediscovery of the resurrected writing of antiquity inspired the imagination of the Italians who gave birth to a new kind of aesthetic culture much different of the modern spirit. The light of the Renaissance dazzled the English horizon in the sixteenth century. A number of factors accounted for the “re-birth” under the reign of Elizabeth I.

The main characteristics of the Renaissance are: i) the new learning, ii) geographical discoveries, iii) the new cosmos. iv) decline of feudalism. v) art and music, vi) reformation.

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Renaissance scholars revived the knowledge of the Greek language and Latin literature. The discovery of new trade routes helped to establish the commercial prosperity of countries like Spain, Portugal and England. The economic prosperity helped in the development of an intellectual and artistic life. The new discoveries gave new materials to the literary imagination which are traced in Elizabethan plays. In 1543 Copernicus published his new hypotheses which picture system in which the center is not the earth but the sun and in with the earth is not stationary, but one planet among the many planets which revolve round the sun. The Renaissance was a new social force which weakened the foundation of the feudal system. The Renaissance artists introduced humanistic element in their paintings. Literature became individualistic, and secular. The classical models roused the intellectual and imaginative faculties in the English writers. They benefited greatly in pastoral poetry, epic, drama, lyric, sonnet and prose. The Renaissance encouraged the questioning attitude in an individual.

The Elizabethan Age passes for the golden age of English poetry. The stimulus for writing poetry was provided by the Renaissance. There was revival of Interest in the literature and mythology of ancient Greece and Rome and in Greek culture and way of life. There was a spurt of translations. "The rich soil", as Legouis puts it, "was fertilized by a deep layer of translations". Such was the fame of the new learning the practically all the great works, both ancient and modern, were translated within no time. The printing press swiftly placed these rich spoils within the easy reached of the common man. These translations opened forth English people "a window on the chanted world of classical antiquity, which appeared with all the freshness of a new discovery, the world of the gods and goddesses of Greece and greater soldiers and statesmen of the Roman Empire. Moreover, they brought their readers into contact with the life and thought of contemporary Europe, and specially of Renaissance Italy.

More specially, the study of Plato inspired the Elizabethans with a high conception of the calling of a poet, and as a result, there was a widespread ambition to write poetry. This accounts for the amazing prodigality of poetic output during the age of Spenser and Shakespeare. The poet was looked upon as the first of men and so everybody tried to be a poet. Poetry no longer remained the privilege of the few. "It was widely disseminated, heated men's brain and sometimes turned their heads, gave a lyrical turn to the whole of literature, deflowered and falsified the prose which was all poetic."

The Renaissance gave birth to individualism and worldliness. These were the same ingredients in the classical Greek literature which attracted the men of the Renaissance. The ancient Greek was a worldly man in that his whole life and hope were centered on the present world rather on some future one. The Greek literature also reveals that strength individualism was a trait of the ancient Greek, for the voice of the Greek literature was democratic and individualistic.

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Athens rather than the regimented anthill of Sparta, the result of this individualism was that the Renaissance men cared not a fig for authority; they were free in making their own decisions, right or wrong, and this freedom found expressions in the plays of Marlowe. "With the limitation of the power of the Church," says Philip Henderson, "the Elizabethan intellectual had indeed more freedom than the Middle Ages" and he said nothing against the Government, for then he would be liable to the charge of treason, it was in the way that Marlowe came to an untimely end. Having written such "revolutionary" plays as *Edward II* and *Richard II* in which kings are represented as being deposed and murdered, and together with notoriously discontented, Sir Walter Raleigh to what was considered a politically 'dangerous society, he was assassinated one day in a country pub. Elizabeth had not forgotten the 'Ward of the Roses', and she had no intention of allowing such anarchy to break out again. It is characteristic to note that Marlowe belonged to the Elizabethan age which was greatly influenced by the spirit of Renaissance. It was an age of new ideas, soaring ambitions, unlimited opportunities. The Renaissance spirit inspired the people with a burning desire to discover new lands, to undertake hazardous voyage, to colonies and settle in new and unknown lands, to exploit all their materials resources for enriching their motherlands. In this connection it is repeated that Elizabethan English literature was greatly influenced by Italian art, literature and philosophy which spread its influence practically all over Europe.

It is equally significant to write that the Renaissance English literature is characterised by the four periods: (1) The period of Preparation (1500-1579): it was known as the youth of Renaissance. (2) The Elizabethan period (1579-1602): it was known as the manhood of the Renaissance. (3) The Jacobean period (1602-1625): it was the middle age of the English Renaissance. (4) The Caroline period (1625-1660): it was the old age of the Renaissance. The efflorescence of the Renaissance spirit appeared in the Elizabethan literature which was marked by fullness of national life, a passion for knowledge, a spirit of daring adventure and an ambition to achieve great things. Gradually the spell of the Renaissance disappeared and the people found their hopes dashed to the ground. The Renaissance raised man's hopes to the most magnificent potentialities within him, only to dash them again in bleakest pessimism as soon as he realised his individual limitations and life became "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Shakespeare chimes the note of disillusionment, the anarchy of the individual mind of man broken loose from the moorings of religious or social order.

The many-sided intellectual activities of the Renaissance were fully reflected in the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The prose writings of Malory (*Morte d' Arthur*), Erasmus', "Praise of Folly" and Sir Thomas More's '*Utopia*' were largely responsible for heralding the dawn of the Renaissance which attained its maturity in the age of Elizabeth. These three prose writers sang in praise of the Renaissance and harnessed their pens in driving away

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vice, ignorance and superstition, the three foes of the humanity. More's "Utopia" was the 'true prologue to the Renaissance'.

Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey were the pioneers of the new poetry in England. These two diplomats brought with them the new spirit of the Renaissance from Italy and breathed in it; "*Tottle's Miscellany*" which is recognised as one of the landmarks of English poetry a new sense of grace, dignity and harmony which were lacking in the Scottish and English Chaucerians. They introduced the vogue of sonnet writing and blank verse poetry in England. The Renaissance spirit had its full play in the hands of Spenser. He is recognised as 'the touchstone of English poetic sensibility'. In Spenser we have fine expression of Renaissance ideal of adventure and active life which is expressed in 'The Faerie Queene'.

The noble heart that harbours various thought,
And is with child of glorious great intent.
Can never rest, until it forth have brought
The eternal brood of glory excellent.

Thus the Renaissance is popularly paraphrased as 'The Revival of Learning, and is taken to mark the end of the dark priest-ridden Middle Ages and the beginning of a new era of free thought and intellectual activity. In the realm of intellectual speculation, the Renaissance manifested a growth of the spirit of science. Its high priest was Bacon, who could proudly say that "he had taken all knowledge to be his province". Bacon sent forth this aspect of the Renaissance in his essay on "Truth". "The inquiry of truth, which is the love-making of wooing of it, the knowledge of truth which is the province of it and the belief of truth, which is the enjoying of it is the sovereign good of human reason."

He was here indirectly implying a criticism of the dogmas of the times when in the "Advancement of Learning" he wrote- "if a man will begin with certainties. He shall end in doubts: but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties".

In a word, the Renaissance man claimed to be a law unto himself. His personality transcended tradition, theory and rules. Hence in its aspects of self-expression, an independent value was placed on originality and spontaneity. A great importance was attached to genius which was only a uniquely individual creative force. This is manifest in the sphere of literature and art and Arnold Hauser attributes it to the permeation of Society with the idea of competition as a dynamic force that runs through bourgeoisie society The individual not only acts as individual, but he constantly affirms it and deliberately intensifies it.

In summing up, the thought and literature of the Elizabethan age were principally shaped by the forces which combined to give birth to the Europe-wide movement in the fifteenth century known as the Renaissance. It was considered as a great movement, one out of a few recorded in the history of human growth. The Renaissance has been called a kind of tropical dawn, a sudden passage of light from darkness. It is a landmark in the history of literature. It marked the liberalisation of thought and the sudden breaking of scholastic framework. It pushed English literature to its flowering season.

CHAPTER II

ELIZABETHAN LYRICS AND SONGS

The term "Elizabethan" is the most convenient one we can choose by which to designate the continuous period from 1558 to 1603. *Tottle's Miscellany* (1557) really marks the dawn of Elizabethan literature and includes die bulk of Elizabethan poetry. Lyric poetry retains much of the earlier Elizabethan spirit in Jonson, and his followers Herrick and Others. The characteristics of Elizabethan literature are "enthusiasm, spontaneity, creative energy, lyricism, versatility, a spirit of adventure and experiment, a love of pageantry an unsatiated delight in beauty, soaring imagination and a pervading patriotism.

England became the impassioned lover of songs and lyrics during this age. Lyricism is the pervading note of the time. The lyrics become an expression of the soul. Songs were sung in halls and parlours. Songs translated from foreign songs were adapted. Songs of various kinds—love songs, religious songs and fantastic songs—were composed in every mood—grave, mocking, sentimental and cynical. The themes of songs and lyrics are the eternal themes of lyric poetry i.e. praise of the gods, patriotism, war revelry, and rejoicing and above all, love. Lyric poets sing of love, without being lovers, and of nature without having any real feeling for her charms.

Love is the main theme of the Elizabethan lyrics. In the sonnets it is refined, elaborate and romantic, as with Spenser and Sidney or deep and passionate and perplexed as with Shakespeare. The love lyric, as developed in accordance with the musical art of the time, is too light an instrument to utter the deeper notes of passion, and its theme is fanciful love-love that laughs and entreats and sighs from very blitheness of soul. It is Pagan love and Renaissance love and the love of English man and maiden, that sounds through these lyrics nothing deeply sentimental or medieval. The songs of Sidney are bold, passionate songs sometimes characterised by exquisite beauty and charm and sometimes by the note of fancifulness. Spenser inserted elaborate songs in his "*Shepherd's Calender*". His natural richness and loftiness led him to make of the song a little ode if not such a magnificent ode as the *Epithalmion*.

Shakespeare's songs are the most original and spontaneous of all the richest in impressions of nature. Some songs of Shakespeare are fantastic. The rhythm of his songs is an various of their meaning. They vanish at the attempt to wring sense from them. Music is this note. Though Shakespeare's contemporaries lacked his varied wealth or realism, they decorated their plays with songs.