

Renaissance Prose
or

16th Century Prose

Elizabethan Age was an age of poetry and dramas. It is in this age that we find towering personalities like Marlowe and Shakespeare. But the Renaissance spirit did not exhaust itself in the composition of verses and in the writing and staging of dramas but the spark of brilliance can be seen in the prose writings too. It is surprising that some of the important dramatists of the period belonging to the University Wits were great prose writers also. The prose writers who distinguished themselves in the field of fiction are Lyly, Greene, Lodge, Nashe and Sir Philip Sidney.

John Lyly, one of the important playwrights before Shakespeare, known to be one of the University Wits, was the pioneer of the English novel, the first

Stylist in prose and most popular writer of the age. A man of limited means, rather a man of meagre means was fortunate enough to attract the attention of Lord Burgandy, who became his patron. Lyly published the first part of his famous 'Euphuus', 'the Anatomy of Wit' in 1597 which received much praise and was widely accepted. It was much admired by the ladies. The structure is Spanish and there is much moralising and more sentiments in it. Sentimentalism and didacticism account for the popularity of the book. His style is allusive. It may be his defect but it overburdens his prose. The second defect is that he forgets the difference between prose and verse. In the words of A.C. Rickett, "It is the prose of the age that found its most effective medium in verse." What is more important about Eup-

lucid is not its subject matter but the style. He wrote in a manner that came to be known as ~~epithet~~ euphuism.

Thomas Lodge is also one of the University wits. He is also one of the prose fiction writers of the age and a studious friend of Robert Greene. He travelled widely and during his travels wrote several romances, one of them being 'Rosalynde' which inspired Shakespeare to write his famous comedy 'As you like it'. Rosalynde is a pastoral romance written in the language of Euphuism. Lodge's other works are 'Robert the Devil', 'Euphuism's shadow' and 'The Margaret of America'.

Robert Greene succeeded ~~lyly~~ lyly and attained greater simplicity in his later writings. He had no patron, he lived on his wit. His first novel is poor and imitative. It is from 'Pandosto' from which Shakespeare took the plot of his 'Winter's

Tale' that his originality came to the fore. His other novels are 'mammilia' and 'murephone'. He did much and contributed largely to the development of the novel, but this can be found in his pamphlets and not in his fiction because here he writes from his knowledge of the underworld of his day. More vivid is his 'Life and Death of Ned Browne' where he anticipates the 'low life' scenes of Defoe and Smollett. So far as the individualisation of characters is concerned, it can be seen in 'A quip for an upstart Courtier'.

The fourth name in the fiction of the day is Thomas Nashe. His friend Lodge called him "ingenious, ingenious, fluent, facetious Thomas Nashe". He had a rich fund of humour. His most important work is 'The Unfortunate Traveller' or 'The Life of Jack Wilton'. It is linked with light-heart-

ed humour. One of the reasons why he took to light-hearted humour is that he found the English suffering from too much of sentiment. His intention was to freshen the novel with humour. Jack Wilton has been written in the form of memoirs and is dedicated to the 'Earl of Southampton', his patron. The novel is in the picaresque tradition and can be compared with 'Gil Blas' by Le Sage and other novels of the tradition. Sir Philip Sidney's 'Arcadia' must be mentioned as it marks a well-defined stage in the history of English novel. The writers who preceded him were either the disciples of Lyly or the imitators of Euphuism. Sidney invented his own style. It became so popular that for some time it seemed to displace Euphuism. The novel was written in 1580 but published after his death.

Arcadia is a pastoral romance written with the purpose of pleasing the Countess of Pembroke. As compared to Lyly, his style turned to be artificial but in spite of the artificiality sometimes it rises to the level of beauty. The prose of Sidney is marked by simplicity, melodiousness, strength and sweetness. According to A. C. Rickett "what Sidney did for prose, Spenser did for verse."

Sir Walter Raleigh, in addition to being a soldier, was a good writer of prose. His best work entitled 'History of the World' was written during his imprisonment. The book is a serious discursive review of the past and the present. The book became very popular due to its treatment of 'Biblical History'. It is written in eloquent prose. His other works are 'Fight about the Gates of the Azores', 'A Discov-

very of the Empire of Guiana
'The Discoveries' and 'Advice
to his son'. The main defect
of Raleigh's prose is lack
of humour but it is counter
balanced by the picture of the
author it throws — the ~~picture~~
picture of a restless, adven-
turous and ambitious spirit.
Another prose writer of the
period is George Gascoigne
whose 'Adventures of Master
F. G.' published in 1573 brings
before us a realistic picture
of a group of idle gentlemen
in Northern England. Other
writers of the period are
Jeremy Taylor, John Florio
and Richard Knott.

The end

Munir Bhushan Sinha
Deptt. of English
S. S. College, Jehanabad