

# UG 1st Sem CC: 2 (ENGLISH)

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## FIFTEENTH CENTURY POETRY

W.H. Hudson calls it "a long barren period" . It is a period of Chaucer's imitators who dwelt on outworn theme. There is no freshness and originality in the poetry of this period. The sense of beautiful seems to have died out with the sense of life and reality. The living spirit of literature gave place to a mere literary tradition. Lifeless imitation assumed the outworn garb of romance and allegory .

Stopford A. Brooke remarks: "There was then a considerable school of imitators, who followed the style, who had some of the imaginative spirit, but who failed in the music and art of Chaucer."

The main forms and the tendencies in the

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fifteenth century poetry:

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## ALLEGORY

During the fifteenth century poets were interested in writing allegory and in following the tradition of the fourteenth century poets. These poets had no originality of their own , and hence their allegorical poetry lacked fervour and force .It became mechanical

and soulless. "The allegory , as we can see I Dunbar's "Golden Barge" and Lydgate's "Temple of Glass", usually opened with a garden and a dream , conventionalized to an absurd degree, and it continued with the introduction of the "Goddess of Love" , the " Virtues and Vices " , similar stock personations . The allegory, however, in spite of it's enormous elaboration, was not at the end of it's popularity. "

Stephen Hawes wrote several allegories and complicated them by addition of chivalrous elements. In his " Example of Virtue " he relates the allegory of youth led Discretion or Reason finally marrying fair Purity, the daughter of the King of Love .His chief work "Pastime of Pleasure" is another allegory recounting the life of Grand Amour, who grows old and dies after serving a long apprenticeship to Lady Grammar, Logic , Rhetoric and music. William Dunbar of Scotland wrote two love allegories viz."The Thistle and the Rose" and "Golden Barge " . In the former allegory he symbolises the marriage of James IV to Margaret Tudor, daughter of Henry VII .The other allegory is of the type " Romance of the Rose" written in nine line stanza.

## ECLOGUE AND PASTORAL POETRY

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During the fifteenth century eclogue and pastoral poetry came into prominence. The pastoral poetry had its birth in Italy, and was nurtured by Theocritus and Virgil. In England it was first introduced by Barclay , the English Chaucerian, and Henryson , the Scottish

Chaucerians Barclay wrote five eclogues. They have nothing of the idyll but are moral satires. Henryson loved nature and countryside. His poetry is rich in the presentation of nature in its lovely aspects.

## SATIRICAL POETRY

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The poetry of the fifteenth century specialised in satire. John Skepton, the English Chaucerian, was brutal and coarse and satirised the vice of the clergy in his "Book of Colin Clout" in the same vein as Langland had done in "Piers the Plowman". Dunbar among the Scottish poets was satirical and he had the same breadth, vigour and vitality as Langland had. His "Tidings from the Session" is an attack on the law courts; his "Satire on Edinburgh" is a bitter exposure of the dirty conditions of the city. He employed a jovial mocking style like that of Rabelais. In the "Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins" we find boisterous ridicule and jovial invectives and Rabelaisian relish for the grotesque. In spite of the prevalence of satiric poetry, the inferiority of these satirists to Langland is well marked out. Referring to this aspect Hugh Walker says, "Their (Chaucerians) inferiority is as well marked in satire as in anything else."

## MORAL TONE

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The Poetry of the fifteenth century was characterised by a moral note. In this respect Henryson's "

Testament of Cressida " is an important landmark. He considered it necessary that Cressida should be chastised for her faithlessness to Troilus. In Henryson the moral tone predominates . He considered the miserable end of Cressida as the most fitting end for the faithless women of the world. Chaucer, in pity drawn a veil over life of his heroine after the fall; Henryson presented Cressida as a moralist would do.

## CAROLS AND LYRIC POETRY

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A carol is a type of the lyric which developed fruitfully in the fifteenth century. Secular and amorous carols around the holy and ivy theme. There are others about the boar's head , like the one still sung at the Queen's College, Oxford. Two of the most popular lyrics of the fifteenth century are " The Coventry Carol Hayle" and " Comely and Clene".

## BALLADS

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During the fifteenth century ballads became very popular. The two famous ballads of this age are " The Nut Brown Maid" and "Ballad of the Cheve Chase." The ballads of the fifteenth century are of two types, one presenting an emotional situation, often tragic, in short stanzas, with a refrain and with much repetition; the other, as in the case of the Robin Hood ballads, offering a rather extended narrative in stanzas of four lines the second and fourth lines rhyming. The

first type--the folk ballad-shows some signs of group composition although the originals were composed by individuals. The second type-the minstrel ballad-is certainly the result of the individual composition.

## VERSIFICATION

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In versification the poetry of the age was able to keep up the standard of Chaucer. There was a marked decadence in the style of English Poetry. The meters of the works of Lydgate, Skeleton and Hawes became mere doggerel. There was no depth of poetical imagination and phrasing. The retrograde tendency became well marked in Lydgate . With him decomposition overtook English verse. He admitted ruefully, " I took none heed neither of short nor long. "

## SUMMING UP

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The poetry of the fifteenth century, on the whole, reveals a strong tendency among the poets of the age to keep close to the tradition of Chaucer. The fifteenth century poetry is, in fact, Chaucerian poetry. The same measure, the same- stanza forms, the same subjects, the same devices are used. ' A common greyness silvers everything '. Here, indeed, was tradition, but it was lifeless and empty; and while it strove to preserve the form lost almost every trace of the spirit.

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