

## Early Roman Literature

Rome has nothing to compare with Homer and Hesiod, Plato and Aristotle. It developed no great literary or philosophical tradition. There are the plays written by Terence and Plautus from the period 200-150, which greatly influenced the Renaissance comedies of Shakespeare etc. but otherwise nothing of note from before the time of Caesar and Augustus.

At the time of Caesar, the leading Roman statesman was Cicero (born 106) whose full name was Marcus Tullius Cicero, so that he was also known (in Shakespeare etc.) as "Tully". He was opposed to Antony after the assassination of Caesar and he was murdered by Antony's agents in 43 B.C.. He had studied at the Academy in Athens, where he learned to present mostly Stoic morality in a simple, undogmatic way. Cicero's main works are his Orations (speeches made in the course of his career as a lawyer and political figure), his 931 letters to 99 different people, and writings on rhetoric and style. As a philosophical figure, he wrote on political theory (*De Republica*, a dialogue), on ethical and on theological questions. He was deeply influenced by the Stoics but adopted an independent line on some questions. His main doctrine is that of *humanitas*, the qualities of mind and character that make a man civilized. A true Man should respect all men because humanity is worthy of respect. (The Stoics taught the universal Brotherhood of Man, based on the notion that each individual contains a spark of the same divine fire). No law, he said, can make a wrong thing right or a right thing wrong. The moral thought of Cicero has deeply marked the thinkers of Europe: Luther, Montaigne, Locke, Hume. He was mainly familiar as a moral thinker in the Middle Ages, but at the Renaissance his influence as a stylist in prose, as the model of Latin style, was enormous.

### From Cicero's *De Officiis*

If every one of us seizes and appropriates for himself other people's property, the human community, the brotherhood of mankind, collapses. It is natural enough for a man to prefer earning a living for himself rather than for someone else; but what nature forbids is that we should increase our means, property, and resources by robbing others.

This idea that one must not injure anybody for one's own advantage is not only natural law, an internationally valid principle; it is also incorporated in the laws which individual communities have drawn up. (...)

Magnanimity, and loftiness of soul, and courtesy, and justice, and generosity, are far more natural than self-indulgence, or wealth, or even life itself. But to despise these latter things, to attach no importance to them in comparison with the common good, really does need a great and lofty heart.

In the same way, it is more truly natural to model oneself on Hercules and undergo the most terrible labours and troubles to help and save all the nations of the earth than to live a secluded, untroubled life with plenty of money and pleasures. Mankind was grateful to Hercules for his services... So the finest and noblest characters prefer a life of dedication to a life of self-indulgence: and one may go further, and conclude that such men conform with nature and will therefore do no harm to their fellow-men. (...) Everyone ought to have the same purpose: to make the interest of each the same as the interest of all. For if men grab for themselves, it will mean the complete collapse of human society.

If Nature prescribes that every human being must help every other human being, whoever he is, just precisely because they are human beings, then by the same authority all men have identical interests. Having identical interests means that we are all subject to one and the same Law of Nature: that being so, the very least that such a law must enjoin is that we may not wrong one another. (...)

People are not talking sense if they claim that they will not rob their parents or brothers, but that robbing their other compatriots is a different matter. That is the same as

denying any common interest with their fellow-countrymen, or any consequent legal or social obligations. And such a denial shatters the whole fabric of national life.

Another attitude is that one ought to take account of compatriots but not of foreigners. People who argue like this subvert the whole basis of the human community itself-and when that is gone, kind actions, generosity, goodness, and justice are annihilated. And their annihilation is a sin against the immortal gods. For it was they who established the society which such men are undermining. And the tightest bond of that society is the belief that it is more unnatural for one man to rob another for his own benefit than to endure any loss whatsoever, whether to his person or to his property, or even to his very soul, provided that no consideration of justice or injustice is involved: for justice is the queen and sovereign of all the virtues.

Let us consider possible objections.

(1) Suppose a man of great wisdom were starving to death: would he not be justified in taking food belonging to someone who was completely useless?

(2) Suppose an honest man had the chance to steal the clothes of a cruel and inhuman tyrant, and needed them to avoid freezing to death, should he not do it?

These questions are very easy to answer. For if you rob even a completely useless man for your own advantage, it is an unnatural, inhuman action. (...)

As for the tyrant, we have nothing in common with autocrats; in fact we and they are totally set apart. There is nothing unnatural about robbing, if you can, a man whom it is morally right to kill, and the whole sinful and pestilential gang of dictatorial rulers ought to be cast out from human society... these ferocious, bestial monsters in human form ought to be severed from the body of mankind.

(Translated by Michael Grant)

Catullus (84-54) is above all remembered for the 25 poems in which he celebrates his lady "Lesbia" (surely not her real name, even if she was a real person). He was influenced by the Hellenic epigram, but made it into something personal and vivid. In this way he influenced the poets who came after him, and wrote some of the most perfect short lyrics in any language, full of intensity and vitality. Many of his poems are love-elegies, based on Greek models but Roman in feeling.

My sweetest Lesbia, let us live and love,  
And though the sager sort our deeds reprove,  
Let us not weigh them; heaven's great lamps do dive  
Unto their west, and straight again revive  
But soon as once set is our little light,  
Then must we sleep one ever-during night.  
(Version by Thomas Campion, 1601)

Sallust (86-35) was one of the first Roman historians, writing about the period of Marius and the first stages of the decline of the Republic.

Julius Caesar himself wrote "Commentaries" on his wars, seven books on the campaign in Gaul, three more on the Civil War, describing each stage in clear, simple prose. These have been much studied, for Caesar was one of the greatest generals ever, a master-strategist.

## Augustan Literature

The Augustan Age was later often seen as a Golden Age, because of the quality of the writers, because it was a age of peace, because Rome was rebuilt in imperial style. Yet it was also an age of failure and disappointment, because Augustus was an authoritarian

dictator, an autocrat who swept away the last democratic forms of the Republic and took control of every sector of life. Augustus established the Empire as it was to survive for 400 years, with a broadly unified culture that would spread across Western Europe, bringing many of the best things that had first been discovered by Greece. Augustus wished to give his people a higher vision of morality, of human dignity, and used art for that purpose.

Publius Vergilius Maro (known as **Virgil** or Vergil) (70-19) was born near Mantua, studied at Cremona, Milan, Rome. He was deeply influenced by the poems of Catullus and by the perfections of rhythms and form practiced by the Alexandrians. At the time of Caesar's death he went to live in the countryside near Naples, and here he began his bucolic (pastoral) Eclogues. These caught the attention of Octavian's rich and powerful advisor, Maecenas, the model rich patron of literature, who brought Virgil into the service of the rising future Augustus. The Eclogues were followed soon by the Georgics, written after he had met Horace. Later he began to write the Aeneid for Augustus. He went to finish it and study in Athens, from which he returned with Augustus in 19, but fell ill and died on the way home.

*The Eclogues* are modelled on the Idylls of Theocritus, but blend the Greek and the Italian landscapes. The action is located in Arcadia, an idealized land of shepherds acting as a symbolic contrast to the cor-ruptions of the contemporary city, so that "pastoral" poetry is satiric as well as escapist. The delicate sentiments and the pure music of Virgil's Eclogues have inspired many later poets, including Sidney and Spenser. The mysterious 4th Eclogue was long thought by Christians to be a "prophecy" of the birth of Christ.

From Virgil's "Pollio" : the Fourth Eclogue of the *Bucolics*

(Which Christians later believed prophesied the birth of Christ)

We have reached the last Era in Sibylline song.  
Time has conceived and the great sequence of the Ages starts afresh.  
Justice, the Virgin, comes back to dwell with us,  
and the rule of Saturn is restored.  
The Firstborn of the New Age is already on his way  
from high heaven down to earth.

With him, the Iron Age shall end  
and Golden Man inherit all the world.  
Smile on the Baby's birth, immaculate Lucina;  
your own Apollo is enthroned at last.

And it is in your consulship, yours, Pollio,  
that this glorious Age will dawn  
and the Procession of the great Months begin.  
Under your leadership all traces that remain of our iniquity will be effaced  
and, as they vanish, free the world from its long night of horror.

He will meet with the gods;  
he will see the great men of the past consorting with them,  
and be himself observed by these guiding a world  
to which his father's virtues have brought peace.  
(Translated by E. V. Rieu)

The *Georgics* are presented as a guide to being a good farmer, but the quality of the poetry shows that this is no mere handbook. These poems underlie many others written later about the details of ordinary daily life, especially working life, and the pleasures of rural activity. But they also show that there is a religious mystery revealed by contact with nature.

For Dryden these were "the best poems of the best poet."

The *Aeneid* relates the story of Aeneas in 12 books. An epic of the legendary origins of Rome, with a strong unity of action, inspired by Homer. The style is highly polished, artificial, quite unlike the popular style of Homer. During the Middle Ages, it was read as an allegory of the human life but from Petrarch on, it was also seen as a model to be imitated by Renaissance writers of epic.

For Western culture, no work is more influential than the *Aeneid*. Homer was unknown for centuries, the Middle Ages knew only his name and had no Latin translation of his epics, in fact he was taken for a liar because there existed better-known Latin prose stories of the same events told from the Trojan point of view. These stories, bearing the names of Dares Phrygius ("The Fall of Troy") and Dictys of Crete ("Diary of the Trojan War"), were the main source of stories about Troy until the mid-17th century.

The *Aeneid* is equally a continuation of the Trojan side, Aeneas being shown as the son of Venus and a Trojan father, Anchises, in the Iliad, where he is second to Hector. The *Aeneid* is written with intense artistry, with all Virgil's sensitivity and compassion. It shows the foundation of Rome being prepared through great suffering, near-despair, and human weakness, thanks to a scheme of divine providence.

Since printing began in Western Europe, the *Aeneid* has been published in at least one new edition every year; from Roman times until then it had been read continuously, even when no other classical poetry was esteemed. Virgil was considered to have been a Prophet of Christ, and was given religious respect. He is a basic influence for Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Victor Hugo, Tennyson...

### The *Aeneid* (Summary)

In Book 1 the Trojan survivors, led by Aeneas, escape a terrible storm and arrive in North Africa. There they are brought by Venus to the court of Dido, Queen of Carthage, who falls in love with Aeneas. She asks to hear his story, which occupies Books 2 and 3, with the destruction of Troy and his travels. They have settled down into a quiet life together, but without any wedding ceremony. In Book 4 Mercury is sent with a message from the gods, urging Aeneas to remember his mission to go to Italy and found a new Troy there. His departure causes Dido to commit suicide and is given as the reason for the centuries of war between Carthage and Rome in the future.

Arriving back in Sicily, Aeneas the "True" organizes Games to commemorate the first anniversary of his father's death there, before the journey to Carthage (Book 5). From there they sail up to Cumae, near Naples, and visit the Sibyl (oracle of Apollo) in her cave. After an oracle on their future plans, Aeneas asks permission to go down into the Underworld and meet his father's spirit. He is given instructions and makes the journey (Book 6), one of the most famous parts of the *Aeneid*.

Once at the Tiber, difficulties and fighting return (Book 7), but the spirit of Tiber encourages Aeneas to enter Latium. He sails up to the site of future Rome, where Arcadians are living, and visits the Capitol and the Forum, still just rocks and fields. For future battle, Venus obtains armour from Vulcan, with a shield picturing the future story of Rome (Book 8). The remaining books (Books 9-12) describe the great battles and struggle between Aeneas and Turnus for control of the land, with Aeneas' last gesture of killing Turnus an unnecessary act of revenge for the death of Pallas, when Turnus was already beaten. The poem was left incomplete at Virgil's death.

The morality of the *Aeneid* is "Avoid excess, be true." Its basic theme is the importance of harmony and reconciliation, true nobility in living. The opening lines have often been imitated:

Arms, and the man I sing, who, forced by fate,  
And haughty Juno's unrelenting hate,

Expelled and exiled, left the Trojan shore.  
Long labors, both by sea and land, he bore,  
And in the doubtful war, before he won  
The Latian realm, and built the destined town;  
His banished gods restored to rites divine,  
And settled sure succession in his line,  
From whence the race of Alban fathers come,  
And the long glories of majestic Rome.

O Muse! the causes and the crimes relate;  
What goddess was provoked, and whence her hate;  
For what offense the Queen of Heaven began  
To persecute so brave, so just a man;  
Involved his anxious life in endless cares,  
Exposed to wants, and hurried into wars!  
Can heavenly minds such high resentment show,  
Or exercise their spite in human woe?

Against the Tiber's mouth, but far away,  
An ancient town was seated on the sea;  
A Tyrian colony; the people made  
Stout for the war, and studious of their trade:  
Carthage the name; beloved by Juno more  
Than her own Argos, or the Samian shore.  
Here stood her chariot; here, if Heav'n were kind,  
The seat of awful empire she designed.  
Yet she had heard an ancient rumor fly,  
(Long cited by the people of the sky,  
That times to come should see the Trojan race  
Her Carthage ruin, and her towers deface;  
Nor thus confined, the yoke of sovereign sway  
Should on the necks of all the nations lay.  
She pondered this, and feared it was in fate;  
Nor could forget the war she waged of late  
For conquering Greece against the Trojan state.  
Besides, long causes working in her mind,  
And secret seeds of envy, lay behind;  
Deep graven in her heart the doom remained  
Of partial Paris, and her form disdained;  
The grace bestowed on ravished Ganymed,  
Electra's glories, and her injured bed.  
Each was a cause alone; and all combined  
To kindle vengeance in her haughty mind.  
For this, far distant from the Latian coast  
She drove the remnants of the Trojan host;  
And seven long years the unhappy wand'ring train  
Were toss'd by storms, and scatter'd thro' the main.  
Such time, such toil, requir'd the Roman name,  
Such length of labor for so vast a frame.

(Translated by John Dryden)

From Book VI of the *Aeneid*: The Underworld

Hence leads a road to Acheron, vast flood  
Of thick and restless slime: all that foul ooze  
It belches in Cocytus. Here keeps watch

That wild and filthy pilot of the march  
 Charon, from whose rugged old chin trails down  
 The hoary beard of centuries: his eyes  
 Are fixed, but flame. His grimy cloak hangs loose  
 Rough-knotted at the shoulder: his own hands  
 Pole on the boat, or tend the sail that wafts  
 His dismal skiff and its fell freight along.  
 Ah, he is old, but with that toughening age  
 That speaks his godhead! To the bank and him  
 All a great multitude came pouring down,  
 Brothers and husbands, and the proud-souled heroes,  
 Life's labours done: and boys and unwed maidens  
 And the young men by whose flame-funeral  
 Parents had wept. Many as leaves that fall  
 Gently in autumn when the sharp cold comes  
 Or all the birds that flock at the turn o' the year  
 Over the ocean to the lands of light.  
 They stood and prayed each one to be first taken:  
 They stretched their hands for love of the other side.  
 But the grim sailor takes now these, now those:  
 And some he drives a distance from the shore.  
 Aeneas, moved and marvelling at this stir,  
 Cried - 'O chaste Sibyl, tell me why this throng  
 That rushes to the river? What desire  
 Have all these phantoms? and what rule's award  
 Drives these back from the marge, lets these go over  
 Sweeping the livid shallows with the oar?'  
 The old priestess replied in a few words:  
 'Son of Anchises of true blood divine,  
 Behold the deep Cocytus and dim Styx  
 By whom the high gods fear to swear in vain.  
 This shiftless crowd all is unsepulchred:  
 The boatman there is Charon: those who embark  
 The buried. None may leave this beach of horror  
 To cross the growling stream before that hour  
 That hides their white bones in a quiet tomb.  
 A hundred years they flutter round these shores:  
 Then they may cross the waters long desired.'  
 (Translated by J. E. Flecker)

Quintus Horatius Flaccus (always known in English as **Horace**) (65-8) was born in a simple family, went to study at the University of Athens, then served under Brutus, but survived the defeat at Philippi (42) and was introduced to Maecenas by Virgil and entered the service of Octavian, who enjoyed his company. His combination of great poetic skill with a basically humorous attitude to life made him the great model for English writers such as Pope.

The *Epodes* are the earlier works, iambic poems in which Horace adopts a tone of bitterness, ferocity, which is often found not to be "real"; they are about love problems, politics, or are humorous exercises. They show refined techniques in epigram etc., derived from the Hellenistic Greek poetry.

The *Satires* follow a genre invented by Lucilius (died 101), the personal, autobiographical satire, about opinions, adventures, food, family, friends, morality, but Horace is much less bitter, far more humorous; a stream of anecdotes interrupts the flow of ideas, and we never know when Horace is being ironic because he mocks himself as much as everyone else.

He uses a form of the epic hexameter, passing from the high style to the very relaxed, and this link between epic and satire is recalled in the 17-18th century English "mock-epic."

The Odes (Carmina) are designed to display Horace's great technical skill, modelled on the Greek poets, both Sappho and the Alexandrians. They are not "pure" lyrics, but explore many forms and situations, often expressing directly political comments, which until this were only found in epic forms of poetry. For Petrarch as for Ben Jonson, these were a major model, and they inspired Marvell's "Horatian Ode."

The *Epistles* (letters) are his own inventions, written after the Odes (from 20 B.C.), verse letters in which it is possible to deal with any subject in a personal, conversational way: how to get on with great men, the dangers of avarice, the value of the simple life, town versus country etc. They are not "real" letters, addressed to a particular person, but exercises in style. They were very influential from the Renaissance period onwards, from Donne to Pope especially.

*Ars Poetica* (Art of Poetry) is also a verse epistle, skillful and humor-ous, but although it talks about epic and drama, it is not quite clear what message it contains. Pope based his "Essay on Criticism" on it, and it was very important for theorists such as Boileau. The following texts are both free English versions of parts of the *Ars Poetica*:

'Tis hard, to speak things common, properly:  
And thou mayst better bring a Rhapsody  
Of Homer's forth in acts, than of thine own  
First publish things unspoken, and unknown.  
Yet, common matter thou thine own mayst make,  
If thou the vile, broad-trodden ring forsake.  
For, being a Poet, thou mayst feign, create,  
Not care, as thou wouldst faithfully translate,  
To render word for word: nor with thy sleight  
Of imitation, leap into a straight  
From whence thy modesty, or Poem's Law  
Forbids thee forth again thy foot to draw.  
Nor so begin, as did that Circler, late:  
I sing a noble War, and Priams fate.  
What doth this promiser, such great gaping worth  
Afford? The Mountains travailed, and brought forth  
A trifling Mouse! O, how much better this,  
Who nought assays, unaptly, or amiss?  
Speak to me, Muse, the man, who, after Troy was sacked  
Saw many towns, and men, and could their manners tract.  
He thinks not how to give you smoke from light,  
But light from smoke...  
(Ben Jonson, 1604)

Observe what Characters your persons fit,  
Whether the Master speak, or Jodelet:  
Whether a man, that's elderly in growth,  
Or a brisk Hotspur in his boiling youth:  
A roaring Bully, or a shirking Cheat,  
A Court-bred Lady, or a tawdry Cit:  
A prating Gossip, or a jilting Whore,  
A travelled Merchant, or an homespun Bore:  
Spaniard, or French, Italian, Dutch, or Dane;  
Native of Turkey, India, or Japan.

Either from History your Persons take,

Or let them nothing inconsistent speak:  
If you bring great Achilles on the Stage,  
Let him be fierce and brave, all heat and rage,  
Inflexible, and head-strong to all Laws,  
But those, which Arms and his own will impose.  
Cruel Medea must no pity have,  
Ixion must be treacherous, Ino grieve,  
Io must wander, and Orestes rave.  
But if you dare to tread in paths unknown  
And boldly start new persons of your own  
Be sure to make them in one strain agree  
And let the end like the beginning be.  
(John Oldham, 1681)

**Livy** (64-A.D. 12?) is the great historian of Rome. He wrote a history from the beginnings, in 142 books, of which only 35 have survived. He exposes the history of Rome in vivid prose, full of descriptions, that make it a "prose epic," a form of literature. It is given a basic moral structure (Livy came from a very strict family in Padua) by the idea of old Rome as a place of discipline, simplicity, piety, virtue, all values lost in later corruption by luxury and avarice.

**Propertius** (54-16), the most "artistic" of the Latin poets, elaborate, witty and energetic like John Donne, is difficult. He gave the name "Cynthia" to his lady, who seems to be real.

Publius Ovidius Naso (known as **Ovid**) (43-A.D. 17) became famous as a poet in the generation after the death of Virgil and Horace, by 8 A.D. he was the most famous poet in Rome, but then he displeased Augustus (How? We have no clear information) and he was exiled to Tomis on the Black Sea, a dangerous place on the edge of the Empire, where he died.

Ovid wrote all his works except the *Metamorphoses* in elegiac couplets. The *Amores*, a collection of love poems, suggesting a final rejection of love-conventions, translated by Marlowe, influenced Donne.

The *Heroides* (Epistles from Heroic Women) are mostly verse epistles or dramatic monologues written/spoken by famous women to absent husbands or lovers; a second group has pairs of letters in which the man writes/speaks first. These are explorations of the psychology of passion, of what we call "romantic love," the oppositions between the sexes exist in unresolved tension. Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard" is one of many modern imitations.

The *Ars Amatoria* (Art of Loving) is a parody of normal didactic poetry, teaching the arts of seduction and intrigue to men (books 1 & 2) and women (book 3). It must have shocked, but Ovid's "apology" or retraction, the *Remedia Amoris* (the Cure for Love), is no more serious. In the Middle Ages, Ovid's psychology of Love was immensely popular, especially in France, where it underlies what is often known as "courtly love."

The *Metamorphoses* (Transformations), an epic poem in 15 books in epic hexameters, show the transformations found in old legends, from the beginnings of time until Julius Caesar. Ovid wished to be made immortal by this work, which is inspired by Alexandrian poetry. It is essentially a collection of fragmentary stories, anecdotes united by an overall thematic framework and by Ovid's narrative skill. The more philosophical theme of "mutability and permanence" stands to affirm a basically optimistic outlook. These stories are the main source of medieval and Renaissance knowledge of Greek mythology, interpreted in the Middle Ages in a moralizing, allegorical way. The *Metamorphoses* was often read and



translated in England, especially by Caxton (1480) and by Arthur Golding (1567-7) whose translation had a great influence on Elizabethan poetry, including Shakespeare, who probably also read the original Latin.

Ovid, with Virgil, is one of the first "literary poets," his poems show how much he had read of other poets. But he is writing about human emotions, exploring the heart and its passions. He has enormous technical skills over language and metre, but above all a marvellous imagination, which may be serious or amused. In any case, he teaches us to be more human at every point. Compared with the other Augustans, he is a man of freedom and sensitivity, aware of the good that exists in life. He and Virgil are the two poets who were read continuously, who were as familiar in the 12th century as in the 16th.

### The beginning of the *Metamorphoses*

The golden age was first; when man, yet new,  
No rule but uncorrupted reason knew;  
And with a native bent, did good pursue.  
Unforced by punishment, unawed by fear,  
His words were simple, and his soul sincere:  
Needless was written law, where none oppressed;  
The law of man was written on his breast;  
No suppliant crowds before the judge appeared;  
No court erected yet, nor cause was heard;  
But all was safe, for conscience was their guard....  
The teeming earth, yet guiltless of the plough,  
And unprovoked, did fruitful stores allow:  
Content with food which nature freely bred,  
On wildings and on strawberries they fed....  
From veins of valleys milk and nectar broke,  
And honey sweating through the pores of oak.  
But when good Saturn, banished from above,  
Was driven to Hell, the world was under Jove.  
Succeeding times a silver age behold,  
Excelling brass, but more excelled by gold.  
Then Summer, Autumn, Winter did appear;  
And Spring was but a season of the year.  
The sun his annual course obliquely made,  
Good days contracted, and enlarged the bad.  
Then air with sultry heats began to glow,  
The wings of winds were clogged with ice and snow;  
And shivering mortals, into houses driven,  
Sought shelter from the inclemency of heaven.  
Those houses then were caves, or homely sheds,  
With twining osiers fenced, and moss their beds.  
Then ploughs, for seed, the fruitful furrows broke,  
And oxen laboured first beneath the yoke.  
To this next came in course the brazen age:  
A warlike offspring prompt to bloody rage,  
Not impious yet-Hard steel succeeded then;  
And stubborn as the metal were the men.  
Truth, Modesty, and Shame the world forsook:  
Fraud, Avarice, and Force their places took....  
Then landmarks limited to each his right:  
For all before was common as the light.  
Nor was the ground alone required to bear

Her annual income to the crooked shear:  
But greedy mortals, rummaging her store,  
Dugged from her entrails first the precious ore,  
Which next to hell the prudent gods had laid;  
And that alluring ill to sight displayed.  
Thus cursed steel, and more accursed gold,  
Gave mischief birth, and made that mischief bold:  
And double death did wretched man invade,  
By steel assaulted, and by gold betrayed.  
Now, brandished weapons glittering in their hands,  
Mankind is broken loose from moral bands;  
No rights of hospitality remain:  
The guest, by him who harboured him, is slain;  
The son-in-law pursues the father's life;  
The wife her husband murders, he the wife.  
The step-dame poison for the son prepares;  
The son inquires into his father's years.  
Faith flies, and Piety in exile mourns;  
And Justice, here oppressed, to heaven returns.

(Translated by John Dryden)

The end of the *Metamorphoses*,

All things do change; but nothing sure doth perish. This same sprite  
Doth fleet, and frisking here and there doth swiftly take his flight  
From one place to another place, and entereth every wight,  
Removing out of man to beast, and out of beast to man;  
But yet it never perisheth nor never perish can.  
And even as supple wax with ease receiveth figures strange,  
And keeps not aye one shape, nor bides assured aye from change,  
And yet continueth always wax in substance; so I saw  
The soul is aye the selfsame thing it was, and yet astray  
It fleeteth into sundry shapes...  
In all the world there is not that standeth at a stay.  
Things ebb and flow, and every shape is made to pass away.  
The time itself continually is fleeting like a brook:  
For neither brook nor lightsome time can tarry still. But look!  
As every wave drives other forth, and that which comes behind  
Both thrusteth and is thrust itself, even so the times by kind  
Do fly and follow both at once, and evermore renew,  
For that that was before is left, and straight there doth ensue  
Another that was never erst.  
Now have I brought a work to end which neither Jove's fierce wrath,  
Nor sword, nor fire, nor fretting age with all the force it hath  
Are able to abolish quite. Let come that fatal hour  
Which, saving of this brittle flesh, hath over me no power,  
And at his pleasure make an end of my uncertain time;  
Yet shall the better part of me assured be to climb  
Aloft above the starry sky; and all the world shall never  
Be able for to quench my name; for look! how far so ever  
The Roman Empire by the right of conquest shall extend,  
So far shall all folk read this work; and time without all end,  
If poets as by prophecy about the truth may aim,

My life shall everlastingly be lengthened still by fame.  
(Translated by Sir John Harrington)

#### Literary Figures of the Post-Augustan Period

**Phaedrus** (15 B.C.-50) ought to be known for his adaptations into Latin of Aesop's *Fables* since his work established the fable, especially the beast fable, as a serious genre.

**Seneca** (4 B.C.-65) was above all a philosopher, Stoic and moralizing, but many of his works are lost. He is notable in literary history because his Latin versions of nine tragedies (*Hercules Furens*, *Medea*, *Troades*, *Phaedra*, *Agamemnon*, *Oedipus*, *Hercules Oetaeus*, *Phoenissae*, *Thyestes*) showed the Renaissance a form of classical tragedy that it found more congenial than the austere Greek originals. Seneca's tragedies are designed to be read in 'closet performance', not acted in a theatre. They are static, and in high style. The presence of ghosts, tyrants, madmen, nurses, traitors, of high emotions expressed in elaborate rhetoric, of violent events, and other such elements in Renaissance tragedy are all signs of Senecan influence. His work is designed to illustrate the Stoic idea that passion is essentially destructive; passion and revenge unleash the hounds of hell, and the innocent suffer as much as the guilty, while the gods remain above, indifferent.

Seneca's prose works are marked by noble humanism and moral enlightenment. His style is epigrammatic, curt, and influenced the change in English prose style in about 1600. Until then, Cicero had been the model. Erasmus edited him, Montaigne chose him and Plutarch as his favorite writers. The English Essays of Francis Bacon show strong Senecan influence in their use of philosophical epigrams.

#### From Seneca's *Moral Epistles*

We need not lift our hands to heaven, we need persuade no one to let us approach the ear of some statue, as if by so doing we made ourselves more audible. God is near you, with you, in you. Yes, Lucullus, within us a holy spirit has its seat, our watcher and guardian in evil and in good. As we treat him so he treats us. The good man, in fact, is never without God. Can any one rise superior to Fortune without his aid? Is he not the source of every generous and exalted inspiration? In every good person "Dwells nameless, dimly seen, a god" (Aeneid).

If you are confronted by some dense grove of aged and giant trees shutting out every glimpse of sky with screen upon screen of branches, the towering stems, the solitude, the sense of strangeness in a dusk so deep and unbroken, where no roof is, will make God real to you. Again, the cavern that holds a hillside poised on its deep-tunnelled galleries of rock, hollowed into that roomy vastness by nature's toils, not man's, will strike some hint of sanctity into your soul. So if you see a man undismayed by dangers, untroubled by desires, happy in adversity, calm in the midst of storm, eying mankind from above and the gods on their own plane, will you not be touched with awe before him? Into that body a divine force has descended. The splendid and disciplined soul, which leaves the little world unheeded and smiles at the objects of all our hopes and fears, draws its driving force from heaven. So great a creation cannot stand without God for its stay... Thus a spirit, great and holy, sent down to give us a nearer knowledge of the divine, lives among us but cleaves to the fountain of its existence: from this it is pendant, on this its gaze is fixed, thither it strives, and moves among our concerns as a superior. (... ) And what, you ask, is that? His spirit, and Reason as perfected in that spirit. For man is a creature of Reason. And what does this Reason demand of him? A very easy thing-to live in accord with his own nature. But it is made hard by the universal insanity. We push each other into vices.

(Translated by E. Phillips Barker)

**Petronius**, too, committed suicide in 65 after losing Nero's favour. He is the author of one work, the *Satyricon*, which many consider the first novel. It is a kind of Menippean Satire, combining lyric and mock-epic, poetry with prose. It is full of low-class and disreputable heroes, humour of situation and lively, realistic dialogue that reminds one of Charles Dickens. Its structure is episodic, like the picaresque novel.

### The Writers of the Silver Age

Quintilian (30-100?) is only known by one work, "On the Training of an Orator," in which he outlines a traditional system of education based on speech-making. In the Renaissance, many scholars were tutors to high-class children and his ideas appealed to Erasmus, Vives etc. At the end, he gives a picture of the finished product, a Roman gentleman perfect in morals and diction. Pope refers to his suggestions about good reading in the *Essay on Criticism*.

Statius (40-96) left only one work that has survived, the epic *Thebaid* which was highly esteemed in the Middle Ages by Dante and Chaucer. It tells of the fratricidal conflict between Eteocles and Polynices for control of Thebes, ending in their deaths (they kill each other). Creon refuses burial to Polynices but Antigone and his wife perform the rites. Theseus of Athens intervenes, kills Creon, and destroys Thebes. The work is no longer admired or read.

Martial (40-104) has left us fifteen books with more than 1500 epigrams, often a single couplet. Some have a "sting" that is closer to satire than the Greek epigrams had ever been. But the humour ("wit") goes with deep understanding of humanity. Martial's epigrams were essential for the art of 17th-century poetry: Ben Jonson, John Donne, Herrick, Cowley. Renaissance critics distinguished between different tones of epigram: honeyed, pungent, mordant, ridiculous and foul.

Pliny the Younger (61-114) is best known for his 10 books of letters, 247 letters to 105 people. They were prepared for publication, so are more artificial than those of Cicero, but it is Pliny who taught the West the art of literary letters, a form of essay. One of the most famous letters contains his description of the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 which destroyed Pompeii, in which his uncle died. Equally important is his letter to the Emperor Trajan, in which he asks how he should deal with the Christians in the province of Asia Minor he had been sent to govern.

Juvenal (50-127) is the greatest of the ancient satirists, fierce where Horace was amused, considering the evils of his age with "harsh, wild laughter." Some of the topics of his poems are: hypocritical philosophers, the difficulties of being poor, the faults of women, the evils of pride and ambition, the cruelties of people. He was popular in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Donne and other young men of his time enjoyed his caustic approach. Dryden was the first to translate him while adapting his references to contemporary situations, Boileau in France, Pope and Dr. Johnson, Burke, Hugo, Flaubert, Byron, all drew on his 16 surviving poems. His vision of the world is always on the darker side, his struggle is to remain human despite all the wickedness he sees.

Tacitus (55-117?) is a chronicler, a historian. He tells us almost all we know about the events between the death of Augustus and the death of Nero in his *Annals*, and is the source for Robert Graves' novels about Claudius, for the film "Quo Vadis," as well as for Racine's *Britannicus*, Ben Jonson's *Sejanus* (in which Shakespeare acted) etc. He is also a vital source of knowledge about the Germanic tribes in his *Germania*; some of them were later to cross the Channel and become the Anglo-Saxons while others took control of Italy. He even describes Britain in his *Agricola*.

Suetonius (69-140) is the founder of modern biography, in his lost *De Viris Illustribus*, in his

"Lives of the Poets" and his "Lives of the Twelve Caesars." After him, history came to be seen in a biographical perspective, and thus he inspired St. Jerome's *De Viris Illustribus* (392), Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne* (820), William of Malmesbury's *History of the English Kings* (1127) and all that follow. His lives are told without prejudice or rhetoric, facts speak for themselves, and since the people he describes were so fascinating, his lives are reported like "case-histories."

At the same time, but living in Greece and writing in Greek, lived Plutarch (50-120). For the last thirty years of his life he was priest at Delphi and wished to revive the ancient Greek spirit. He is most famous for his *Lives*, although he wrote very many other works, mostly philosophical as with his *Moralia*. His *Lives* contain biographical portraits of 50 great men, some legendary like Theseus and Romulus, some almost contemporary like Julius Caesar and Brutus. Mostly they are written in pairs, with moralizing comparisons attached. The stories he tells are vivid, the narrative memorable, the style varied. Many of the *Lives* follow a pattern of family background - education - youth - climax - change of fortune, which helped to inspire the Renaissance historical tragedy. In France, he was translated by Amyot in 1559, this was then put into English by Sir Thomas North (1579), giving Shakespeare his material for Julius Caesar and other plays. Montaigne, Dryden, Rousseau and the French Revolutionaries all drew on him. In Plutarch's *Lives*, history is seen becoming literature.

Marcus Aurelius is unique among the emperors in being also famous as a writer. He was much engaged in provincial wars, in Syria and Egypt, etc. During his spare time he made notes on thoughts which struck him. Because of his own personality, and the difficulties surrounding him, these have great intensity, although the Stoic ideas expressed in these *Meditations* are not very new. It is a work which has appealed to thoughtful men of action over the centuries.