

## Section A

### MEN AND WOMEN

**William Blake** (1757 – 1827)

*The Sick Rose* – page 18

He did not go to school, but was an apprentice engraver before becoming a student at the Royal Academy. From 1779 he worked as a bookseller's engraver and in 1784 set up his own print shop. During his time, neither his poetry or art attracted an enthusiastic audience, and a lifetime of hard work failed to bring him riches. His last years were passed in obscurity. It was some four decades after his death that his reputation as a lyric poet was established, while rediscovered engravings had a significant influence on the development of Art Nouveau. *The Sick Rose* was published in his 1794 volume, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, which was admired for its powerfully symbolic and vivid imagery, containing many of his more accessible poems and demonstrating his command of the lyric.

**Elizabeth Barrett Browning** (1806 – 1861)

*Sonnet* – page 11

She was largely self-educated at home and became deeply versed in the classics. In 1838 she became seriously ill as a result of a broken blood vessel and was sent to Torquay. It was there two years later that her eldest brother drowned, to her lifelong grief. She returned to London in 1841, though still an invalid. Robert Browning began a correspondence with her in 1845 and they were married in September of the following year, necessarily in secret because her father forbade his sons and daughters to marry. They moved to Florence. Her poetic reputation was always greater than that of her husband's, although her progressive social ideas and occasional experimental style often alarmed her contemporary readers. Her best work is considered to be the sequence of sonnets dedicated to her husband.

**John Donne** (1572 – 1631)

*The Sun Rising* – page 8

He was born into a devout Catholic family, but renounced his faith when he was in his early twenties and conformed to the Established Church. He sailed with Sir Walter Raleigh to fight the Spanish treasure ships off the Azores in 1597. On his return, he became secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton, the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal. In 1601 he was elected MP for Brackley, but in that same year he wrecked his career by secretly marrying Lady Egerton's niece, Ann More, finding himself without employment and his wife without a dowry. After a period of living on the kindness of friends he was employed in controversies with Catholics. Long years of poverty and insecurity came to an end in January 1615 when he took Holy Orders. Two years later his wife died, after giving birth to their twelfth child. From 1621 until his death, Donne was Dean of St Paul's, and was one of the most celebrated preachers of his age. He is regarded as the founder of the Metaphysical Poets, noted for their extended metaphors and striking

imagery. He is celebrated as an original, honest and powerful love poet. His monument by Nicholas Stone, which survived the Great Fire, stands in Wren's Cathedral.

**Michael Drayton** (1563 – 1631)

*Since there's no help* – page 16

He was born at Hartshill in Warwickshire and as a youth became page to Sir Henry Goodere of Polesworth. He fell in love with Sir Henry's daughter, Anne, and worshipped her as 'Idea' in his poetry. Even after her marriage to Sir Henry Rainford he continued to celebrate her charms in verse, and he never married. He had wanted to be a poet from the age of ten and became a prolific writer. His first work was a verse paraphrase of parts of the Old Testament, *The Harmony of the Church*. Ironically, the *Harmony* caused offence among the authorities and was banned. When James I became king in 1603 Drayton angled for royal favour with *To the Majesty of King James: a Gratulatory Poem*. Unfortunately he omitted to include the customary tribute to the late Queen Elizabeth, and this oversight probably cost him an appointment at court. In spite of this setback, Drayton had a fairly successful career as a poet. '*Since there's no help*' is his most famous sonnet. He died poor, but was buried at Westminster Abbey.

**Anne Finch** (1661 – 1720)

*The Unequal Fetters* – page 12

She was the Countess of Winchilsea. She was one of the earliest published women poets in England. William Wordsworth was a great admirer of her work and she is considered by many to have been the greatest English female poet to have written before the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

**Dora Greenwell** (1821 – 1882)

*A Scherzo A Shy Person's Wishes* – page 13

She was born in Northumberland. She largely lived a life of quiet service, helping the poor and visiting convicts in Durham prison, but she was also a strong campaigner for better education and votes for women. A writer of poems and hymns, her work is influenced by her love of the countryside and her deep interest in theology. She was a friend of poet Christina Rossetti.

**Thomas Hardy** (1840 – 1928)

*The Ruined Maid* – page 10, *On the Departure Platform* – page 17

Apart from a period in London as an apprentice architect, he spent all his life in Dorset. In 1874 he gave up architecture for writing and took to travelling in Europe with his wife. He would spend several months of every year in London where he revelled in the admiration of the literary and aristocratic society, but resented the reviews of 'pessimism' and 'immorality'. He published 11 major novels in 24 years. From the late 1890s, partly owing to attacks on the 'obscenity' of his 1896 novel *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy devoted himself to poetry, but his late start held back his reputation. As with his novels, most of Hardy's poems reveal his love and observation of the natural world, often with strong symbolic effect, deeply rooted in his rural background and often colloquial. He was deeply affected by his loss of faith and by the death

of his first wife, and explored issues of failed love, of time and of life's tragic ironies. Philip Larkin, for whom Hardy's 'dominant emotion' is 'sadness', thought him the best poet of the century.

**Robert Herrick (1591 – 1674)**

*Upon Julia's Clothes* – page 8

The son of a prosperous goldsmith, he entered St John's College, Cambridge, in 1613 and later moved to Trinity Hall. He was ordained a priest in 1623 and by 1625 had become well known as a poet. He was one of the army chaplains on a disastrous expedition led by the Duke of Buckingham in 1627, and was rewarded for his service in 1630 by being appointed at Dean Prior in Devon. He did not initially enjoy the barren isolation of this rural life, though his poems show that he developed feelings for folk customs and festivals. A happy rather than passionate love poet, he is regarded as one of the finest English lyric poets whose style gives grace to the subjects of love, transience and death that obsess him.

**Thomas Hood (1799 – 1845)**

*Faithless Sally Brown* – page 14

He faced long struggles against poverty and illness with courage and good humour - characteristics reflected in his work. Hood largely wrote humorous and satirical verse, often making use of his remarkable skill with puns.

**Amy Levy (1861 – 1889)**

*In the Mile End Road* – page 19

She was born in Clapham to a Jewish family. She was a Cambridge graduate who became well known as a feminist poet and novelist. Inner conflicts between her conventional upbringing and the bohemian lifestyle of the literary, compounded by exhaustion from publishing three novels in 1888, led to her suicide that year, aged 27.

**Andrew Marvell (1618 – 1678)**

*To His Coy Mistress* – page 9

The son of a clergyman of Calvinist views, Marvell was educated at Hull Grammar School and Trinity College, Cambridge. He left Cambridge in 1641 and spent several years travelling and sometimes tutoring in France, Holland, Spain and Italy. Back in England, he was tutor to the daughter of Lord Fairfax in Yorkshire from 1650 to 1652. He moved in literary circles and was friends with Royalists, but he began to accept Oliver Cromwell's power, and finally to admire him. In 1653 he became tutor to one of Cromwell's wards at Eton and the following year began a career as unofficial laureate to the Lord Protector. Marvell was MP for Hull from 1659 until his death. He spent 1662-63 in Holland on secret political work, probably espionage. He was a staunch defender of constitutional liberties. His patriotism often found expression in political satires. These overshadowed during his age his place as a lyricist among the Metaphysical Poets. He is best known for writing in a balanced and argumentative style treating conventional subjects with irony and enigma, as in *To His Coy Mistress*.

**Christina Rossetti (1830 – 1893)**

*Remember* – page 19

An English poet whose parents were Italian and whose brother was poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti, she was a devout High Anglican. Her work ranges from poems of fantasy and verses for the young to ballads, love lyrics, sonnets, and religious poetry. A sense of melancholy, often morbid, dominates her poetry, which is strong with symbolism, vivid in detail and intensely emotional. Serious illness left her an invalid and recluse from 1874.

**William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616)**

*Sonnet 138 ('When my love swears that she is made of truth')* – page 11

Born in Stratford, his beginnings as a writer are unknown. He was a leading member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1594, which grew into London's leading dramatic company, occupying the Globe Theatre from 1599 and becoming the King's Men on James I's accession in 1603. His 37 plays have made him the most famous and admired writer of all time. His plays were published through performance, although only half appeared as printed scripts during his lifetime. He composed a series of 154 sonnets, many of them addressed to a fascinating tormentor, known only as the 'Dark Lady'. Although Sir Thomas Wyatt introduced this poetic form with its 14 lines and 10 syllables to England, it was named after Shakespeare because he was the greatest sonneteer.

**Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503 - 1542)**

*'They Flee From Me...'* – page 16

He held various diplomatic posts in the service of Henry VIII in France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands. His visits to Italy in 1527 prompted him to translate and imitate the poems of Petrarch, introducing the sonnet form to England. Wyatt is thought to have told the king before his marriage to Anne Boleyn that she had been his mistress and was not fit to be a royal consort. He was briefly imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1536, but was not executed like Anne's other former lovers. Shortly after his release he became a sheriff of Kent, and from 1537 to 1539 was ambassador to the court of Charles V in Spain. In 1540 his close friend Thomas Cromwell was executed, and the following year Wyatt himself was charged with treason but released two months later. His poetry raises questions of authorship, biographical relevance and artistic intention and reviews of his work are greatly varied. C. S. Lewis labelled him the 'father of the Drab Age', while some note an honesty and strength of feeling in his love poems that anticipates those of Donne.