HSC English Advanced
Comparative Studies of Texts and Context
Introduction to text one
Week 2, Term 1
Today we are going to look at the oldest text in your pairings. You should always consider the older text first because of the influence that older classic texts can have on future texts, directly or indirectly. You should explore your text’s context and values, and the overall message of the text.
The Elizabethan Era: 1558-1603

Queen Elizabeth I reigned in England from 1558 to her death in 1603. Her father was King Henry VIII, the inventor of the Church of England, and her mother was Anne Boleyn, who was executed by her husband for treason. This made the throne a bit difficult for Elizabeth to get her hands on, but she was very determined and succeeded in becoming her father’s heir to the throne, by having other contenders, including her sister, Mary Queen of Scots, executed.

She was a very strict Protestant, and so outlawed Catholicism, declaring it treasonous. This made life difficult as there was about a 50-50 split of Catholics and Protestants at the time in the country, and the national religion flip-flopped a lot between kings. Considered a stern and strict ruler, she led England in wars against the Spanish (a catholic nation). However, English arts and literature blossomed under her rule, and Queen Elizabeth had Shakespeare’s drama company “The Lord Chamberlain’s Men” perform at her castle and for the nobility frequently, even though Shakespeare’s secretly Catholic family were on rocky terms with her, as she had Shakespeare’s cousin put to death.

Elizabeth never took a husband, and died in 1603 without an heir. She left the throne to her Scottish nephew, James I who was already king of Scotland. This action united England and Scotland as one country. James was chosen because he was a Protestant, even though his mother, Mary Queen of Scots was a Catholic – the very same one who had been executed at Queen Elizabeth’s request.
Elements of Renaissance Drama:

- **An Aurally versus Visually reliant audience:** For us in the 21st Century, visual symbols are everywhere: TV, magazines, advertising billboards, government signs, even on people’s clothing. We are therefore better at interpreting visual symbols than print and are heavily reliant on this skill for survival – even traffic lights show this. Imagine you couldn’t read or write, and you were born in a time when very few visual symbols existed or were used in daily life. You would be very dependent on hearing – from eavesdropping gossip at the local ale-house to public announcements made by the town crier about new edicts from the Queen that could have your head cut off if you didn’t obey them. These people were totally dependent on hearing for information and they were therefore very good at it, as skilled aurally as we are visually today.

- **Suspension of disbelief:** There was no such thing as “special effects” in Renaissance drama, and it was quite natural for the audience to be expected to imagine ideas instead of being shown them. With no real visual stimulus in their lives, they didn’t expect stage effects or props or scenery. The play told them what to imagine, e.g.: “fair Verona where we lay our scene” and they simply imagined what it all looked like. The actors wore costumes to help the imagining along. They may also have used music from a little orchestra, or a prop or two, such as a sword to liven things up, but that was all they had to work with. Playwrights and actors, although patronized by dukes, kings and queens, were not necessarily wealthy people. Renaissance actors moved around the stage far more, and in a more exaggerated way, to give the audience something to look at. Audiences didn’t expect realism from a play either. When the evil character reveals his plot in a soliloquy not two feet away from the hero, the audience obligingly suspends disbelief and makes pretend that the hero cannot hear. The fact that characters rant their thoughts out loud all the time falls under the same considerations from the audience, in a time when voice-overs were not possible.

- **Retelling Stories:** Renaissance plots were rarely original. They were often dramatizations of history, or the retelling of an Ancient Greek or Roman playwright such as Ovid. Shakespeare often rehashed folklore and fairytales to get the plots of his stories. You might think of this as cheating, but that isn’t how they thought of it. It wasn’t the plot that was important, so much as HOW you told it. This of course meant that Renaissance audiences – Shakespeare’s included – would have been as familiar with the plots of his plays as we are with Cinderella and Red Riding Hood. Because they already basically knew the story, what was really important to the audience were the double-meanings, the jokes, and the way in which the characters and values were represented, and they had more time to pay attention to these aspects.

- **Women weren’t allowed to act:** In fact, the Renaissance was very much a man’s movement – women were not allowed to be great artists. Young teenage boys around the age of 14 played the roles of women, and were often bound around the groin to keep their voices higher and more feminine for longer.
Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre: An example of Renaissance playhouses

The Globe was a three-story, open-air amphitheatre approximately 30 metres in diameter that could house up to 3,000 spectators. The Globe is depicted as round in historic sketches of the building, however, the uncovering of a small part of the Globe's foundation suggested that it was a polygon of 20 sides.

At the base of the stage, there was an area called the pit, where people called the "groundlings" would stand to watch the performance. Groundlings would eat hazelnuts or oranges (much as we eat popcorn at the movies) – and they had something to throw if they disliked the performance. Around the yard were three levels of stadium-style seats, which were more expensive.

A rectangle of stage platform, called the apron stage, thrust out into the middle of the open-air yard. The stage measured approximately 13 metres in width and 8 metres in depth and was raised about 1.5 metres off the ground, which kept actors safely out of the reach of the heckling public. The apron stage had a trap-door in the floor for actors to vary their entrance to the stage.
There was a roofed **inner stage** separated from the apron stage by a curtain. The back wall of this stage had two or three doors on the main level which entered into the "tiring house" (backstage area) where the actors dressed and awaited their entrances.

Over this stage, there was a roof called **the heavens** supported by large columns, with clouds and sky painted on it. Actors sometimes descended from the heavens using another trapdoor with a rope and harness, particularly ghosts, fairies and witches.

Just below this section on the second level was **the balcony**. The balcony housed musicians and could also be used for scenes requiring an upper space, such as the balcony scene in Romeo and Juliet.
Richard III - 1591

Richard III was a real king, although whether or not he was really evil is up for debate. One of Shakespeare’s earliest plays, it is of the History genre, and was written the way it was to flatter Queen Elizabeth I, as the hero of the play, Richmond, who becomes Henry VII when he is crowned, is Queen Elizabeth’s grandfather.

To discuss Richard III appropriately you will need to study Renaissance Drama, the Elizabethan period, Shakespeare, and The War of the Roses.
The War of the Roses:

The Wars of the Roses were a series of civil wars between supporters of the rival houses of Lancaster (represented by a red rose) and York (represented by a white rose) for the throne of England. They were fought in several skirmishes between 1455 and 1485.

The end of the War of the Roses is where Richard III comes in. There had been a lull in the wars while Edward IV, a York, was on the throne. When he died unexpectedly in 1483 his surviving brother Richard first moved to prevent Edward's widow from participating in government during the minority of Edward's son, Edward V, and then seized the throne for himself. This usurpation, and suspicions that Richard had murdered Edward V and his younger brother (often referred to as the "Princes in the Tower" as this is where they were locked), provoked several members of the nobility to revolt against him.

The Earl of Richmond, a distant relative of the Lancasters, overcame and killed Richard in battle at Bosworth in 1485. The wars ended with the Earl of Richmond being crowned King Henry VII, who founded the House of Tudor, which subsequently ruled England and Wales for 117 years.

Values of the time

- The values of Elizabethan England were quite visceral. They were used to public executions as their other form of entertainment, so they liked violence and revenge themes. Swordfights and murders in plays, especially if the guy deserved to die, were very popular.

- At the time physical deformity was usually representative of deformity of character. The Elizabethans believed the four humours – (liquids of the body) and these were thought to guide a person’s behaviour if they were not in balance. If you were a sad person or a dour one, people might remark that you had too much Black bile. Yellow Bile was thought to make you cranky, Blood made you courageous and sexual, and Phlegm made you calm and unemotional.

- Each scene in Act I is ended by Richard directly addressing the audience. This action on Richard’s part not only keeps him in control of the dramatic action of the play, but also of how the audience sees him: in a somewhat positive light, or as the protagonist. Richard embodies the dramatic character of "Vice" from Medieval mystery plays with his “impish-to-fiendish humour”. Like Vice, Richard is able to present what is ugly and evil — his thoughts and aims, his view of other characters — into what is amiable and amusing for the audience.

- Ambition for the crown was a very popular theme, and such ambition always had to be punished — or the queen might have something to say about the message of your play. Richard III, the real man, was a member of the York family, who during the war of the Roses was the enemy of the Lancaster family, from whom Elizabeth herself was descended. Many historians state that Richard was no more evil than many other monarchs who killed to get the throne (Lizzy included) but it was politics which meant that Richard had to be portrayed as evil.
Julius Caesar - 1599

The play is believed to have been written in 1599, although, like many of Shakespeare’s works, it’s very hard to tell exactly when it was written. As a big picture, Julius Caesar is supportive of Elizabethan contextual values about leadership by showing what happens when people try to kill a leader – civil war. However, Shakespeare may have focused on this play to compare the values of the Roman democracies with the fairly totalitarian state that was Elizabethan England.

It has also been suggested that Shakespeare used the story of Caesar to stand in for a contemporary political event – the English Nine Years War against Ireland, and the Earl of Essex, who led England’s troops, and was subsequently executed by Elizabeth in 1601 for ‘treason’. Essex was thought to be planning to overthrow Elizabeth, whose rule was shaky as she had no heir.

Shakespeare got his account of Caesar’s murder from Sir Thomas North’s translation of Plutarch’s Life of Brutus and Life of Caesar. Plutarch was a Greek-Roman historian who lived between 46–120 A.D. and put his own spin on the lives he was recounting – he paints Brutus, a fellow republican, as noble, whilst Caesar and Antony, he is quite gruff about, calling Antony an alcoholic.

There are several places where Shakespeare slightly alters his telling from the original. He combines battles, and makes several events, such as the death of Caesar, the reading of his will, and Marc Antony’s speech all happen on the same day so as to simplify and heighten the drama. Also, Shakespeare moves the scene of Caesar’s death to the Capitol so that it has more dramatic and symbolic impact. In Caesar’s defence, Shakespeare added a line to his final words. “And you Brutus? Then Caesar falls.” Meaning that, if Brutus wished it, he was prepared to die. This rather problematises the “ambition” accusation.
There are also many elements in the play which are not historically accurate, owing to the fact that Shakespeare would not have had an excellent understanding of the small details about Roman life. The script mentions objects such as hats and doublets (a large, heavy Elizabethan jacket) - neither of which existed in ancient Rome. Caesar is mentioned to be wearing a doublet instead of a Roman toga. Another time, a clock is heard to strike and Brutus notes it with "Count the clock". Clocks of this variety were not used in ancient Rome: they used sun-dials. These elements are known as anachronisms – meaning that they are “out of time” with the historical context of the play.

Values of the time

- Republican vs Monarchy. The ideals of the Roman court are very different to Elizabethan England. During the play many of the senators argue the pros and cons of these systems. This would have been fairly educating to the common people of Renaissance England who probably didn’t know there even were alternative forms of government. The norm at the time was for plays about the Romans to feature a pack of squabbling, heathen idiots - on 1578 play advertised their play as showing: ‘their greedy desire to conquer others, their picking of quarrels at home, their mortal malice to destroy themselves (commit suicide) and an evident demonstration that peoples’ rule must give place and Prince’s power prevail’.

- Manliness and virtue. For the Romans, being ‘virtuous’ meant being manly – a good citizen (the opposite of personal ambition), a rhetorician, a loyal friend to other men (who may be your true loves, rather than your wife) and brave. It was considered more virtuous to kill yourself than to allow your enemy to kill you – which is why there are quite a lot of suicides in the play. Essex too, was something of a chivalric character to the English – riding off into battle with a huge procession. Chivalry and knighthood was dying in the Elizabethan court, giving way to politics and bureaucracy – a habitat more suited to Robert Cecil, Essex’s rival.

- The power of rhetoric, the ability to persuade through formal public speaking, is an important idea in Rome, where it was considered quite virtuous. Cicero (who appears briefly in the play) was very influential to Roman rhetoric, even describing an ‘ideal orator’ who was knowledgeable on all things – an idea which contributed a lot to humanism. Rhetoric in Shakespeare’s time is more about wit and wordplay – being quick and clever rather than being the wise orator Cicero advocated for. Consider the two funeral speeches Antony and Brutus make, and who sways the crowd more.

- Humanism and reason. The Romans tried to emulate the Golden Age of the Greeks, and thus tried to explain the world with thought and study. They rhetoric (politics) grammar (literature) ethics (philosophy) science and art and highly valued great thinkers and orators. In the Renaissance, people took up humanism once again, and genius artists like Shakespeare were greatly appreciated. Shakespeare is a big believer in using reason –
gathering evidence and thinking before acting. Many tragedies come about because characters act rashly – the mob kills Cinna the Poet, Brutus doesn’t stop to consider who really wrote the letters calling for Caesar’s downfall, Cassius and Titanius suicide.

- Politica/ambition. Both Rome and Elizabethan England were political minefields. Several characters including Caesar, Casca, Marc Antony and Brutus himself can be viewed as being ambitious or envious. “For the good of Rome” is a wonderful cover for any political corruption taking place.

- Personal duty versus civic duty. There’s a philosophical problem at the heart of the play – is it more important to do what is right by your friends, or your country? In Elizabethan England, one’s loyalty is supposed to be to the queen – part of what gets Essex into trouble is that he keeps disobeying Elizabeth in order, he thinks, to better serve her. Likewise, Brutus is torn between loyalty to his friend and to his nation, but like a good republican, he chooses his nation “not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more”. Part of Brutus’ problem is that he is an idealist, not a pragmatist – after all, the Rome he was trying to save gets plunged into civil war because of him.
The Jacobean Era

James was an unpopular king. Not only was he a Scottish King taking the English Crown, but like Elizabeth, he was a Protestant, and the Catholic peasantry tried to have him and the whole Parliament blown up in the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. The plan was to blow up the House of Lords and install a Catholic head of state. Fawkes was discovered guarding 36 barrels of gunpowder—enough to reduce the House of Lords to rubble—and arrested. Eight of the conspirators, including Fawkes, were convicted and sentenced to be hanged, drawn, and quartered.

Although anti-Catholic legislation was introduced soon after the plot's discovery, many important and loyal Catholics retained high office during King James I's reign. The two religions of England continued to grate against each other, culminating in the English Civil War, which broke out during the reign of James' son Charles I.
John Donne’s Poetry – 1572-1631

John Donne was born in England into a Catholic family at a time when Catholicism was illegal in England – The Jacobean Era. Many of his family were exiled or killed for religious reasons. Despite the obvious dangers, Donne’s family arranged for his Catholic education. Donne was admitted to the University of Cambridge, but was unable to obtain a degree because of his Catholicism. When his brother died of plague in prison after harbouring a Catholic priest, Donne began to question his faith.

Donne spent much of his considerable inheritance on women, literature, pastimes and travel. He married Anne More against the wishes of her father. This ruined his career and earned him a short stay in prison. Donne was released when the marriage was proven valid. He wrote to his wife to tell her about losing his job, he wrote after his name: John Donne, Anne Donne, Un-done.

Following his release, Donne had to accept a retired country life. Though he practiced law he was in a constant state of financial insecurity, with a growing family to provide for. Anne bore him 12 children in 16 years of marriage. In a state of despair, Donne noted that the death of a child would mean one less mouth to feed, but he could not afford the burial expenses. During this time Donne wrote, but did not publish, Biathanatos, his defense of suicide. His wife died five days after giving birth to their twelfth child. Donne mourned her deeply and never remarried; this was quite unusual for the time, especially as he had a large family to bring up. He eventually converted to the Church of England at the urging of James I and became a preacher. He was well-known for his sermons and wrote a series of meditations and prayers on health, pain, and sickness before his death.
Donne's Literary Style

Donne's earliest poems showed a developed knowledge of English society coupled with sharp criticism of its problems. His satires dealt with common Elizabethan topics, such as corruption in the legal system, mediocre poets, and pompous courtiers. His images of sickness, vomit, manure, and plague assisted in the creation of a strongly satiric world populated by all the fools and knaves of England. His third satire, however, deals with the problem of true religion, a matter of great importance to Donne. He argued that it was better to examine carefully one's religious convictions than blindly to follow any established tradition, for none would be saved at the Final Judgment, by claiming "A Harry, or a Martin taught [them] this."

Donne was famous for his metaphysical poetry. His work suggests a healthy appetite for life and its pleasures, while also expressing deep emotion. He did this through the use of conceits, wit and intellect. Donne's early career was also notable for his erotic poetry, especially his elegies, in which he employed unconventional metaphors, such as a flea biting two lovers being compared to sex.

Donne is considered a master of the metaphorical conceit, an extended metaphor that combines two vastly different ideas into a single idea, often using imagery. An example of this is the equation of lovers with saints. Unlike the conceits found in other Elizabethan poetry, which formed clichéd comparisons between more closely related objects (such as a rose and love), metaphysical conceits go to a greater depth in comparing two completely unlike objects, although sometimes in the mode of Shakespeare's radical paradoxes and imploded contraries. One of the most famous of Donne's conceits is found in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" where he compares two lovers who are separated to the two legs of a compass.

Donne's works are also witty, employing paradoxes, puns, and subtle yet remarkable analogies. His pieces are often ironic and cynical, especially regarding love and human motives. Common subjects of Donne's poems are love (especially in his early life), death (especially after his wife's death), and religion. Donne's poetry represented a shift from classical forms to more personal poetry. Donne is noted for his poetic metre, which was structured with changing and jagged rhythms that closely resemble casual speech.
Values of the time

- James inherited a debt from Elizabeth which saw the whole country plunged into economic hardship. Couple that with a massive outbreak of the plague, and the gunpowder plot, and it’s easy to see why the general public might have been depressed.

- Protestantism and the Anglican Church were known for being more dour and serious religions which did not like the wealth, richness and corruption associated with the Catholic church. While this was quite a fair assessment, it often meant the Protestants and Anglicans did not approve of wasting money on the Arts and theatres and masques – or of having any fun or free thought at all. Although James was moderate for a Protestant, many other Protestant nobles were much grouchier than him.

- Several metaphysical poets, especially John Donne, were influenced by Plato, the ancient Greek Philosopher whose ideas experienced a revival in the Renaissance. Plato believed that, somewhere in the universe, there was one perfect example of everything. For example, there was one perfect, Platonic dog somewhere that encapsulated all that a dog was meant to be. All other dogs were merely an emulation or variation of this dog. Likewise there was one perfect tree specimen, and so on for all things in existence. One of the primary Platonic concepts found in metaphysical poetry is the idea that “the perfection of beauty in the beloved acted as a remembrance of perfect beauty in the eternal realm” in short, that an experience of beauty was an echo of the ‘one true beauty’ which could be a philosophical concept or a religious one depending on your viewpoint.

- New science during the period, especially navigation and cartography (mapping the world) and space revelations such as those by Copernicus, Galileo and Kepler had begun to filter through. These ideas often captivated metaphysical poets and served as sources for some of their more unusual comparisons or conceits.
Pride and Prejudice

Jane Austen (1775 –1817) was an English novelist whose works of romantic fiction are set among the gentry. Austen's realism and biting social commentary have cemented her historical importance as a writer.

Austen lived her entire life as part of a small and close-knit family located on the lower fringes of English gentry. She was educated primarily by her father and older brothers as well as through her own reading. She experimented with various literary forms, including the epistolary novel which she tried and then abandoned. From 1811 until 1816, with the release of Sense and Sensibility (1811), Pride and Prejudice (1813), Mansfield Park (1814) and Emma (1816), she achieved success as a published writer. She wrote two additional novels, Northanger Abbey and Persuasion, both published posthumously in 1818.

Austen's works critique the novels of sensibility (which relied on an over-indulgence in emotion to captivate readers) of the second half of the eighteenth century and are part of the transition to nineteenth-century realism. Austen's plots, though fundamentally comic, highlight the dependence of women on marriage to secure social standing and economic security. Like those of critic and moralist Samuel Johnson, one of the strongest influences on her writing, her works are concerned with moral issues, and elevating the novel to an instruction on moral conduct.
The Regency Period 1795-1830

In 1820, George III was deemed unfit to rule, suffering from the now understood disease of porphyria, which is caused by arsenic poisoning. His son, George IV embraced his new title of Prince Regent, proxy of George III, with excess and scandal. The Regency Era was a time of stark contrasts, of defining styles and tastes and of scandal and gossip. It saw Napoleon rise and fall (1769–1821), and the struggle for power in the Americas (1812-1815). The charming Lord Byron became a social celebrity with his dark romantic poetry, the cheeky and controversial Beau Brummell defined and shaped the fashions and, in a new style of writing, the likes of Jane Austen and Charles Dickens began their social commentaries on the people and classes of their era through fictional novels which were heavily steeped in truths of the time.

The class system in England during Regency was strictly upheld by the old class land owners and their peers, the Church and the Royals who defined the social scenes. The idea of nobles oblige was that the aristocracy must take care of the extremely poor by providing them with charity. But it was also considered immoral to try to change the class status of any individual, or to try to change one’s own class status. This is because the stability of the kingdom was thought to rely on each person remaining within their class. To try to move classes was to be treasonous, and if one believed in the Divine Right of Kings, blasphemous.

But it was a time of economic and social change as England embraced the industrial age. While it was a time of a widening the gap between the rich and the poor, a new class of bourgeoisie, or merchant class were blossoming. Their ‘new money’ from rising industries enabled entrepreneurs to achieve riches and experiences that would have otherwise remained unattainable for the middle classes. It was this new middle-class that seemed to threaten the once-secure state of aristocracy, many of whom had frittered away their money and now only had their noble titles to their name. Previously the aristocrats instigated an incredibly formal etiquette code, in order to somehow distance the upper class from any crassness of the lower classes or anyone who tried to step out of their traditional roles. However, it became quite common for merchant classes to intermarry with noble families who had lost their fortunes – the nobles got a nice fat dowry out of it, and the merchants got a rise in social status for their family.

It was also the age of submission to ones superiors; once again a hierarchical structure was enforced through social manners so that people of the regency period knew the correct way of addressing and showing respect to those with more wealth or higher political or social ranking than themselves.

There was a move away from the traditional aristocratic styles of the periwigs and powder of the eighteenth century as the French Revolution (1789–1799) had made it unfashionable to be overtly aristocratic and in its place came simplistic elegance. Men embraced elegant linen trousers and overcoats with breeches and boots while women abandoned corsets for a high wasted, natural figured, thin, gauzy dresses. This new informal fashion in no way slowed the upper classes desire for lavishness, with both men and women changing outfits several times a day in preparation of different activities. ‘Regency style’ homes drew from Greek, Roman, Gothic, Egyptian, Asian and neo-classical English influences, featuring elegant furniture and vertically pin-striped wallpaper, bay windows, balconies and stucco walls. It was a time where wealth was celebrated and opulence was expected.
**Values of the time**

- Stability and maintaining the status quo was definitely important during this period. There was lots of upheaval elsewhere but the no-nonsense Brits felt this was beneath them, even when kings went mad or the finances of their home were in question. Hence the rigid class structure and oppressive morality.

- Social manners were a very important part of life. They were how one maintained the class distinctions and prevented one from saying what one really thought. Often, a person’s appropriate actions or reactions were dictated by their position in life – who they could befriend, who they could marry, who they could socialise with was often pre-determined by their class, gender, and geographical location.

- Upper class women were expected to marry the best offer, not the love of their lives. They would be coached in whom they could accept or reject by their families. They would learn music or art as a means of self betterment so they might be more attractive to a potential husband. They were usually not permitted to own or inherit land, so once their husband died their home would go to the next eldest male relative who would (hopefully) give them an allowance to live on and a small cottage somewhere. In short, women were ornaments with no economic independence and little personal power.

- The character of Elizabeth may seem an exception to this in that she not only marries Darcy for love, but she seems quite an independent creature. Notice though that Elizabeth can only obtain power or have a logical mind by emulating men – she often ridicules or rejects the traditional feminine pursuits. She also idolises her father. However, her father is out of touch with reality and does little to protect or help his daughters to an economic future while the mother is trying, in her flustery way, to make sure her daughters are provided for.
The Victorian Era: 1837-1901

Victoria became Queen on her eighteenth birthday, and had the longest rule of any Monarch in British history, where the values she imposed directly influenced the period; the people proudly referred to their country as “Victorian England”. Victoria was subservient in her rule to a number of patriarchal-romantic figures throughout her life, including Lord Melbourne (the Prime Minister) and her husband, Prince Albert. Although the monarchy was unpopular at the time of Victoria’s coronation, her modesty, decorum and middle-class values soon made her popular. The Queen was very family-oriented and had a very large family. Albert’s death shattered her, and she became a recluse for ten years in mourning.

The United Kingdom was at the height of the industrial revolution, which reinforced the rigid class structure. Hostility arose between the upper and lower classes while the middle and working classes boomed. Each class included a range of occupations of varying status; there was a large income gap between skilled and unskilled labour. Beneath them was an "under class" which lived in abject poverty. Victoria saw, through expansion via colonisation, the building of railroads, and the establishment of the constitutional monarchy (where the Queen is only a figure-head for the parliament) that the United Kingdom was the globe’s super-power by the time of her death.
The novel was the most emphasised text-type in this period, thanks to the influences of Jane Austen. William Thackeray wrote Vanity Fair, a panoramic view of English society. The Bronte sisters came to fame as novelists, by exposing the incredibly hard lives of women in the poor and working classes. Charles Dickens is the most noted novelist of the period, with Great Expectations and Oliver being his most famous works. He too was a great philanthropist interested in alleviated the drudgery of the working and starving poor. Elisabeth Gaskell wrote “North and South” about the huge divide between idealisms of the religious and non-religious, upper and lower classes, Worker’s Unions and Capitalists. Opiates and horror were a writer’s companions: Lewis Carroll wrote “Alice in Wonderland” and Bram Stoker wrote “Dracula”. Homosexuality was against the law, and Oscar Wilde was imprisoned, with his horror novel “The Picture of Dorian Grey” being morally boycotted. England’s ties to colonial India gave birth to Rudyard Kipling’s “Jungle Book.” Poets included Robert Browning, and Lord Alfred Tennyson. Browning in particular was scathing of the “morality values” imposed by the church.

Values of the Time

- The morality and values of the Victorians can be classed under Religion, Morality, Elitism, Industrialism and Improvement.

- The Victorian was a time of many contradictions. A plethora of social movements concerned with morals co-existed with a class system that permitted harsh living conditions for many including prostitution and child labour.

- Victorian prudery sometimes went so far as to deem it improper to say "leg" in mixed company; instead, the preferred euphemism “limb” was used. Verbal or written communication of emotion or sexual feelings was also often proscribed so people instead used the language of flowers where specific flowers in a bouquet had coded messages which could not be spoken.

- Homosexuals were regarded as abominations and homosexuality was illegal. Many famous men from the British Isles, such as Oscar Wilde, were homosexuals. Toward the end of the century, many large trials were held on the subject. Wilde, for example, was sentenced to two years’ hard labour for homosexual relations.

- The Anglican Church which had dominated the religious scene and was accused of corruption and disinterest in the masses now had to make room for Methodists, Quakers, and a bunch of other new religious factions. The “Crisis of Faith” otherwise known as Darwin’s Origin of the Species also caused a religious uproar.
Sonnets from the Portuguese

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861) was one of the most prominent poets of the Victorian era. Her poetry was widely popular in both England and the United States during her lifetime.

The Barrett family, who were part Creole, had lived for centuries in Jamaica, where they owned sugar plantations and relied on slave labour. Elizabeth's father chose to raise his family in England while his fortune grew in Jamaica.

Elizabeth was educated at home and attended lessons with her brother's tutor. This gave her a good education for a girl of that time, and she is said to have read passages from Paradise Lost and a
number of Shakespearean plays, among other works, before the age of ten. She was "a shy, intensely studious, precocious child, yet cheerful, affectionate and lovable". Her intellectual fascination with the classics and metaphysics was balanced by a religious obsession which she later described as "not the deep persuasion of the mild Christian but the wild visions of an enthusiast." By the age of twenty, she had read the principal Greek and Latin authors and Dante's Inferno in their original languages. She learnt Hebrew and read the Old Testament from beginning to end.

Elizabeth began to battle with a lifelong illness, which the medical science of the time was unable to diagnose. She began to take morphine for the pain and eventually became addicted to the drug. This illness caused her to be frail and weak.

In 1828, Elizabeth’s mother died. The death of her mother hit her hard, which for a time took away from her the power of thinking. The abolition of slavery in the early 1830s reduced Mr. Barrett’s finances. His financial losses in the early 1830s forced him to sell his home to please creditors. Subsequently Elizabeth became ill for weeks. She had become an invalid and a recluse, spending most of the next five years in her bedroom, seeing few people other than her immediate family. Since she was not burdened with any domestic duties expected of her sisters, Elizabeth could now devote herself entirely to the life of the mind, cultivating an enormous correspondence, reading widely”.

Her 1844 Poems made her one of the most popular writers in the land at the time and inspired Robert Browning to write to her, telling her how much he loved her poems. Browning met Elizabeth in May 1845, and so began one of the most famous courtships in literature. Elizabeth had produced a large amount of work and had been writing long before Robert Browning had ever published a word. However, he had a great influence on her writing, as did she on his; it is observable that Elizabeth’s poetry matured after meeting Robert. Two of Barrett’s most famous pieces were produced after she met Browning: Sonnets from the Portuguese and Aurora Leigh.

Some critics, however, point to him as an undermining influence: "Until her relationship with Robert Browning Barrett’s willingness to engage in public discourse about social issues and about aesthetic issues in poetry, which had been so strong in her youth, gradually diminished, as did her physical health. As an intellectual presence and a physical being, she was becoming a shadow of herself".

Among Elizabeth's best known lyrics are Sonnets from the Portuguese (1850)—the "Portuguese" being her husband's pet name for her. The title also refers to the series of sonnets of the 16th-century Portuguese poet Luis de Camões; in all these poems she used rhyme schemes typical of the Portuguese sonnets.

The verse-novel Aurora Leigh, her most ambitious and perhaps the most popular of her longer poems, appeared in 1856. It is the story of a woman writer making her way in life, balancing work and love. The writings depicted in this novel are all based on similar, personal experiences that Elizabeth suffered through herself. “Mrs. Browning”s poems are, in all respects, the utterance of a woman—of a woman of great learning, rich experience, and powerful genius, uniting to her woman’s nature the strength which is sometimes thought peculiar to a man.”

The courtship and marriage between Robert Browning and Elizabeth were carried out secretly. Six years his elder and an invalid, she could not believe that the vigorous and worldly Browning really loved her as much as he professed to, and her doubts are expressed in the Sonnets from the Portuguese, which she wrote over the next two years. Love conquered all, however, and after a
private marriage, Browning imitated his hero Shelley by spiriting his beloved off to Italy. The Brownings were well respected in Italy, and they would be asked for autographs or stopped by people because of their celebrity. Elizabeth grew stronger and in 1849, at the age of 43, she gave birth to a son, Robert Wiedemann Barrett Browning, whom they called Pen.

At her husband's insistence, the second edition of Elizabeth’s Poems included her love sonnets; these increased her popularity and high critical regard so that she cemented her position as favourite Victorian poetess. Upon William Wordsworth's death in 1850, she was a serious contender to become Poet Laureate, but the position went to Tennyson. In 1860 she issued a small volume of political poems titled Poems before Congress. These poems related to political issues for the Italians, “most of which were written to express her sympathy with the Italian cause after the outbreak of fighting in 1859”.

She became gradually weaker and died on June 29, 1861. “The shops in the section of the city around Casa Guidi were closed, while Elizabeth was mourned with unusual demonstrations.”

**Style and Influence**

Much of Elizabeth’s work has religious themes recurring throughout her literature. She had read and studied such famous literary works as Milton’s Paradise Lost and Dante’s Inferno. Elizabeth says in her writing, "We want the sense of the saturation of Christ's blood upon the souls of our poets, that it may cry through them in answer to the ceaseless wail of the Sphinx of our humanity, expounding agony into renovation. Something of this has been perceived in art when its glory was at the fullest. Something of a yearning after this may be seen among the Greek Christian poets, something which would have been much with a stronger faculty"

She also believed that "Christ's religion is essentially poetry—poetry glorified.” She explores the religious aspect in many of her poems, especially in her early work, such as the Sonnets. She was interested in theological debate, had learned Hebrew and read the Hebrew Bible. We find in the poem Aurora Leigh, for example, much religious imagery and allusion to images of the apocalypse.

Her popularity in the United States and Britain was further advanced by her stands against social injustice, including opposition to slavery in the United States, championing of the Italian national cause, and protesting against child labour.

Throughout the majority of the 20th Century, literary criticism of Browning's poetry remained sparse until her poems were discovered by the Feminist movement. Browning described herself as being inclined to reject several women's rights principles, suggesting in letters that she believed that there was an inferiority of intellect in women. However, feminist critics write that because Browning participates in the literary world, where voice and diction are dominated by masculine superiority, she "is defined only in mysterious opposition to everything that distinguishes the male subject who writes..."
The Modern Era  1900-1939

Modernism was at first referred to as the “avant-garde” or radical movement. The optimism and strict decorum of the Victorian era was rejected by artists who felt the structure was holding the world back. With new understanding of Physics, the Mind, and other puzzling realms of reality, there was a new focus on realism – literature was cynical and objective about the world, but also very subjective. Poetry was the key text-type. Art went through revolutionary changes in Impressionism and Cubism, where the world was “deconstructed” and seen from a very personal point of view. Christian values compromised with new discoveries in science. After the Russian Revolution, the concept of Communism seemed as dangerous to Capitalism as Darwin’s book had been to Religious order: life had been cheapened by discovering our place in the animal kingdom, Industrialism’s minimum wages, and the War’s senseless deaths.

Modernism was a complicated era, where the world’s pace began to speed up and focus on money-making, selling and expansion rather than a philosophical or spiritual life. It was characterised by self-awareness, manipulation of form or medium as an integral part of the work itself. It contrasted pre-modern Western art, which often sought only to represent a form of reality. Key movements in Modern art included Cubist painting, modernist literature such as that written by Virginia Woolf, and the 'new poetry' headed by T. S. Eliot.

Einstein’s Theory of Relativity completely contradicted Classical Physics in several ways which concluded that reality changes depending on the observer. Sigmund Freud introduced the idea of the unconscious mind – with impulses and restrictions of which we are not consciously aware.
Nietzsche was the age’s dominant philosopher – though he’d died in 1900. He believed that forces were more important than mere facts or objects, and described the “will to power” as the most important of them (where living things are not just driven to stay alive, but by a greater need to use and wield power, which may even contradict the will to live). These influences contributed to an internally focused and subjective movement, with the surrounding universe considered chaotic or overwhelming in the face of Relativity, Industrialism, and the First World War.

In the 1920s, Modernism, which had been such a minority taste before the war, came to define the age. Modernism was seen in Europe in such critical movements as Dada, and then in constructive movements such as Surrealism. Another strong influence at this time was Marxism. The Russian Revolution was the catalyst to fuse politically radical points of view and the desire for a better or utopian society.

**Values of the Time**

- Life seemed more meaningless because people were less spiritual and religious, and the world had seen so much death and destruction, losing over 20% of the world’s population to flu and war. Pacifism and a growing fear of fascism as Hitler’s influence grew were common.

- Art and literature no longer needed to conform to rules. In fact, the rules of reality had been broken in almost every intellectual frontier, which is why styles like cubism – where creating a recognisable object or scene is not the point – or stream of consciousness in writing, where a person doesn’t try to constrain their writing but tries to emulate the experience of thought came into being. Woolf herself was a practitioner of stream of consciousness.

- Anti-Semitism (a dislike of Jews) was common, with Christians and Jews often keeping separate socially. Woolf herself was accused of anti-Semitism despite being married to a Jew, because she typically portrayed Jewish stereotypes in her writing.

- Women had experienced some sexual and social liberation after the First World War. This was due to a much more open sexuality practiced in war-time, and the fact that when men went away to war, there was a shortage of men to run factories, etc and keep the country running at home. Women were encouraged to step up and take these roles, and experiencing the workforce and life outside the home made many women more independent and reluctant to give up those roles when the men returned. This set the stage not for feminism in the radical 1960’s way that we know it, but certainly for the idea of women’s rights and independence to come into the public mind.
Weimar Republic  1919-1933

The Weimar republic was a rather unstable democracy that followed the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II after World War I and the German Revolution of 1919, which dissolved the German Empire. Since they lost the war, the Treaty of Versailles basically insisted that Germany effectively pay damages to the rest of Europe, which left the country broke and humiliated. Inflation rose so much that printed currency kept fluctuating in value and was often useless. In the early days there were often strikes, and political frictions – the ruling Social Democrats party was often accused of having betrayed the workers, and conservatives missed the glory days of the old empire.

At first the government was pretty brutal about outbreaks of violence in the cities: the army and the Freikorps (a kind of volunteer, anti-communist army) committed hundreds of acts of gratuitous violence against striking workers – which would seem to heavily influence the themes of Metropolis.
Despite all this turmoil and poverty, the 1920s saw a remarkable cultural renaissance in Germany. During the worst phase of inflation in 1923, the clubs and bars were full of people who spent their daily profits so they would not lose its value the following day. This led to a very Modern atmosphere of partying and not caring about tomorrow. American music such as jazz and cabaret became popular, which was seen as ultra-scandalous because of its sexualised nature and because of its association with black Americans. At this time, Europe in general, and Berlin in particular, had become obsessed with an African-American singer and performer called Josephine Baker – who performed ‘the danse savage’ in a ‘skirt’ made of a string of jeweled bananas – purportedly driving men sexually wild. Acts like Baker’s may well have inspired the robot’s erotic powers in *Metropolis*.

Berlin left-wing intellectuals responded by condemning the excesses of capitalism and, influenced by the cultural explosion that followed the 1917 Russian Revolution, German literature, cinema, theatre and musical works entered a phase of great creativity.

Before the First World War, German expressionism tried to present the world from a personal, subjective perspective, distorting it radically to represent or convey emotions, especially angst, rather than physical reality. Though it remained popular after the War, the difficulties of the time, and the influx of American influence, also led to a new philosophical and artistic perspective: New Objectivity, which focused on being pragmatic and getting on with the business of life. It was understood by Germans as a kind of cult of Americanism: the hard fact, functional work, and usefulness.

The Bahaus or ‘building’ movement of art and architecture tried to encapsulate this modern feeling, concerned design that had an absence of ornamentation – where form was function. Another of these ‘International’ styles was the Futurism coming out of Italy, which focused on long lines, dynamic lines, suggesting speed, motion, and urgency. It was considered to glorify the machine age, war and violence. Futurist Antonio Sant’Elia’s work was a huge influence on the set design of the film *Metropolis*. Fritz Lang also claimed that the glittering skyscrapes of New York had inspired him.

Not everyone was happy with the changes taking place in Weimar culture. Conservatives feared that Germany was betraying her traditional values by adopting popular Hollywood styles. Old German traditionalists complained that modern women were ‘Americanised’, wearing make-up, short hair, smoking and breaking with traditional social values and behaviour. The idea of a purifying the German national people, and harking back to its grand traditions, was eventually promoted by the Nazi Party that would soon rise to power.
Values of the time

- Romanticism, the prevailing artistic movement of the 1800s, had begun in Germany, and was linked to wild nature, strong emotions, and, eventually, a kind of folk culture and German Nationalism. The gutsy, highly-ornamental operas of Wagner came to represent this Romantic German Nationalism.

- Industrialism. The Romantics hated industrialism because it was soulless and ugly, and because around 1900, the pace of life had changed quite dramatically. In Germany, this was compounded by New Objectivity, which admired ‘productiveness’, and socialism’s concern for the plight of the worker who was treated as no more than a cog in the greater machine of society.

- The 1917 Russian Revolution that ousted Tsar Nicolas and created the Soviet Union spread talk of Marxism all across Europe. The idea of socialism appealed to workers everywhere, but it also represented social unrest in terms of striking and revolutions. The ruling classes didn’t particularly want their wealth or power challenged, either. In Germany, in particular, striking had already been cracked down upon, and the use of martial law to suppress the citizens would probably have played on the workers’ minds.
**Exercise**

Prepare a table of values that are present in your text’s context. Define the value on the left, and link it to a content example from your text on the right. You should discuss at least 5 values.

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Victorian Era imposed a strict class structure and believed that rigid foundations maintained the stability of the nation.</td>
<td>Victorian rigidity is reflected in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s use of sonnets, a traditional poetry form with a strict, repetitive structure whose steady rhyming pattern echoes the Victorian desire for stability.</td>
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