The golden age of Spanish literature belongs to the 16th and 17th centuries, extending approximately from 1550 to 1650. Previous to the reign of the Catholic sovereigns there exists, strictly speaking, only a Castilian literature, largely influenced by imitation first of France and then of Italy; the union of the two crowns of Aragon and Castile, and afterwards the advent of the house of Austria and the king of Spain’s election as emperor, achieved the political unity of Spain and the unity of Spanish literature. After the death of Philip IV. (1665) the light went out; the nation, exhausted by wars and bad administration, produced nothing; its literary genius sank in the general decline, and Spain was destined ere long to fall again under the influence of France, to which she had submitted during the first period of the middle ages. In the 16th and 17th centuries the literature was eminently national. Yet in certain kinds of literature the Spaniards continued to seek models abroad.

Lyric poetry, especially that of the more ambitious order, is always inspired by the Italian masters. An irresistible tendency leads the Spanish poets to rhyme in hendecasyllabics—as the marquis of Santillana had formerly done, though his attempts had fallen into oblivion—and to group their verses in tercets, octaves, sonnets and *canciones (canzoni).* Juan Boscán, Garcilaso de la Vega and Diego Hurtado de Mendoza are the recognized chiefs of the school *al itálico modo,* and to them belongs the honour of having successfully transplanted to Spain these different forms of verse, and of having enriched the poetic language of their country. The defects of Boscán and Mendoza (such as certain faults of rhythmic accentuation) were corrected by their disciples Gutierre de Cetina, Gregorio Silvestre, Hernando de Acuña, by the poets of the so-called school of Seville, headed by Fernando de Herrera and also by those of the rival school of Salamanca, rendered famous mainly by the inspired poetry of Luis Ponce de Leòn. Against these innovators the poets, faithful to the old Castilian manner, the rhymers of *redondillas* and *romances,* held their own; under the direction of Cristòbal de Castillejo, they carried on a fierce war against the “ Petrarch- ists.” But by the last third of the 16th century the triumph of the new Italian school was assured, and no one any longer thought of reproaching it for its exotic flavour. Still at this period there was a schism between the higher poetry and the other varieties: in the former only the hendecasyllabic and the heptasyllabic *(quebrado)* were employed, while the popular poets, or those who affected a more familiar tone, preserved the national metres. Almost all the poets, however, of the 16th and 17th centuries tried their powers in both kinds of versification, using them in turn according to the nature of their sub- jects. Thus Lope de Vega, first of all, who wrote *La Dragontea* (1598), *La Hermosura de Angelica* (1602), *La Jerusalem conquistada* (1609), in Italian verses and in octaves, composed his long narrative poem on Isidore, the patron of Madrid (1599), in *quintillas* of octosyllabic verse, not to mention a great number of *romances.* As regards this last form, previously disdained by artistic poets, Lope de Vega gave it a prestige that brought it into favour at court. A host of poets were pleased to recast the old *romances* or to compose new ones. The 17th century, it may be said, is characterized by a superabundance of lyric poetry, to which the establishment of various literary academies contributed. Of this enormous mass of verses of all sorts little still survives; the names of most of the versifiers must be omitted, and in addition to those already cited it will be suffi- cient to mention Góngora and Quevedo. Góngora is especially famous as the founder of the “ cultist ” school, as the introducer into Castilian poetry of a periphrastic style, characterized by sonorous diction and artificial arrangements of phrase. The Spaniards have given the name of *culto* to this eccentric style, with its system of inversions based on Latin syntax; but Góngora, a poet of really great powers, had begun better, and as often as he is contented with *romances* he finds true poetic accents, ingenious ideas and felicitous expressions. Quevedo, much greater in prose than in verse, displays real power only in satire, epigram and parody. There is in some of his serious pieces the stuff of a Juvenal, and his satiric and burlesque *romances,* of which several are written in slang *(germanîa),* are in their way little masterpieces. Another commonplace of Spanish poetry at this period was epic poetry after the style of Tasso’s *Geru- salemme.* These interminable and prosaic compositions in *octavos reales* do not approach their model; none of them can even be compared in style, elevation of thought and beauty of imagery, to Camoens's *Lusiadas.* They are in reality rhymed chronicles, and consequently, when the author happens to have taken part in the events he narrates, they have a genuine historical interest. Such is the case with Alonso de Ercilla’s *Araucana,* of which it may be said that it was written less with a pen than with a pike. In burlesque poetry the Spaniards have been more successful: *La Gatomaquia* of Lope de Vega, and *La Moschea* of Villaviciosa (d. 1658) are agreeable examples of witty invention.

The departments of imaginative literature in which the genius of the new Spanish nation revealed itself with most vigour and originality are the *novela* and the drama. By *novela* must be understood the novel of manners, called *picaresca* (from *pīcaro,* a rogue or “ picaroon ”) because of the social status of the heroes of those fictions; and this type of novel is a Spanish invention. The pastoral romance, on the other hand—the best-known examples of which are the *Diana* of Jorge de Montemayor, continued by Alonso Perez and Gaspar Gil Polo, the *Galatea* of Cervantes, and the *Arcadia* of Lope de Vega—as well as the novel of adventure begun by Cervantes in his *Novelas exemplares,* and cultivated after him by a host of writers, is directly derived from Italy. The *Arcadia* of Sannazaro is the source of the *Diana* and of all its imitations, just as the Italian *novellieri* are the masters of most Spanish *novelistas* of the 17th century. The picaresque novel starts in the middle of the 16th century with the *Vida de Lazarillo de Tormes, sus fortunas y adversidades∙,* the impetus was given, and the success of *Lazarillo* was so great that imitators soon appeared. In 1599 Mateo Alemán published the first part of the adventures of another picaroon, Guzman de Alfarache; before he could issue the sequel (1604) he was anticipated (1602) by an unscrupulous rival, whose continuation was on a lower plane. Quite unlike that of the *Lazarillo,* the style of Mateo Alemán is eloquent, full, with long and learned periods, sometimes diffuse. Nothing could be more extravagant and more obscure than the history of Justina the beggar woman *(La Pícara Justina)* by Francisco Lopez de Ubeda (1605), which is generally (but perhaps wrongly) said to be a name assumed by the Dominican Andrés Perez. A long series of similar tales continued to be published by writers of considerable merit (see Picaresque Novel).

By degrees the picaresque romance was combined with the novel of Italian origin and gave rise to a new type—half novel of manners, half romance of adventure—of which the characteristic example appears to be the *Marcos de Obregón* (1618) of Vicente Martinez Espinel, one of the best written works of the 1 7th century. To the same class belong almost all the novels of Alonso Jeronimo de Salas Barbadillo, Luiz Velex de Guevara and Francisco Santos’s popular pictures of life in Madrid, *Dia y noche de Madrid* (1663), *Periquillo, cl de las gallineras,* &c. On the other hand, the novels of Tirso de Molina *(Los Cigarrales de Toledo,* 1624), Perez de Montalbán *(Para todos,* 1632), Maria de Zayas (*Novelas*, 1635-1647), are more in the manner of the *Novelas exemplares* of Cervantes, and consequently of the Italian type. Among the so-called historical romances one only deserves to be mentioned—the *Guerras civiles de Granada* (1595-1604) by Ginés Perez de Hita, which deals with the last years of the kingdom of Granada and the insurrection of the Moors of the Alpujarras in the time of Philip II. *Don Quixote* (1605-1615), the masterpiece of Cervantes, is too great a work to be treated with others; and, moreover, it does not fall strictly within the limits of any of the classes just mentioned. If it has to be defined, it may be described as the social romance of