

POETRY IN MIDDLE ENGLISH (TOPIC 1)

Old English ca. 410–1066: the fall of the Roman Empire/ germanic invasions Angles Saxons, Jutes Vikings and Saxons, **410 Anglo Saxon conquest, 597 St Augustine's arrival in Kent. 871–899 Reig of King Alfred, 1066 Norman Conquest (the Battle of Hastings)** William the conqueror became king of England from **early medieval period to late medieval period. 1200 begining of Middle English Literature, 1360–1400 Summit of Middle English Literature, 1485 William Caxton's printing of Sir Thomas Malory Morte Darthur end of Medieval Period.**

The Normans brought french influences, French language mixed with Old English into a more modern language. Also influences from Scandinavian people and latin of course. The development of a national identity: England, Wales, Scotland. **1215 The Carta Magna** gives more power to the aristocrats and less to the king. **1265 is the year of the first Parliament. 1362 English becomes language of national law,** A local southern dialect becomes the origin of Modern English M.E.

Christian and Heroic culture: 597 St Augustine's arrival in Kent, Christian monks in the monasteries were first to write down the words to English early literature, they guarded culture and learning. Most of them were anonymous texts

Heroic culture: of heroes and leaders who defended their lands against invaders.

The very first fragment is called **Cademon's Hymn poem ca. 670** (religious song) He was a shepherd who listened to God, in the far north of England Two features of most O.E. are clear **Caesura** to show the rhythm of the verse, and the **Aliteration**, Another is probably from the begining of the 8th Century, another is a poem called **Cynewolf's cycle** (lives of Saints), '**Deor's Lament**', **Epic Poems are: The Exeter Book, The Vercelli Book, The Wanderer (in the Exeter Book), Dream of the Rood (cruz) (the Vercelli book), The Seafarer (in the Exeter Book)** these are elegiac poems –the speaker is always alone and his memories are very important, **The Wife's Lament...**

Linguistic and literary devices: **Caesura, aliteration, repetition, kenning, etc.**

Epic poetry: Beowulf is an anonymous poem, describes invasions and battles, some historic, some legendary the poem is set around the sixth century but written down in the eighth century, Beowulf is the first hero in English literature, written with new words, action, colour. The poem is a statement of heroic values (against a monster)

Prose in o.e.: Bede known as Venerable Bede was a monk who lived in the end on 7th and begining of the 8th century. He wrote mostly about the Bible and is remembered for writing: History of the English Curch and People, ca. 731 in Latin.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (record of events) is one of the first historic books some of it is poetry, **King Alfred the Great, IXth C. Was probably one of the people who helped put the Cronicle together. He ordered many translations of religious texts during his reig in the 9th C.**

Aelfric was an other monk, important translator and writer, his was: **Catholic Homilies and Lives of the Saints, Xth C.** Using real spoken English and all the features of Old English literature Aelfric is the greatest figure in Old English prose, excellence of stile and wide knowledge to all his words.

Themes of Old English literature are security, for the individual and the society, and religious faith This literature gave comfort and provided reflection.

POETRY IN MIDDLE ENGLISH 1150–1485

In Middle English literature the old hero now became a man of romance, love poetry came from the South of France. Women began to appear as objects of desire and perfection, with feelings. It was a time of wars and tragedies like the Hundred Years War between France and England, the wars of the Roses between the royal houses of Lancaster and York for the throne of England. In the mid Thirteenth century the Black Death brought illness and death to millions of people., problems like the Peasant 's Revolt.

–**Poetry after the Norman invasion: The owl and the Nightingale (ca. 1250) and Layamon's Brut (ca. 1200)**Layamon was one of the first authors to see himself as a writer of history, Brut brought together many themes and figures and is an important text in the history of writing in English just at the time when English was developing as a language and a culture. The popular ballads and songs grew as the first masterpieces of English literature were written. There was text for women written by men.

–**The alliterative tradition: Sir Gawain and the green knight (ca. 1375)**Anonymous. Sir Gawain is one of the Knights of the Round Table, from the court of King Arthur, he is expected to be brave, honest and honorable. He agrees to the challenge of a huge green man which is to cut the man's head off. A year later when Gawain accepts that he is not an ideal brave hero he is forgiven by the green Knight. Gawain returns to the court of King Arthur and is praised for his bravery. Gawain is in fact a type of anti-hero, and the poem is an ironic questioning of the value of the historical myths of heroism in those changed times, much as Chaucer questioned the old-fashioned values of his knight.

Arthurian theme; Celtic tradition. Plot. Allegory: Symbolism.

–**Religious poetry: Pearl (ca. 1375). Plot. Technical perfection** Anonymous. Is a dream a father has of his daughter who died. She is now perfect, in heaven, and the father can see how far she is from the human level.

–**Anonymous lyrics (ca. 1300): Problematic sources (Anglo-saxon songs and carols; French and Latin sources): "Cuckoo song, Alison, Spring-tide, Blow Northern Wind... Carols (songs) and Ballads (lyrics poems).**

Geoffrey Chaucer (1340?–1400)

Biography; Italy, France, Spain?

French influence: The book of the Duchess; (allegory, dream-vision). English translation of the Roman de la Rose. (ca. 1370)

Italian influence: The House of Fame; (dream vision, ca. 1374–1380).

The Parliament of Fowles (1382). Famous opening lines: The life so short, the craft so long to learn.

His first poems were dream poems using Old English model **Troilus and Criseyde (ca. 1382). Setting: War of Troy; plot: loves and adventures of the protagonist: Troilus–Criseyde–Diomedes.**

The Legend of Good Women. Poetic narratives on famous female lovers: Cleopatra, Dido, Philomena...

The Canterbury Tales (1386–1400). Main work. ca.1700 lines, most of them heroic couplets. They were a series of linked stories(idea from the Italian writings of Boccaccio but sets them in the here and now of the late fourteenth-century England), there are many aspects, secular and religious, the time is Spring when the words come to life again after the long winter the people are of every level of society, except the highest and

the lowest, a wide range of the new middle class, including a knight, a nun, the wife of Bath, religious figures and tradesmen. The stories are also very different classical, modern, moral, some the opposite. He wrote twenty four of these tales, which are the great mirror of its time and a great collection of comic views of the life it describes, he uses irony, the stories contrast old ways of behaving and of thinking with more modern attitudes. So religion is less important than enjoying life, and making money is a new ambition:

–**Collection of 25 tales (prologue & tale).**

–**The theme of pilgrimage.**

–**The General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales.**

–**Characterization. Estates.**

–**Humour; irony; satire.**

–**Some famous tales: The Miller's Tale, The Wife of Bath's Tale...**

William Langland (1330?–1400)

– **Contrast with Chaucer:** European (continental versification of Chaucer) v. Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse (Langland); contrasting attitudes to life.

– **Piers Plowman (1360?–1400):** allegorical work (dream vision); profoundly religious exploration of the fallen nature of humanity.

– **Social criticism.** Alliance with popular feelings about social injustice and criticism of the states. (Tough with corruption in Justice and Church)

ORIGINS OF THE ENGLISH DRAMA

The original medieval dramas were set in and around the church at festival times, and they showed scenes from the Bible for an audience who could not understand Latin (Bible). The plays were called mystery or miracle plays because they showed the mysterious or miraculous events of the Bible and the Saint's lives

Mystery and Miracle plays: the Bible & the lives of Saints.

The plays were performed on moving cars (wagons) by the business men of the city (The Fishers and Mariners) Groups of these remain from the cities of York, Wakefield, and Chester.

Drama and the Church. Guilds and pageant wagons. Cycles

Surviving cycles of plays of 14th– 15th centuries:

- **The York Cycle: 48 plays; covers biblical history from Creation to Crucifixion.**
- **The Wakefield Cycle: religious theatre combined with humour and high spirits. The Second Sheperd's Play (satirizes shrewish wives and overtaxing of the poor).**
- **The Chester Cycle: 24 pageants. More humorous treatment of sacred history.**
- **Other cycles: Chester & N. Town Cycle.**

The Morality Plays: allegorical sermons with simple plots. Professional actors.

- Everyman (ca.1470)
- The Castle of Perseverance (ca.1425)
- Mankind (ca.1475)

THE MAJOR LITERARY EVENT OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY WAS THE INVENTION OF PRINTING BY GUTENBERG IN GERMANY. IT WAS BROUGHT TO ENGLAND IN THE 1470S. First books were:

- BIBLES
- SIR THOMAS MALORY'S MORTE D'ARTHUR (about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table) PRINTED BY WILLIAM CAXTON (1485).
- THE POETRY OF JOHN SKELTON difficult to classify, the last medieval poet. He wrote short rapid poetry about subjects such as drinking alcohol, a pet bird and low life. His humour, his poetic style are unique.
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