

# UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION

**English****Code:30**

## MODULE 1 (SECTION- I) – ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD

### INTRODUCTION

In the ancient times, there were three tribes called Angles, Saxons and Jutes in the northern Europe. In the 5th century, they conquered Britain and settled down there. After driving the native people into the deep mountains of Wales and Scotland, they divided the whole island among themselves. Angles settled down in the east midland, and built the kingdom of East Angles; Saxons took the southern part of the island and set up some small kingdoms such as Wessex, Essex and Sussex; Jutes occupied the southeastern corner of the island. Gradually seven kingdoms arose in Britain. In the 7th century, these small kingdoms were combined into a united kingdom called England. Angles, Saxons and Jutes who are usually known as Anglo-Saxons are the first Englishmen. The language spoken by them is called the Old English, which is the foundation of English language and literature. With the Anglo-Saxon settlement in Britain, the history of English literature began.

### Characteristics of Anglo-Saxon Literature

Anglo-Saxon literature, that is, the Old English literature, was almost exclusively a verse literature in oral form. It could be passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. Its creators for the most part were unknown. It was given a written form long after its composition. There were two groups of poetry in the Anglo-Saxon period. The first group was the pagan poetry represented by Beowulf ; the second was the religious poetry represented by the works of Caedmon and Cynewulf. In the 8th century, Anglo-Saxon prose appeared. The famous prose writers of that period were Venerable Bede and Alfred the Great.

### ANGLO-SAXON POETRY

#### ➤ PAGAN POETRY

#### BEOWULF

Beowulf is the oldest poem in the English language. It is the most important specimen of Anglo-Saxon literature, and also the oldest surviving epic in the English language. It consists of more than 3,000 lines. It had been passed from mouth to mouth for hundreds of years before it was written down in the 10th century or at the end of the 9th century. The main stories in the poem are based on the folk legends of the primitive northern tribes. Hrothgar, king of the Danes, has built near the sea a mead-hall called Heorot. It is the most splendid hall in the world. Every night the king and his thanes gather there to feast and enjoy the songs of his gleemen. But later on misfortunes befall them. One night, after they have gone to sleep, a frightful monster called Grendel comes. He breaks into the hall, kills thirty of the sleeping warriors, carries off their bodies and devours them in his lair under the sea. The appalling visit speedily repeats, and fear and death reign in the great hall. The king's warriors fight at first, but flee when they find that no weapon can hurt the monster. The splendid mead-hall is left deserted and silent. For twelve winters Grendel's horrible raids continue, and joy is changed to mourning among the Danes. Beowulf is the nephew of Hygelac, king of the Geats who live in Juteland,

Denmark. He is a great hero, noted for his strength and bravery. When he hears that Hrothgar, the good friend of his uncle, is in great trouble, he determines to help the unhappy king. Then he crosses the sea with 14 soldiers to rid Hrothgar of the monster. When they get there, they are given a feast of welcome in the hall, and then they lie down in the hall for the night. At midnight, Grendel comes and kills one of Beowulf's soldiers. Beowulf has a hand-to-hand fight with him. Finally, he wrenches off one of the monster's arms. Then the monster flees to his den and dies. The next night, Grendel's mother descends upon the hall to avenge her son. She carries away the king's dearest friend. In the morning, Beowulf chases her into her lair and slays her with a sword wrought by the giants hanging on the wall. When he finds the corpse of Grendel, he cuts off his head and brings it back triumphantly. The Danes award him many treasures, and Beowulf returns to his uncle happily. Later on, Beowulf inherits the crown from his uncle and has reigned over his kingdom for 50 years. He is a nice king loved and respected by his people. But a disaster befalls his kingdom. A fire-spewing dragon that lives on a mountain begins to devastate the land of his kingdom because it thinks somebody has stolen a golden cup from the mountain cave that he has guarded for 300 years. Therefore, the angry dragon determines to punish the people of the kingdom. It spews fire every day to burn the land and kill the people. To save his people from the disaster, with 11 chosen warriors the aged king goes to fight against the dragon. In the end, the dragon is killed, but Beowulf is severely wounded during the battle. He dies a heroic death. The poem ends with the scene of the grand funeral held for the hero by his people.

### **SALIENT FEATURES OF THE POEM :**

- 1) It is not a Christian but a pagan poem, despite the Christian flavor given to it by the monastery scribe who wrote it down. It is the product of an advanced pagan civilization. The whole poem presents to us an all-round picture of the tribal society. The social conditions and customs can be clearly seen in the poem. It helps us a lot when we study the primitive society of Europe. So, the poem has a great social significance.
- 2) The use of strong stresses and the predominance of consonants are notable in the poetical lines. Each line is divided into two halves, and each half is made to have two heavy stresses.
- 3) The use of alliteration is another notable feature of the poem. Three stressed syllables of each line are arranged in alliteration, which makes the whole line even more emphatic.
- 4) A lot of metaphors and understatements are used in the poem. For example, the sea is called "the whale-road" or "the swan-road"; the soldiers are called "shield-men"; the chieftains are called "treasure-keepers"; the human body is referred to as "the bone-house"; God is called "wonder-wielder"; the monster is referred to as "soul-destroyer".

### **➤ ELEGIAC POETRY**

- **WIDSITH:** The poem "Widsith," the wide goer or wanderer, is in part, at least, probably the oldest in our language. The author and the date of its composition are unknown; but the personal account of the minstrel's life belongs to the time before the Saxons first came to England.<sup>14</sup> It expresses the wandering life of the gleeman, who goes forth into the world to abide here or there, according as he is rewarded for his singing. From the numerous references to rings and rewards, and from the praise given to generous givers, it would seem that literature as a paying profession began very early in our history, and also that the pay was barely sufficient to hold soul and body together.

Of all our modern poets, Goldsmith wandering over Europe paying for his lodging with his songs is most suggestive of this first recorded singer of our race.

- **DEOR'S LAMENT:** In "**Deor**" we have another picture of the Saxon scop, or minstrel, not in glad wandering, but in manly sorrow. It seems that the scop's living depended entirely upon his power to please his chief, and that at any time he might be supplanted by a better poet. Deor had this experience, and comforts himself in a grim way by recalling various examples of men who have suffered more than himself. The poem is arranged in strophes, each one telling of some afflicted hero and ending with the same refrain His sorrow passed away; so will mine. "Deor" is much more poetic than "Widsith," and is the one perfect lyric of the Anglo-Saxon period.

- **THE SEAFARER:** **The Seafarer** is an Old English poem giving a first-person account of a man alone on the sea. The poem consists of 124 lines, followed by the single word "Amen" and is recorded only at folios 81 verso - 83 recto of the Exeter Book, one of the four surviving manuscripts of Old English poetry. It has most often, though not always, been categorized as an elegy, a poetic genre commonly assigned to a particular group of Old English poems that reflect on spiritual and earthly melancholy. Much scholarship suggests that the poem is told from the point of view of an old seafarer, who is reminiscing and evaluating his life as he has lived it. The seafarer describes the desolate hardships of life on the wintry sea. He describes the anxious feelings, cold-wetness, and solitude of the sea voyage in contrast to life on land where men are surrounded by kinsmen, free from dangers, and full on food and wine. The climate on land then begins to resemble that of the wintry sea, and the speaker shifts his tone from the dreariness of the winter voyage and begins to describe his yearning for the sea. The poem ends with a series of gnomic statements about God, eternity, and self-control. The poem then ends with the single word "Amen".

### ➤ RELIGIOUS POETRY

Religion is the mainspring of Anglo-Saxon poetry. Christianity received a warm welcome in England and instilled a new spirit into English poetry. The Anglo-Saxon religious poetry used the same verse and vocabulary as the stories of heroes. The church used the old pagan poetry in the new light for Christianity.

- The mixture of Christian and pagan can be seen in **Andreas**, which is, in many ways, an epic poem like **Beowulf**. Andreas has to rescue St. Matthew as Beowulf rescued Hrothgar, though Andreas is unwilling to do the task. It is religious poem and yet an adventure story like the heroic tales of warriors.
- The first English poet of Streaneshalch(Whitley) , between AD 658 and AD 680 was clearly known as **Caedmon**, who lived in a monastery in the Middle age.
- **Venerable Bede**, a historian, tells us that Caedmon turned into song the story of **Genesis** and **Exodus**, the settlement of chosen people in the Promised Land, the life and death of Savior and the Revelation of the judgment to come.
- In the Junian manuscript of Oxford, there are poetical versions of **Genesis**, **Exodus** and **Daniel**, together with three poetical Christ poems- **The Fallen Angel**, **The Harrowing Hell**, and **The Temptation**. These were generally assumed to be Caedmon poems, opined by Bede.

- The influence of Caedmon upon his successors was great and among them **Cynewulf** was significant. Cynewulf lived in the early 9th century. Except the unknown composer of Beowulf, he is regarded as the greatest Anglo-Saxon poet. Of his life story we know very little. He was probably an ecclesiastic and a scholar. His name remained unknown until 1840. He produced four poems: **Christ, Juliana, The Fates of the Apostles, and Elene**. Of all these poems the most characteristic is Christ, which is a didactic poem in three parts: the first part celebrates the Nativity; the second part describes the Ascension; and the third part deals with the Doomsday. Cynewulf took his subject matter partly from the church liturgy, but more largely from the homilies of Gregory the Great. The poem expresses a deep love for Christ and reverence for Virgin Mary. The unsigned poems attributed to Cynewulf are- **The Andreas, The Phoenix, The Dream of the Rood, The Decent into Hell, Guthlac, The Wanderer** and some of the Riddles.

### ANGLO-SAXON PROSE

Prose literature arrived later than poetry. It did not show its appearance until the 8th century. There appeared three famous prose writers: **Venerable Bede, Alfred the Great and Aelfric**.

➤ **Venerable Bede:**

When we speak of the Old English prose, the first name that comes into our mind is Venerable Bede (673-735), who is the first scholar in English literature and has been regarded as the father of English learning. His works, over 40 in number, were written exclusively in Latin and covered the whole field of human knowledge of his day. The most important of his works is *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. The book not only tells us how religion was introduced and spread in England but also recounts some historical events of that period as well as some Anglo-Saxon mythological legends. It is in this book that Bede describes Caedmon's legendary life story.

➤ **Alfred the Great:**

Alfred the Great (848-901), king of Wessex kingdom, is another important figure in prose writing of Anglo-Saxon period. During his reign, he tried every means to improve education by founding colleges and importing teachers from Europe. He was a well-known translator. He translated some important Latin works into English, among which, the most important is *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. This book records the main happenings of the Anglo-Saxon period. It is the best monument of the Old English prose.

➤ **Aelfric:**

Aelfric (955-1010) was a clergyman. He wrote a large number of religious works in Greek and Latin. In his works he introduced a lighter, clearer and more musical prose, and the Old English prose was attaining high quality.

## MODULE 1 (SECTION- Ii) – ANGLO-NORMAN PERIOD (1066-1400)

The term Anglo-Norman is generally used to describe the period of English history from the Norman Conquest to the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It was called so because the non-Latin literature of that era was written in Anglo-Norman, the French dialect, spoken by the Norman invaders. The Normans were pagan barbarian pirates from Denmark, Norway and Iceland, who began to make destructive plundering raids on European coastal settlements in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

### ✓ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AT A GLANCE

- Defeat of the last Saxon King Harold II by King of Normandy, William the Conqueror at Hastings- 1066.
- Establishment of Anglo-Norman Period (1066 to 1350).
- Feudalism originating in Rome was established in England by William the Conqueror- later consolidated by his successors. **Domesday Book** in 1080s.
- **Magna Carta**- Great Charter of Demands 1215, 15<sup>th</sup> June.
- King John was forced to seal the Charter containing 63 demands of the Barons.
- According to **Magna Carta**, no freeman was to be punished without a trial and the king could not demand taxes without the approval of the Great Council.
- French became the official language and it was the first language in education, resulting in the decline of English. It continued up to the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.
- Cambridge University was established in 1209.
- Oxford University supposed to have been established in late 9<sup>th</sup> or late 12<sup>th</sup> century.

### ➤ LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS:

- French dominated literature.
- Continental literature via French literature, rich and varied in theme, polite and urban in spirit, enriched English literature.
- Eclipse of the titanic heroes like Beowulf and of heroic themes.
- English poetry aglow with brightness and liveliness instead of gloom and melancholy of Anglo-Saxon poetry.
- East Midland dialect instead of Wessex-Saxon was regarded as the standard dialect in which Anglo-Saxon writers wrote.

### ➤ RELIGIOUS POETRY :

#### ❖ POEMA MORALE (MORAL ODE):

- It was written in 1170 AD and of about 400 lines.
- The unknown poet lamenting over his misspent youth and exhorting the readers to renounce the sordid ways of life.
- It begins cynically- trusting to wife and child is building on the sand- the danger of missing the salvation.
- It was written in Iambic Septanarius- 15 syllabled verse line. It influenced later ballads like John Gilpin.



❖ **ORMULUM :**

- It was written in 1200 AD by Augustinian Monk Orm or Ormin of Mrcia.
- Though it was a fragment of a bigger poem, it contains ten thousand lines (about 1/8 of the book).
- It was an English poem, basically having little impact of French.
- It was a paraphrase of Gospel.
- It was written in Iambic Septanarius.

❖ **THE OWL AND THE NIGHTINGALE:**

- Written about 1200 AD, perhaps written by **Nicholas De Guildford** of Porteshan in Dorset.
- The poem consists entirely of a fierce debate between the eponymous owl and nightingale, as overheard by an unidentified narrator. The Nightingale begins the argument by noting the Owl's physique, calling her ugly and unclean. The Owl proposes that they proceed civilly and reasonably in their debate, and the Nightingale suggests consulting Nicholas of Guildford, who, although frivolous in his youth, is now a reasonable judge. However, the Nightingale immediately goes on to shame the Owl for the screeches and shrieks she produces, and equates her active time of night with vices and hatred. The Owl in turn posits that the Nightingale's continuous noise is excessive and boring. The Nightingale replies that the song of the Owl brings unwanted gloom, while her own is joyous and reflects the beauty of the world. The Owl is quick to reply that Nightingales only sing in summer, when men's minds are filled with lechery. However, the reader never learns which bird bests her opponent at the debate; the poem ends with the two flying off in search of Nicholas.
- The text is composed of rhyming **octosyllabic** couplets, generally following the poetic construction of iambic tetrameter.
- Most scholars in the past have defined the work as an **allegory**, yet the difficulty of sustaining this method of analysis throughout the poem remains a challenge. It has also been suggested that the owl and nightingale represent historical figures, which necessarily grounds these arguments in a very specific time. Scholar Anne Baldwin posits that the poem was written between 1174 and 1175, and that the **nightingale represents King Henry II and the owl is Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury**.

❖ **CURSOR MUNDI (CURSE OF THE WORLD):**

- A poem of 30 thousand lines, written about 1320 by an unknown Northumbrian cleric.
- The theme – Old and New Testament stories, about Adam, fall of Adam, history of Apostles etc.
- Romantics in spirit, though religious in theme.
- Blending of biblical stories and medieval legends.
- Forerunner of Miracle plays.

❖ **THE PRICK OF CONSCIENCE:**

- A religious poem, perhaps by Richard Rolle.
- Joy and sorrows of life, the transitory of life and inevitability of death.

## MODULE 1(SECTION – III) – 14<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY/ AGE OF CHAUCER (1340-1400)

### INTRODUCTION

The age of Chaucer covers period from 1340 to 1400. It was a period of **transition** and **turbulence**. This age was a meeting ground of two divergent period- the old and the new, the Medieval and the Renaissance. Though the spirit of middle ages had not yet passed away, the seeds of upcoming modernity were being sown. This period witnessed remarkable social, religious and political changes. It was in this period that crucial **Hundred years' War** between England and France took place. This war awakened English nationalism and gave rise to national consciousness.

### ➤ CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AGE:

- The age of Chaucer is the first significant period in the literary history of England. In every walk of life there were signs of change. The social, political, religious and literary changes were taking place. In short, it was an age of change, and birth of new modalities.
- The age of Chaucer was a transitional age. The medievalism was departing and modernism was developing slowly. Wycliffe and his followers were sowing the seeds of Reformation. They were making attack upon the church. Individualism was being emphasized.
- The age witnessed the beginning of the Hundred Years War. England was at war with Scotland and France. This war brought great victories in the battles of Crecy and Poitiers. The consciousness of national unity was strengthened.
- The age also saw natural calamities and social unrest. Plagues and pestilences, constitutional conflicts and unorthodoxy came to the forefront. In 1348-49 came the terrible **Black Death**. It shook the social fabric violently. A large number of people died. It reappeared in 1362, 1367 and 1370. Famine followed plague. Vagrants and thieves multiplied. Labor became scarce. Heavy taxation was imposed. The Toll Tax brought about the **peasants' revolt**. This revolt was a clear sign of social tension and unrest.
- In the age of Chaucer the church was the seat of power and prestige. It was infected with corruption. The churchmen were fond of wealth and luxury. They indulged themselves in all sorts of vices. John Wycliffe, the morning star of the Reformation, led an attack upon the growing corruption of the church.
- The age of Chaucer marked the dawn of new learning. It brought about a change in the general outlook of the age. Man's intellectual horizon expanded. He began to make efforts to liberate himself from the shackles of theological slavery. Two Italian writers Petrarch and Boccaccio were the pioneers of this great revival. But beneath the medievalism the heaven of Renaissance was already at work. The modern world was in the process of being born.

- Corruption was widespread in the Church as well. As Hudson writes: “The greater prelates heaped up wealth, and lived in a Godless and worldly way; the rank and file of the clergy were ignorant and careless; the mendicant friars were notorious for their greed and profligacy.” **John Wycliffe**, “**the morning star of the Reformation**”, and poets like **Langland** and **Gower** freely condemned the growing corruption in the Church, and through their teachings sought to revive the real Christianity. Thus the ideas of the Reformation were already becoming a force in the age of Chaucer.
- It’s an age of intense social, political, religious and literary activity. It is the meeting ground of the Medieval and the Modern, the Renaissance and the Reformation, the Old and the New, and the Religious and the Secular. In short, it is a remarkable age—an age in which men like Chaucer can make their mark. Thus the age of Chaucer, in the words of **Kittredge**, is a **singularly Modern age**.

### ➤ MAJOR HISTORICAL EVENTS

- **THE HUNDRED YEARS’ WAR (1337-1453):** The **Hundred Years’ War** was a series of conflicts in Europe from 1337 to 1453, waged between the House of Plantagenet, rulers of England and the French House of Valois, over the right to rule the Kingdom of France. Each side drew many allies into the war. It was one of the most notable conflicts of the Middle Ages, in which five generations of kings from two rival dynasties fought for the throne of the largest kingdom in Western Europe. The war marked both the height of chivalry and its subsequent decline, and the development of strong national identities in both countries. This war is commonly divided into three phrases- the **Edwardian Era**, the **Caroline Era** and the **Lancastrian Era**.
- **THE BLACK DEATH (1348-50):** The **Black Death** was a bubonic plague pandemic, which reached England in June 1348. It was the first and most severe manifestation of the Second Pandemic, caused by *Yersinia pestis* bacteria. The term “Black Death” was not used until the late 17th century. The term “Black Death” – which refers to the first and most serious outbreak of the Second Pandemic – was not used by contemporaries, who preferred such names as the “Great Pestilence” or the “Great Mortality”. It was not until the 17th century that the term under which we know the outbreak today became common probably derived from Scandinavian languages. Earlier demographic crises – in particular the Great Famine of 1315–1317 – had resulted in great numbers of deaths, but there is no evidence of any significant decrease in the population prior to 1348.
- **THE PEASANT’S REVOLT (1381):** The **Peasants’ Revolt**, also named **Wat Tyler’s Rebellion** or the **Great Rising**, was a major uprising across large parts of England in 1381. The revolt had various causes, including the socio-economic and political tensions generated by the Black Death in the 1340s, the high taxes resulting from the conflict with France during the Hundred Years’ War, and instability within the local leadership of London. The final trigger for the revolt was the intervention of a royal official, John Bampton, in Essex on 30 May 1381. His attempts to collect unpaid poll taxes in Brentwood ended in a violent confrontation, which rapidly spread across the south-east of the country. A wide spectrum of rural society, including many local artisans and village officials, rose up in protest, burning court records and opening the local gaols. The rebels sought a reduction in taxation, an end to the system of unfree labour known as serfdom, and the removal of the King’s senior officials and law courts.



### ➤ GEOFFREY CHAUCER

- Chaucer was born between the years 1340-1345 probably in London. His father was a prosperous wine merchant.
- In 1357 he was a page in the household of Elizabeth de Burgh, Countess of Ulster (wife of Prince Lionel).
- He was captured by the French during the Brittany Expedition of 1359 but was ransomed by the King.
- Edward III later sent him to France on a diplomatic mission. He also travelled to Genoa and Florence.
- Around 1366, Chaucer married Philippa Roet, a lady in waiting in the Queen's household.
- Philippa's sister, Katherine Swynford later became the third wife of John of Gaunt (King's fourth son and Chaucer's patron).
- In 1374 Chaucer was appointed Comptroller of the Lucrative London customs.
- In 1386 he was elected Member of Parliament for Kent and also served as a justice of peace. In 1389, he was made clerk of the King's works, overseeing loyal building projects.
- He held a number of royal posts serving both Edward III and his successor Richard II.
- Chaucer lived during Edward III – 1327-1377, Richard II – 1377 -1399, Henry IV – 1399 -1413.
- He was the first poet to be buried in Westminster Abbey now known as "**The Poets Corner.**"
- Arnold called him **father of English poetry.**
- In the "**Legends of Good Women**", the 9 legends are - **Cleopatra, Thisbe, Dido, Hypsipyle, Medea, Lucrece, Ariadne, Philomela, Phyllis and Hypermnestra.**
- Dryden re-wrote Canterbury Tales in Modern English.
- He was the first national poet of England.
- Dryden said about him – "**Here is God's plenty**" and "**A Rough diamond and must first be polished ere he shines**".
- Boccaccio exercised a deep influence on Chaucer. On diplomatic mission he was sent to Italy where he met Petrarch and Boccaccio. He makes a clear reference of Petrarch in his **Clerk's tale.**
- He is called **father of English poetry** and **Grandfather of English Novel.**
- He is called **morning star of Renaissance.**
- Arnold says about him – "**Chaucer lacks not only the accent of Dante but also the high seriousness.**"
- He is the first one to use **Ottava Rima** in **The Book of the Duchess.** (Ottava Rima is the eight syllable line in rhyming couplet)
- He first used **heroic couplet** in **The Legends of Good Women.** (Heroic couplet is ten syllable line rhyming in Couplets i.e. Decasyllabic Couplet)
- He first used **Rhyme Royal** in **Troilus and Cressida.** **Rhyme Royal** is ten syllable line arranged in seven line stanzas (ABAB BCC).
- Chaucer's **Troilus and Cressida** is called novel in verse.
- In **The House of Fame**, Chaucer writing-style closes to Dante's **Divine Comedy.**
- The general prologue of **The Canterbury Tales** contains 858 lines.
- The general plan of **Canterbury tales** is taken from Boccaccio's **Decameron.** In Canterbury the pilgrims could be seen going to Thomas a Beckett in the month of April. He gave pen picture of 21 pilgrims in this work.

- “Had Chaucer written in prose it is possible his *Troilus and Cressida* and not Richardson’s *“Pamela”* would be celebrated as 1st English Novel” - by S. D. Neil.
- Edmund Spenser in his *“Faerie Queene”* called – “Chaucer, well of English undefiled.”
- Nevill Coghill interpreted *Canterbury Tales* in 20th Century English.
- “Chaucer found his native tongue a dialect and left it a language” - By Lowes.
- “Chaucer is the earliest of the great moderns”: By Mathew Arnold.
- “The father of our splendid English poetry” : by Mathew Arnold.
- For Arnold, Chaucer’s major contribution towards poetry was his adherence to realism. His was a “large, free, sound representation of things,” that had a “true substance”.
- “If Chaucer is the father of English poetry, he is the grandfather of English novel.” -By G.K. Chesterton.
- Occleve wrote a famous poem “*The Regiment of Princess*” on the death of Chaucer.
- Chaucer and Langland died in the same year (1400).
- Chaucer has been criticized for presenting about courts and cultivated classes and neglecting the suffering of the poor.
- Although in *Canterbury Tales* 120 stories were planned but only 24 were completed.
- Chaucer introduced ‘Felicity’ in English.
- Longest tale of *Canterbury Tales* is *The Knight’s Tale*.
- Chaucer has been called the “Prince of Plagiarists.”

It is customary to divide Chaucer’s literary career into three periods the **French**, the **Italian**, and the **English**; of which the last one is the most important and original.

#### ➤ THE FRENCH PERIOD(1359-1373)

- During this time, Chaucer translated the "**Roman de la Rose**," a French poem written during the 1200s.
- He also wrote his "*Book of the Duchess*," an elegiac poem that shared much with contemporary French poetry of the time but also departed from that poetry in important ways.
- Chaucer's extensive reading of Latin poets such as Boethius also influenced his own work.
- He was influenced by French masters as **Guillaume de Machaut, Jean de Meun and Guillaume de Lorris**.
- **The Romance of the Rose/The Romaunt of the Rose:** When Chaucer began to write, the French influence predominated. His genius was fed by French poetry and romance, which were the favourite reading of the elite during his youth. French love poetry appealed in a strong way to his imagination. He was considerably influenced by two French writers, **De Lorris** and **De Meung**, and translated into English their lengthy romance, *The Romaunt of the Rose*. This lengthy translation runs into **8000 lines** and consists of **a long discourse on drawbacks of marriage and the frailties of women**.
- **The Book of the Duchess:** This is the first of Chaucer's major poems. Scholars are uncertain about the date of composition. Most scholars ascribe the date of composition between 1369 and 1372. Chaucer probably wrote the poem to commemorate the death of **Blanche of Lancaster, John of Gaunt's wife**. Notes from antiquary John Stowe indicate that the poem was written at John of Gaunt's request.

The poem begins with a sleepless poet who lies in bed reading a book. The poet reads a story about Ceyx and Alcyone and wanders around in his thoughts. Suddenly the poet falls asleep and dreams a wonderful story. He dreams that he wakes up in a beautiful chamber by the sound of hunters and hunting dogs. The poet follows a small hunting dog into the forrest and finds a knight dressed in black who mourns about losing a game of chess. The poet asks the knight some questions and realizes at the end of the poem that the knight was talking symbolically instead of literally: the black knight has lost his love and lady. The poet awakes and decides that this wonderful dream should be preserved in rhyme.

**The Complaint Unto Pity:** Another poem of this period though much shorter, named, The Complaint Unto Pity, is remarkable for its skilful use of the French seven-lined stanza or, rime royal, which marks a new departure in English versification.

**The French Period—a period of apprenticeship:** The French period is basically a period of apprenticeship. It was in the influence of the French masters that he learned classical restraint, a taste for the good things of life and to be witty rather than satiric.

### ➤ THE ITALIAN PERIOD (1372-1385)

In 1372 Chaucer has been to Italy & came in personal contact with Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio. The important works of this period are: **Troilus and Criseyde**, **The Parlement of Foules**, **The House of Fame** and **The Legend of Good Women**.

**Troilus and Cressyde:** It is a tragic verse romance by Geoffrey Chaucer, composed in the 1380s and considered by some critics to be his finest work. The plot of this 8,239-line poem was taken largely from Giovanni Boccaccio's **Il filostrato**. It recounts the love story of Troilus, son of the Trojan king Priam, and Criseyde, widowed daughter of the deserter priest Calchas. The poem moves in leisurely fashion, with introspection and much of what would now be called psychological insight dominating many sections. Aided by Criseyde's uncle Pandarus, Troilus and Criseyde are united in love about halfway through the poem, but then she is sent to join her father in the Greek camp outside Troy. Despite her promise to return, she is loved by the Greek warrior Diomedes and comes to love him. Troilus, left in despair, is killed in the Trojan War. These events are interspersed with Boethian discussion of free will and determinism and the direct comments of the narrator. At the end of the poem, when Troilus's soul rises into the heavens, the folly of complete immersion in sexual love is contrasted with the eternal love of God.

**The Parliament of Fowls:** It is a 699-line poem in rhyme royal by Geoffrey Chaucer, written in 1380–90 and composed in the tradition of French romances. This poem has been called one of the best occasional verses in the English language. Often thought to commemorate the marriage of Richard II to Anne of Bohemia in 1382, it describes a conference of birds that meet to choose their mates on St. Valentine's Day. The narrator falls asleep and dreams of a beautiful garden in which Nature presides over a debate between three high-ranking eagles, all vying for the attentions of a beautiful female. The other birds, each of which represents a different aspect of English society, are given a chance to express their opinions; Chaucer uses this device to gently satirize the tradition of courtly love. He handles the debate with humor and deftly

characterizes the various birds. Although the debate on love and marriage is never resolved, the poem is complete one and ends on a note of joy and satisfaction.

**The House of Fame:** an unfinished dream-poem by Chaucer composed at some time between 1374 and 1385. There are three books, in 2,158 lines of octosyllabics; it is believed to be Chaucer's last poem in that French form. The poem remains cryptic, and it is uncertain what its purpose or extent would have been (though the poem says that the third book will, in fact, be the final one). After the prologue on dreams and the invocation to the god of sleep, Bk I says the poet fell asleep and dreamt that he was in a Temple of Glass where he saw depicted Aeneas and Dido (based on Aeneid, 4); the dream moves on to deal more briefly with other parts of the Aeneid. At the end of Bk I the poet sees an eagle that alights by him and is his guide through the House of Fame in Bk II (initially suggested, perhaps, by Fama, Rumour, in Aeneid, 4. 1736°). The eagle explains, philosophically and at length, how Fame works in its arbitrary ways and the book ends with a vision of the world (thought by some to be amongst Chaucer's most inspired writing: 896-1045). The eagle departs and at the beginning of Bk III Chaucer enters the Palace of Fame (Rumour) where he sees the famous of both classical and biblical lore. Eolus blows a trumpet to summon up the various celebrities who introduce themselves in categories reminiscent of the souls in Dante's *Divina commedia*. Towards the end of the poem comes a vision of bearers of false tidings: shipmen, pilgrims, pardoners, and messengers, whose confusion seems to be about to be resolved by the appearance of 'A man of gret auctorite . . .' but there the poem ends. The identity of this figure has been much discussed; Boethius seems the most plausible suggestion. Versions of the poem were made by Lydgate (in *The Temple of Glas*), Douglas, and Skelton.

**The Legend of Good Women (1385):** It is written on Queen Bohemia's bidding who asked him to write of good women. Much of this poem is devoted to the first use of the heroic couplet by Chaucer to retell in lyrical form the tragic love stories of Cleopatra, Thisbe, Dido, Hypsipyle, Medea, Lucrece, Ariadne, Philomela, Phyllis and Hypermnestra. It is a dream-vision by Geoffrey Chaucer. The fourth and final work of the genre that Chaucer composed, it presents a "Prologue" (existing in two versions) and nine stories. In the "Prologue" the god of love is angry at Chaucer for writing about so many women who betray men. As penance, Chaucer is instructed to write about good women. The "Prologue" is noteworthy for the delightful humor of the narrator's self-mockery and for the passages in praise of books and of the spring. The stories—concerning such women of antiquity as Cleopatra, Dido, and Lucrece—are brief and rather mechanical, with the betrayal of women by wicked men as a regular theme. As a result, the whole becomes more a legend of bad men than of good women.

### ➤ THE ENGLISH PERIOD (1384-1390)

The last period of Chaucer's poetic career extending from 1384 to 1390 is known as the English period. Instead of being simply imitative, he becomes independent, relying upon himself completely. The greatest work of this period, **The Canterbury Tales**, marks the dawn of a new era, and entitles Chaucer to the claim of being called the "**Father of English poetry**" and the "**Father of English Novel.**"

**The Canterbury Tales** contains 17000 lines.

In *The Canterbury Tales*, 32 characters make the trip to the shrine of the martyr **Saint Thomas Becket** in Canterbury.



Although 29 characters are mentioned in line 24 of the “General Prologue.” The narrator joins this group (making 30). The host, Harry Bailey, makes 31. The Canon’s yeoman, who joins the group later, makes 32. The narrator gives a description of 27 Pilgrims. (Except second Nun or Nun’s Priest).

This work remained unfinished at Chaucer’s death.

In Prologue to Canterbury Tales Chaucer employed the Heroic couplet.

There are four characters that are not criticized or satirized by Chaucer in The Canterbury Tales – 1) Knight 2) Parson 3) Clerk & 4) Plowman.

Clergymen in the Canterbury Tales are: 1. Prioress (Madam Eglantine) 2. Parson 3. Friar and 4. Monk.

**Canterbury Tales** have the characters from three social groups or estates Viz. Nobility, Church and Commoners.

### ➤ **PORTAITS OF THE PILGRIMS IN THE PROLOGUE TO THE CANTERBURY TALES**

**The Narrator:** The narrator makes it quite clear that he is also a character in his book. Although he is called Chaucer, we should be wary of accepting his words and opinions as Chaucer’s own. In the General Prologue, the narrator presents himself as a gregarious and naïve character. Later on, the Host accuses him of being silent and sullen. Because the narrator writes down his impressions of the pilgrims from memory, whom he does and does not like, and what he chooses and chooses not to remember about the characters, tells us as much about the narrator’s own prejudices as it does about the characters themselves.

**The Knight:** The first pilgrim Chaucer describes in the General Prologue, and the teller of the first tale. The Knight represents the ideal of a medieval Christian man-at-arms. He has participated in no less than fifteen of the great crusades of his era. Brave, experienced, and prudent, the narrator greatly admires him.

**The Wife of Bath:** Bath is an English town on the Avon River, not the name of this woman’s husband. Though she is a seamstress by occupation, she seems to be a professional wife. She has been married five times and had many other affairs in her youth, making her well practiced in the art of love. She presents herself as someone who loves marriage and sex, but, from what we see of her, she also takes pleasure in rich attire, talking, and arguing. She is deaf in one ear and has a gap between her front teeth, which was considered attractive in Chaucer’s time. She has traveled on pilgrimages to Jerusalem three times and elsewhere in Europe as well.

**The Pardoner:** Pardoners granted papal indulgences—reprieves from penance in exchange for charitable donations to the Church. Many pardoners, including this one, collected profits for themselves. In fact, Chaucer’s Pardoner excels in fraud, carrying a bag full of fake relics—for example, he claims to have the veil of the Virgin Mary. The Pardoner has long, greasy, yellow hair and is beardless. These characteristics were associated with shiftiness and gender ambiguity in Chaucer’s time. The Pardoner also has a gift for singing and preaching whenever he finds himself inside a church.

**The Miller:** Stout and brawny, the Miller has a wart on his nose and a big mouth, both literally and figuratively. He threatens the Host’s notion of propriety when he drunkenly insists on telling the second tale. Indeed, the Miller seems to enjoy overturning all conventions: he ruins the Host’s carefully planned storytelling order; he rips doors off hinges; and he tells a tale that is somewhat blasphemous, ridiculing religious clerks, scholarly clerks, carpenters, and women.

**The Prioress:** Described as modest and quiet, this Prioress (a nun who is head of her convent) aspires to have exquisite taste. Her table manners are dainty, she knows French (though not the French of the court), she dresses well, and she is charitable and compassionate. Her name is **Madam Eglantyne**.



**The Monk:** Most monks of the middle Ages lived in monasteries according to the Rule of Saint Benedict, which demanded that they devote their lives to “work and prayer.” This Monk cares little for the Rule; his devotion is to hunting and eating. He is large, loud, and well clad in hunting boots and furs.

**The Friar:** Roaming priests with no ties to a monastery, friars were a great object of criticism in Chaucer’s time. Always ready to befriend young women or rich men who might need his services, the friar actively administers the sacraments in his town, especially those of marriage and confession. However, Chaucer’s worldly Friar has taken to accepting bribes. The name of the friar, cited by Chaucer is **Hubert**.

**The Summoner:** The Summoner brings persons accused of violating Church law to ecclesiastical court. This Summoner is a lecherous man whose face is scarred by leprosy. He gets drunk frequently, is irritable, and is not particularly qualified for his position. He spouts the few words of Latin he knows in an attempt to sound educated.

**The Host:** The leader of the group, the Host is large, loud, and merry, although he possesses a quick temper. He mediates among the pilgrims and facilitates the flow of the tales. His title of “host” may be a pun, suggesting both an innkeeper and the Eucharist, or Holy Host.

**The Parson:** The only devout churchman in the company, the Parson lives in poverty, but is rich in holy thoughts and deeds. The pastor of a sizable town, he preaches the Gospel and makes sure to practice what he preaches. He is everything that the Monk, the Friar, and the Pardoner are not.

**The Squire:** The Knight’s son and apprentice. The Squire is curly-haired, youthfully handsome, and loves dancing and courting.

**The Clerk:** The Clerk is a poor student of philosophy. Having spent his money on books and learning rather than on fine clothes, he is threadbare and wan. He speaks little, but when he does, his words are wise and full of moral virtue.

**The Man of Law:** A successful lawyer commissioned by the king. He upholds justice in matters large and small and knows every statute of England’s law by heart.

**The Manciple:** A manciple was in charge of getting provisions for a college or court. Despite his lack of education, this Manciple is smarter than the thirty lawyers he feeds.

**The Merchant:** The Merchant trades in furs and other cloths, mostly from Flanders. He is part of a powerful and wealthy class in Chaucer’s society.

**The Shipman:** Brown-skinned from years of sailing, the Shipman has seen every bay and river in England and exotic ports in Spain and Carthage as well. He is a bit of a rascal, known for stealing wine while the ship’s captain sleeps.

**The Physician:** The Physician is one of the best in his profession, for he knows the cause of every malady and can cure most of them. Though the Physician keeps himself in perfect physical health, the narrator calls into question the Physician’s spiritual health: he rarely consults the Bible and has an unhealthy love of financial gain.

**The Franklin:** The word “franklin” means “free man.” In Chaucer’s society, a franklin was neither a vassal serving a lord nor a member of the nobility. This particular franklin is a connoisseur of food and wine, so much so that his table remains laid and ready for food all day.

**The Reeve:** A reeve was similar to a steward of a manor, and this reeve performs his job shrewdly—his lord never loses so much as a ram to the other employees, and the vassals under his command are kept in line. However, he steals from his master.

**The Plowman:** The Plowman is the Parson's brother and is equally good-hearted. A member of the peasant class, he pays his tithes to the Church and leads a good Christian life.

**The Guildsmen:** Listed together, the five Guildsmen appear as a unit. English guilds were a combination of labor unions and social fraternities: craftsmen of similar occupations joined together to increase their bargaining power and live communally. All five Guildsmen are clad in the livery of their brotherhood.

**The Cook:** The Cook works for the Guildsmen. Chaucer gives little detail about him, although he mentions a crusty sore on the Cook's leg.

**The Yeoman:** The servant who accompanies the Knight and the Squire. The narrator mentions that his dress and weapons suggest he may be a forester.

**The Second Nun:** The Second Nun is not described in the General Prologue, but she tells a saint's life for her tale.

**The Nun's Priest:** Like the Second Nun, the Nun's Priest is not described in the General Prologue. His story of Chanticleer, however, is well crafted and suggests that he is a witty, self-effacing preacher.

Besides the above mentioned characters, there are the **Haberdasher**, the **Carpenter**, the **Weaver**, the **Dyer** and the **Tapestry Maker**.

### ➤ The Knight's Tale

The story is based on **Boccaccio's Tesida**.

The story begins by "Theseus (duke of Athens) who just has conquered Amazon and married Hyppolyta and returning to Athens.

While returning he is encountered by grieving widows of Thebes whose husbands were killed in the war of Thebes by King Creon (King of Thebes)

King Creon refused to give them the dead bodies, so Theseus was touched by pathos and kills Creon and destroys Thebes and restored the pile of bodies to the widows.

Two of them in the pile of bodies were alive. They were seriously injured but not dead. One is Palamon and another is Arcite, they are cousin brothers.

Duke Theseus orders to put them in prison. While in prison Palamon sees Emily, a charming, beautiful and attractive sister of Hyppolyta through back window and falls in love. Soon Arcite also got up and sees Emily and he also fell in love with her.

Arcite was ransomed by his friend and rescued. But Duke Theseus banished him from Athens, but he disguises as a page boy of Emily and walked in Emily's chamber secretly.

Poor Palamon escapes from prison and they both (Palamon and Arcite) met in a forest. Duke Theseus caught them while going for hunting and commanded them to be killed, but kind Hyppolyta requests Duke not to do so.

A deal is made by Theseus - both the convict should collect 100 soldiers and fight. The winner will get Emily as wife.

Palamon prays to Venus (goddess of Love) and Arcite prays to Mars (god of war) while Emily prays to Diana (goddess of chastity and madness).

The war begins and Mars gives victory to Arcite as he earlier whispered "victory".

Goddess Venus cries to his father Saturn as she got defeated.

So Saturn ordered earth to shake the horse on which Arcite was riding and threw him away and Arcite died.

Now Venus won and Palamon got Emily's hand as Arcite finally wished them to marry and they lived happily forever.

The knight is socially the most prominent person on the pilgrimage epitomizing chivalry, truth and honor. He stands apart from the other pilgrims because of his dignity and honor.

### ➤ THE WIFE OF BATH'S PROLOGUE AND TALE

Wife of Bath is characterised as gap toothed, somewhat deaf and wearing bright scarlet red stockings. Her last husband is half her age.

The wife of bath, Alisoun gives a lengthy account of her feelings about marriage. Quoting from the bible, the wife argues against those who believe that it is wrong to marry more than once, and she explains how she dominated and controlled each of her five husbands. She married her fifth husband Jankyn, for love instead of money.

After the wife has rambled on for a while, the friar butts in, to complain that she is taking too long, and Summoner retorts that friars are like flies always meddling.

The Friar promises to tell a tale about Summoner and Summoner promises to tell a tale about Friar.

The host cries to calm down and allow the wife to tell her tale.

Tale begins – In the court of King Arthur; young knight rapes a maiden; to atone for his crime Arthur's queen sends him on a quest to discover what women want most.

An ugly old woman promises the knight that she will tell him the secret if he promises to do whatever she wants for saving his life. He agrees and she tells him that women want most "to control their husbands and their own lives".

They go together to Queen Arthur and old woman's answer turns out to be correct.

The old woman then tells the knight that he must marry her.

When the knight confesses later that he is repulsed by her appearance she give him a choice, she can either be faithful and ugly or beautiful and unfaithful.

The knight tells her to make the choice herself and she rewards him for giving her control of the marriage by rendering herself both beautiful and faithful.

### ➤ THE PARDONER'S TALE AND PROLOGUE

The host is dismayed by the tragic injustice of the physician tale and asks the pardoner to tell a messy tale.

The other pilgrims contradict the host demanding a moral tale after he eats and drinks.

The pardoner tells the company how he cheats people out of their money preaching that money is the root of all evils.

His tale describes three righteous youth who go looking for death thinking they can kill him.

An old man tells them that they will find death under a tree. Instead they find eight bushes of gold which they plot to sneak into the town under the cover of darkness.

The youngest one goes to town to fetch food and drinks but brings back poison hoping to have the gold all to him. His companions kill him to enrich their own shares. They drink the poison and die under the tree.

After pardoner completes his tale, he offers to sell the pilgrims pardons, and singles out the host to come and kiss his relics. The Host infuriates the pardoner by accusing him of fraud but the Knight persuades the two to kiss and bury their differences.

### ➤ NUN'S PRIEST TALE AND PROLOGUE

After seventeen Nobles falls narrated by the monk, the Knight interrupts, and the host calls upon the Nun's priest to deliver something more lively.

Priest tells of Chanticleer, the Rooster who is carried off by a flattering fox who tricks him into closing his eyes and displaying his crowing abilities.

Chanticleer turns the table on the fox by persuading him to open his mouth and brag to the barnyard about his feet, upon which Chanticleer falls out of fox's mouth and escapes.

The host praises the Nun's priest tale adding that if Nun's priest were not in holy orders he would be as sexually potent as Chanticleer.

It has its origin in French 'Roman de Renart.'

Theme: "Never Trust Flatterer".

### ➤ WILLIAM LANGLAND

**William Langland** (1332 – c. 1386) is the presumed author of a work of middle English alliterative verse generally known as **Piers the Plowman**, an allegory with a complex variety of religious themes. The poem translated the language and concepts of the cloister into symbols and images that could be understood by a layman.

Very little is known of Langland himself. It seems that he was born in the West Midlands of England in 1330. The narrator in *Piers Plowman* receives his first vision while sleeping in the **Malvern Hills** (between Herefordshire and Worcestershire), which suggests some connection to the area. The dialect of the poem is also consistent with this part of the country. Robert Crowley's 1550 edition of *Piers Plowman* promoted the idea that Langland was a follower of John Wycliffe. However, this conclusion is challenged by early Lollard appropriation of the Plowman figure (see, for instance, *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* and *The Plowman's Tale*). It is true that Langland and Wycliffe shared many concerns: Both questioned the value of indulgences and pilgrimages, promoted the use of the vernacular in preaching, attacked clerical corruption, and even advocated disendowment. But these topics were widely discussed throughout the late 14th century and were not specifically associated with Wycliffe until after the presumed time of Langland's death. Also, as Pamela Gradon observes, at no point does Langland echo Wycliffe's characteristic teachings on the sacraments.

### ➤ THE VISION OF WILLIAM CONCERNING PIERS THE PLOWMAN

**Piers the Plowman**, in full **The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman**, Middle English alliterative poem presumed to have been written by William Langland. Three versions of *Piers Plowman* are extant: A, the poem's short early form, dating from the 1360s; B, a major revision and extension of A made in the late 1370s; and C, a less "literary" version of B dating from the 1380s and apparently intended to focus the work's doctrinal issues. Some scholars think that version C may not be entirely attributable to Langland.

The poem takes the form of a series of dream visions dealing with the social and spiritual predicament of late 14th-century England. In general, the language is simple and colloquial, but some of the imagery is powerful and direct. Realistic and allegorical elements are mingled in a phantasmagoric way, and both the poetic medium and the structure are frequently subverted by the writer's spiritual and didactic impulses. His



bitter attacks on political and ecclesiastical corruption (especially among the friars) quickly struck a chord with his contemporaries. In the 16th century *Piers Plowman* was issued as a printed book and was used for apologetic purposes by the early Protestants.

Will searches for Piers, falling asleep on Malvern Hills.

The poem is a dream allegory in nature and begins with the line— “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord.”

For centuries, literature had been busy in pleasing the upper class chiefly, but Langland comes as a great poet who appealed directly to the common people in *Piers Plowman*.

The poem first appeared in 1362 in 1800 lines but after final revision it reached its final form in 1500 lines in 1377.

The poem is in two distinct parts. The first containing the vision of Piers (*visio*), and the second a series of visions (*vita*) called “The Search of Dowel, Dobet, Dobest” (do well, do better, do best) —as allegorical character.

In the first vision that of the “Field full of Folk” that poet lies down on the Malvern Hills on a morning and a vision comes to him in sleep.

The next vision are those of seven deadly sins that allegorically figured, seems like shadows in comparison. These all came to Piers asking the way to truth; but Piers in ploughing his half acre land and refuses to leave his work and lead them.

The seven deadly sins are: Pride, Luxury, Envy, Wrath, Avarice, Gluttony, and Sloth.

He sets them all towards honest toil as the best possible remedy for their vices and preaches the gospel of work as a preparation for salvation.

Throughout the poem Piers resemble to John Baptist preaching to the crowd in wilderness.

The poem grows dramatic in its intensity, rising to its highest power in Piers triumph over death. And then poet wakes from his vision with the sound of Easter bells ringing in his ears.

Finally Piers appears as Jesus.

*Piers the Plowman* is the part of “Alliterative Revival” of the 15th century.

It is divided into stanzas called “Passus”.

Famous line from Passus V: “**In whose hand are iniquities whose right land is full of gifts?**”

### ➤ JOHN GOWER

**John Gower**, (born 1330?—died 1408, London), medieval English poet in the tradition of courtly love and moral allegory, whose reputation once matched that of his contemporary and friend Geoffrey Chaucer, and who strongly influenced the writing of other poets of his day.

It is thought from Gower’s language that he was of Kentish origin, though his family may have come from Yorkshire, and he was clearly a man of some wealth. Allusions in his poetry and other documents, however, indicate that he knew London well and was probably a court official. At one point, he professed acquaintance with Richard II, and in 1399 he was granted two pipes (casks) of wine a year for life by Henry IV as a reward for complimentary references in one of his poems.

Gower’s three major works are in French, English, and Latin, and he also wrote a series of French ballads intended for the English court.

The ***Speculum meditantis***, or ***Mirour de l’omme***, in French, is composed of 12-line stanzas and opens impressively with a description of the devil’s marriage to the seven daughters of sin; continuing with the



marriage of reason and the seven virtues, it ends with a searing examination of the sins of English society just before the **Peasants' Revolt of 1381**: the denunciatory tone is relieved at the very end by a long hymn to the Virgin.

Gower's major Latin poem, the **Vox clamantis**, owes much to Ovid; it is essentially a homily, being in part a criticism of the three estates of society, in part a mirror for a prince, in elegiac form. The poet's political doctrines are traditional, but he uses the Latin language with fluency and elegance.

Gower's English poems include *In Praise of Peace*, in which he pleads urgently with the king to avoid the horrors of war, but his greatest English work is the **Confessio amantis**, essentially a collection of exemplary tales of love, whereby Venus' priest, Genius, instructs the poet, Amans, in the art of both courtly and Christian love. The stories are chiefly adapted from classical and medieval sources and are told with tenderness and the restrained narrative art that constitute Gower's main appeal today.

### JOHN WYCLIFFE(1330-1384)

John Wycliffe was an English scholastic philosopher, theologian, Biblical translator, reformer, priest, and a seminary professor at the University of Oxford.

Translation of the Bible in 1382 earned him the title "Father of English prose".

John Wycliffe is called "The Morning Star of Reformation".

In 1382 he completed a translation directly from the Vulgate into Middle English – a version now known as Wycliffe's Bible. It is probable that he personally translated the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; and it is possible he translated the entire New Testament, while his associates translated the Old Testament.

In 1377, Wycliffe and Lollards began reformation in England.

**LOLLARD MOVEMENT:** Lollard, in late medieval England, a follower, after about 1382, of John Wycliffe, a University of Oxford philosopher and theologian whose unorthodox religious and social doctrines in some ways anticipated those of the 16th-century Protestant Reformation. **The first Lollard group centered (c. 1382) on some of Wycliffe's colleagues at Oxford led by Nicholas of Hereford.** The movement gained followers outside of Oxford, and the anticlerical undercurrents of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 were ascribed, probably unfairly, to the influence of Wycliffe and the Lollards. In 1382 William Courtenay, archbishop of Canterbury, forced some of the Oxford Lollards to renounce their views and conform to Roman Catholic doctrine. The sect continued to multiply, however, among townspeople, merchants, gentry, and even the lower clergy. Several knights of the royal household gave their support, as well as a few members of the House of Commons. The accession of Henry IV in 1399 signaled a wave of repression against heresy. In 1401 the first English statute was passed for the burning of heretics. The Lollards' first martyr, William Sawtre, was actually burned a few days before the act was passed. In 1414 a Lollard rising led by Sir John Oldcastle was quickly defeated by Henry V. The rebellion brought severe reprisals and marked the end of the Lollards' overt political influence.

Wycliffe's important works include- **The Truth of the Sacred Scriptures (1378), The Pope's Power (1379), Apostasy (1379), On the Eucharist (1380) and Trialogue (1382).**

➤ **JOHN MADEVILLE**

John Mandeville was an English prose writer of the middle ages.

He is known as the author of the travel book- **The Travels of Sir John Mandeville**.

This book is the most popular of medieval secular texts.

Originally written in Norman French, the work has been translated into English, Latin and other European languages.

The book is an account of Sir John Mandeville's 30 years odyssey throughout Europe, North Africa, the Far East and Arabia.

It became a major source for geographical information. Leonardo Da Vinci and Columbus are believed to have relied upon Mandeville's book.

Religion is a central focus of the book. Even the descriptions of people are often based on religion.

The narrator also shows interest in wildlife and animals in great detail.



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## MODULE 1: - (SECTION – IV) - FIFTEENTH CENTURY (1400-1550)

The period following the death of Chaucer witnessed a wide range of political changes. Henry V was crowned as the King in 1413. Soon, after his accession in April 1413, Henry V resolved to revive the war against France and stake his claim to the French throne. Fitful negotiations between the two countries resumed, in which Henry gave the French king a list of demands. The French emissaries rejected these demands and consequently, England prepared for war and later attacked France. France was defeated in the Battle of Agincourt in 1415.

### ➤ IMPORTANT HISTORICAL EVENTS

**CADE'S REBELLION (1450):** It was an uprising against the government of Henry VI of England. Jack Cade, an Irishman of uncertain occupation living in Kent, organized a rebellion among local small property holders angered by high taxes and prices. He took the name John Mortimer, identifying himself with the family of Henry's rival, the duke of York. Cade and his followers defeated a royal army in Kent and entered London, where they executed the lord treasurer. They were soon driven out of the city; Cade's follower dispersed on being offered a pardon, and Cade was mortally wounded in Sussex. His rebellion contributed to the breakdown of royal authority that led to the Wars of the Roses.

The classical study of Greek was introduced into England. Thomas Linacre, William Grocyn and William Latimer put Greek studies on a firm footing at Oxford, while in Cambridge; Erasmus' teachings of Greek gave a renewal impetus to the advancement of Greek studies.

In 1474, the **first printing press** in England was established by **William Caxton**. His translation of **Raoul Fevre's "The History of Troy"** was considered the first printed book in England. This was followed by the printing of "**Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers**" in 1477. Amongst other books, Caxton printed Chaucer's **The Canterbury Tales**, Gower's **Confessio Amantis**, and Malory's **Morte d'Arthur**. This helped in the spread of Renaissance in England.

With the appearance of the first printed English book in 1476, the phase of Middle English was virtually over. English, as a language, assumed its modern form.

### ➤ LITERATURE OF THE AGE

The period following the death of Chaucer was largely a barren period that did not produce any work of note. Chaucer was followed by a number of imitators, who caught the trick of his language and verse, but lacked the genius to make any fine use of them. They were known as **English** and **Scottish Chaucerians**. There were also some mystical writers whose mystical forms of writings became very popular in the entire Europe.

### ENGLISH MYSTICAL WRITERS

**RICHARD ROLLE:** Rolle, the earliest mystical writer, is usually associated with the mystical writers of the late medieval England but he wrote didactic prose and religious lyrics as well. His principal prose texts are- **The Fire of Love** and **Melos Amoris**, written both in Latin. He preached that those who want to lead a contemplative life must renounce the world and the self in complete devotion to God.

**WALTER HILTON:** Hilton, another mystical writer, belonged to the Augustinian canon. His principal achievement is **The Scale of Perfection**, which is addressed to the 'ghostly sister in Jesus Christ'.

**JULIAN OF NORWICH:** Julian of Norwich is specifically known for her mystical autobiographical work- **Revelations of Divine Love**. In this work, Julian perceives God as all Goodness. She does not consider hell as a place of eternal torments rather an absence of God. The most striking element in this Revelations is the existence of the Maternal God who feeds, provides cloths and loves her children.

**MARGERY KEMPE:** Margery Kempe, an English religious mystic, famous for her autobiographical work **The Book of Margery Kempe**, the specimen of earliest autobiography in English language, which includes her visions and religious experiences. The book is the story of her spiritual and physical travels with an emphasis on the oppositions and trials, she had to face as a result of her highly public devotion to God.

#### ○ POETRY WRITERS

##### ENGLISH CHAUCERIANS:

##### THOMAS HOCCKLEVE(1368-1437):

Hocckleve was a clerk in the office of Privy Seal and some of his poetry claims to describe the events of his own life as in- **La Male Regle**, the prologue to “**The Regiment of Princess**” (1411-1412) and in two poems from the late sequence known as “**Series**” (1420), ‘**The Complaint**’ and ‘**The Dialogue with a Friend**’.

He was an ardent opponent of the **Lollards**.

He also praises **Chaucer** in “**The Regiment of Princess**”.

Hocckleve poetry also included the translations from **Christine de Pisan** (French Poet).

##### JOHN LYDGATE(1370-1449):

Lydgate's poetic output is prodigious, amounting, at a conservative count, to about 145,000 lines.

His position is a man of letters rather than as a major poet.

Perhaps his fame lies in his praise of Chaucer.

**The Complaint of the Black Knight:** It is modeled on Chaucer's ‘The Book of the Duchess’.

**The Temple of Glass:** Indebted to ‘The House of Fame’.

**Reason and Sensuality:** An allegory book.

**Troy Book:** A major contribution to the rendering of classical myth into English. It is 30,000 lines translation of Guido delle Colonne, commissioned by Prince Henry V.

**Fall of Prince** (1438) – 30,000 lines on Monk's Tale.

##### STEPHEN HAWES(1475-1525):

Stephen Hawes, poet and courtier who served King Henry VII of England and was a follower of the devotional poet John Lydgate.

Hawes's main work is a long allegorical poem, **The Passetyme of Pleasure**, the chief theme of which is the education and pilgrimage through life of the knight **Graunde Amoure**. Completed in 1506, it was printed by **Wynkyn de Worde** in 1509.

Another allegory by Hawes, **The Example of Vertu**, is simpler and shorter. Though he shows at times a finer quality of mind than Lydgate, Hawes is not even Lydgate's equal in technical accomplishment, and little of his prolix, repetitious verse is memorable.

**JOHN SKELTON (1460-1529):**

He was the first Poet Laureate by the Universities of Oxford, Louvain, and Cambridge an academic distinction.

He was a follower of Chaucer.

In **Collyn Cloute** Skelton attacked Wolsey in a general satire.

‘**Speke, Parrot**’ and ‘**Why Come Ye not to Courte?**’ are his works.

He wrote **The Book of Phillip Sparrow**, a 1400 lines poem inspired by Catullus.

He became tutor of Prince Henry (later Henry VIII).

He pioneered the verse form known as **Skeltonic Verse**, consisting of short lines grouped by end rhymes.

His other famous works are:

**The Bowge of Court:** The title refers to free board at the King’s table. It is an allegorical poem in seven line stanza, satirizing court life (1480-1498; the court of Henry VII). It was printed by Wynkyn de Worde. The word “Bowge” is a corrupt form of “bouche” – means court relations from French.

**Wynkyn de Worde (1478-1535):** it was printed at Westminster and in London.

**A Garlande of Laurell:** It is an allegory about self-praise, describing the crowning of the author among the great poets of the world.

**Phyllyp Sparowe (The Book of Philip Sparrow):** It is one of the most unusual elegies in English to a pet bird. It is almost comic in its grief. A lamentation put into the mouth of Jane Scrope, a young lady, whose sparrow has been killed by a cat followed by a eulogy of her by Skelton and a defense of himself and the poem.

**Collyn Clout:** A complaint by a vagabond of the misdeeds of ecclesiastic which influenced Edmund Spenser.

**Speke, Parrot and Why Come Ye not to Courte? :** These are satires which attack on Cardinal Wolsey.

**Magnificence (published in 1519):** It is a morality play. Magnificence, symbolizing a generous Prince is ruined by mistaken liberality and bad counselors, but restored by good-hope, perseverance, and other similar figures. The play was edited by Paula Neuss (1980).

**SCOTTISH CHAUCERIANS**

**JAMES I OF SCOTLAND (1394-1437):** King James I of Scotland wrote **The Kingis Quair**, a series of courtly love poems written in rhyme royal stanzas. This poem is not merely a conventional application of Chaucer’s courtly writing. It also introduces to Scottish literature the discourse of subjectivity, in which the first person is the subject of the poem. The King writes this poem as a sort of autobiography about his experiences in English captivity. Although James I is willing to build on the styles of the English Chaucer, his writing reflects the beginnings of a Scottish national identity. In his poems he narrated the story of his love sincerely no doubt, but not with the dramatic realism of Chaucer. He mixes much allegory with reality.

**ROBERT HENRYSON (1425-1500):** Although there are many similarities between the subject matter and refinement of verse in Chaucer and Henryson, the latter poet transcends literary imitation and brings his own Scottish nationalism into his writing. Henryson’s work concentrates on more local issues in Scotland, which gives his work a more “popular” quality than Chaucer’s. He is also famous being one of the first to write in the idiom that later comes to be known as Scots. One of Henryson’s greatest achievements is his work **The Testament of Cresseid**, a critical re-writing of Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde. Henryson disregards Chaucer’s conclusion and creates a totally new ending where Troilus is kept alive to permit one final encounter with his lover, who has been reduced to leprosy.



**WILLIAM DUNBAR:** As Dunbar belongs to the latest medieval phase, his work is quite far from that of Chaucer's. Although Dunbar's **The Tretis** includes many ironic gestures that recall the Wife of Bath and **The Merchant's Tale**, he utilizes a much wilder humor than Chaucer. Dunbar is even credited with the first printed use of the word "fuck." He does not utilize the Chaucerian palinode, or retraction.

#### ○ PROSE WRITERS

##### **THOMAS MALORY (1415-1471):**

Sir Thomas Malory was an English writer, the author or compiler of **Le Morte d'Arthur** (originally titled **The Whole Book of King Arthur and His Noble Knights of the Round Table**).

Since the late 19th century, he has generally been identified as Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel in Warwickshire.

William Wycherley's **Plain Dealer** is based on **Le Morte d'Arthur**.

**Le Morte d'Arthur** is a compilation of traditional tales about the Legend King Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot, and the Knights of the Round Table.

It was first published in 1485 by William Caxton.

Malory wrote about Arthur in 8 books but Caxton converted it into 21 books.

Book 1: "From the Marriage of King Uther unto King Arthur that Reigned after Him and did Many Battles"

Book 2: "The Noble Tale Between King Arthur and Lucius the Emperor of Rome"

Book 3: "The Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake"

Book 4: "The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney"

Book 5: "The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones"

Book 6: "The Noble Tale of the Sangreal"

Book 7: "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere"

Book 8: "The Death of Arthur".

##### **WILLIAM CAXTON:**

William Caxton was an English merchant, diplomat, and writer.

He is thought to be the first person to introduce a printing press into England, in 1476, and as a printer was the first English retailer of printed books.

During 1471-1472 at Cologne, William Caxton learned the trade of printing.

Caxton and Colard Mansion set up a printing press at Bruges, in Belgium.

William Caxton printed a total of about 100 different works.

He translated of about 24 books, all of them except one he printed.

In 1438 he became an apprentice to a prominent London mercer Robert Large.

In 1469 he entered the service of Margaret Duchess of Burgundy, the sister of King Edward IV.

Margaret asked him to complete an English translation of Raoul Lefevre's **History of Troy**. Thus the first printed in English was Caxton's translations of Lefevre called **The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troy** (from French to English).

Caxton printed Chaucer's translation of Boethius in 1479.

Malory Morte d'Arthur was issued from his press in 1485.

Wynkyn de Worde became Caxton's successor on his death in 1491.

The first English translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* was also the work of William Caxton.

Caxton achieved the title of "**Governor of the English Nation of Merchant Adventurers**".

The name of Caxton printing press was "The Red Pale".

