

An Introduction to Literature for Students of English as a Foreign Language

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By

K. Thomas Baby

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



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This book first published 2024

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-0364-0326-2

ISBN (13): 978-1-0364-0326-3

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FOREWORD

Dr Thomas Baby is currently Assistant Professor of English at Dhofar University, Salalah, OMAN. He has taught English Language and literature at various higher education institutions for more than three decades. He is a reputed author who has published nearly half a dozen books and book chapters. He has also written several research articles and presented them at international conferences such as TESOL FRANCE, and TESOL ARABIA. As the Dean of the College of Arts and Applied Sciences, I am proud to certify that Dr Thomas Baby has served our university for nearly seven years now in various capacities as an active faculty member. He has always taken utmost care to carry out the responsibilities entrusted to him by the university in the best possible manner. Recently, he was honoured for his role in the institutional accreditation of the college and the BA English Program by the German Agency for Quality Assurance (AQAS). He was also honoured for his work in the examination committee and his role as an outstanding teacher of our university. Therefore, I am really happy to write this foreword for his forthcoming textbook “**An Introduction to Literature for Students of English as a Foreign Language**”. I am sure, Dr Thomas Baby’s long experience of teaching English literature and his reputation as an excellent teacher would certainly make this compact textbook an indispensable guide for every student of literature. Since the book is written in a simple and easy-to-understand style, it will be beneficial to anyone who wants to learn the basics of English Literature. On behalf of the College of Arts and Applied Sciences, Dhofar University, I am happy to extend my best wishes to Dr Thomas Baby for his endeavour of writing this highly beneficial textbook.

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PREFACE

This textbook is the result of my long experience of teaching **Introduction to English Literature** to the **EFL** (English as a Foreign Language) students of Dhofar University, Salalah, OMAN. The predominant reason for writing this book is the non-availability of a suitable textbook of Introduction to English literature for EFL students. Therefore, I have designed this textbook with extreme care by introducing important literary terms and a brief history of English literature which are not normally included in other textbooks available for this course. These two sections are included with the specific purpose of giving a solid foundation to EFL students who are mostly ignorant of the history and culture of English people. A general awareness of the history and culture of English people is essential for a proper understanding and appreciation of English Literature. Therefore, the book consists of carefully selected materials for the study of fiction, poetry and drama along with simple and clear explanations suitable for the level of EFL students. The book has also incorporated different types of assessment questions to enhance the creative and critical thinking skills of students. In short, the professed aim of this book is to offer a simple and step-by-step explanation of various genres of texts for the benefit of all the students who study Introduction to English Literature. Since the books currently available in the market for this course are significantly beyond the level of most EFL students, this unique textbook will be highly useful to all EFL students and teachers of English literature.

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UNIT I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to English Literature is a credit course in the syllabus of many universities for their degree or diploma courses in English Literature. The **EFL** (English as Foreign Language) students who opt for degree or diploma course in English Literature are required to study different forms of literature such as fiction, poetry and drama in detail during their course of study. Moreover, this credit course is usually taught in the beginning of the study programme. In other words, **Introduction to English Literature** can be considered as an initiation for EFL students into the study of literature. However, the syllabus of Introduction to English Literature for EFL students in most universities consists of a collection of selected fiction, poetry and drama in line with the syllabus designed for native students in English-speaking countries. As a result, most EFL students who study this course do not understand or appreciate literature in full measure because they lack enough background knowledge or an overall perspective of the development of English Literature.

The above-mentioned issues can be effectively addressed by a simple and easy-to-understand text book that explains important literary terms and provides necessary background information about English culture and the development of English literature. Therefore, this book begins with a glossary of important literary terms and a brief history of English Literature. The subsequent chapters are in line with the common syllabus for **Introduction to English Literature** for EFL students in several universities. Many universities often recommend the available titles in the market as recommended textbooks. Unfortunately, many of the books on Introduction to Literature available in the market are not suitable to be used as textbooks for EFL students because these books mostly authored by reputed scholars are meant for native students. Therefore, a real need is felt by many teachers and students for a compact and easy-to-understand textbook for this credit course offered by several universities outside the English-speaking world.

This book is an answer to this long-felt need of a simple handbook for teaching Introduction to English Literature to EFL students. The author who

has been teaching Introduction to Literature to EFL students at Dhofar University for several semesters has designed this compact and easy-to-understand textbook for the course through a careful selection of interesting prose fiction, poetry and drama along with assessment questions for the development of essential learning skills for students. The book is also beneficial to teachers as the author has incorporated his personal resources gained from his vast experience of teaching the subject for more than three decades. The initial chapters of the book are designed to provide a solid foundation to EFL students who are ignorant of the social and cultural background of the English people. An awareness of social and cultural history can equip students to understand and appreciate English literature more effectively. Therefore, the unit followed by the introduction is on **the glossary of literary terms**. It is intended to impart an awareness of the literary implications of many common English words that occur frequently in a literature course. The next unit gives a brief outline **history of English Literature** designed specifically for EFL students who need a proper understanding of English culture from a literary perspective. Unfortunately, many universities do not give due importance to the study of literary terms and history of literature in their syllabus.

The subsequent chapters are on the study of fiction, poetry and drama. They constitute the common components of this course in most of the universities across the world. The professed aim of this book is to introduce the different genres(types) of English literature to foreign students in order to equip them to understand and appreciate the rich variety of English literature. The course will introduce them to great writers of English literature by selecting their works for detailed study in the class. The author has taken extreme care to select authentic materials that will generate genuine interest in students to pursue their studies in literature. Therefore, the unit on the study of fiction consists of short stories and novels by famous authors. For example, the first story in the section is “Half-a-day” by the Egyptian Writer Naguib Mahfouz, who was awarded Nobel prize for literature. The next story is “The Last Leaf” authored by O. Henry who is considered to be a master in the art of writing short stories. In addition, Fairy tales, Fables, the “Arabian Night” stories and novels are included in this section. For instance, Nobel prize winner William Golding’s “Lord of the flies” and Paulo Coelho’s popular best seller “The Alchemist” are the novels taken up for elaborate treatment in this section.

In the next section of poetry, half-a-dozen famous poets representing different periods of English literature are covered chronologically by selecting their famous poems. For example, Shakespeare’s sonnet number

116 and Milton's "On His Blindness" are chosen from the ancient masters. Next, Wordsworth's "The World Is Too Much with Us; Late and Soon" is chosen to represent the new age of romantic poetry in English literature. To represent modern British poetry, T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and W.B. Yeats's "The Second Coming" are included in the selection of poems. In order to include American poets and modern free verse, poems from Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, Richard Wilbur and Linda Paston are analysed critically for the benefits of EFL students who study English poetry.

The next section is on the study of drama which begins with an introductory chapter that describes various elements and distinguishing features of drama as a form of literature. In addition to the printed material or the script, the drama needs a theatre, actors and audience to bring it to perfection. Since the drama is prescribed as a component of study for literature students in the classroom, two one-act plays and a full-length play with five acts are included in this section. The Bishop's Candlesticks is the first one-act play included in this section for its simple language, excellent art of characterization and gripping story-line. The second one-act play in the section is "The Proposal" written by the famous author Anton Chekhov. It is a short hilarious romantic comedy that everyone can enjoy. In addition to the one act plays, a full-length drama in five acts is also included in this section for the benefit of students and teachers. The famous Shakespearean tragedy "Macbeth" is the chosen play because it is one of the best creations of Shakespeare which every student of literature should read, understand and appreciate.

The concluding unit is mainly about effective methods of implementing the teaching learning activities in the classroom. In other words, the concluding unit explains how this textbook can be used effectively in the classrooms for achieving optimum results. The last part of the concluding chapter deals exclusively with the assessment criteria and the learning outcome expected from this course book. The section on assessment deals critically with various types of questions and how to design them effectively for assessing the learners based on their course requirements .

UNIT II

A GLOSSARY OF IMPORTANT LITERARY TERMS

It is necessary that students of literature should have basic knowledge of essential literary terms in order to understand and appreciate literature in the right perspective. Moreover, this unit is intended to create an awareness in students about the literary implications of many common English words that occur frequently in their daily academic situations in life. This unit is also intended to provide a solid foundation to EFL students who are ignorant of the social and cultural evolution of many English words. The following are some of the important literary terms.

- **Allegory:** A literary work in which the characters often signify certain concepts. It has an additional correlated meaning with the aim of giving a moral lesson through a story. Example: *The Pilgrim's Progress* written by John Bunyan.
- **Alliteration:** The continuous repetition of consonant sounds for stylistic purposes. Example: "path of the park" and "pumping, pumping".
- **Allusion:** Referring to other popular source of knowledge from religious texts, mythology, literature or history. Example: Love your enemies and do good to those who persecute you.
- **Ambiguity:** The lack of clarity or multiple meanings in a statement. Example: No man born of woman can kill Macbeth.
- **Analogy:** A comparison between two things by giving further explanation and clarification. Example: Some people find close analogy between animal and human life.
- **Anaphora:** A word or group of words that start two or more subsequent clauses or sentences with more than one occurrence.

Example: “**From** the memories of the bird that chanted to me, /**From** your memories sad brother.

- **Anastrophe:** A figure of speech in which the normal order of the sentences is turned around. Example: “Are you ready?” becomes “Ready, are you?”
- **Antagonist:** The villain or the main character who works against the hero of a story.
- **Antihero:** The main character who appears in some modern novels or plays whose character is just opposite or different from that of the traditional *hero*. Example of Antihero: Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*.
- **Apostrophe:** A method of addressing an abstract idea or somebody who is absent as if present used usually in poetry. Example: “O grave, where is thy victory?”
- **Archaism:** Formal use of outdated expressions in literary works. Example: Edmund Spenser used lot of archaisms in his work “*The Faerie Queene*”.
- **Atmosphere:** The tone or the overall emotional tempo visible in a literary work. Ambience and mood are also used to indicate the atmosphere of a work of literature.
- **Author:** The writer or a person who creates an original work or writes a book through his intellectual and imaginative powers.
- **Assonance:** The continuous repetition of vowel sounds for rhythmic effect in poetry. Example: the rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain.
- **Ballad:** A story in the form of a folk song transmitted orally by illiterate people in ancient times. It was prevalent in rural agricultural communities.
- **Biography:** The written history a person’s life. It usually gives a full life-history of a particular person describing his character, activities and experiences.

- **Blank Verse:** The unrhymed lines of the five feet *iambic pentameter*. It is very similar to the natural rhythms of English speech.
- **Cacophony:** The harsh or jarring dissonance in sound specifically in poetry or any group of words or phrases.
- **Caesura:** A stop or a break in the middle of a line usually marked by some form of punctuations such as a comma, period, dash etc. Example: The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
- **Character:** The characters are the persons, animals or even things that takes the story forward. The **protagonist** is the hero or the main character and the **antagonist** is the villain or enemy in the story. There are **major and minor** characters depending on their role in the story.
- **Characterization:** A technique that writers use for developing their characters into distinct individuals through their physical description, dialogue, actions and thoughts.
- **Chiasmus:** A rhetorical method that uses the structural inversion of two or more phrases to balance them against one another and create an artistic impact. Example: "Never let a Fool Kiss You or a Kiss Fool You."
- **Chorus:** A group of singers on stage who chanted musical verses during a Greek tragedy by wearing masks. It was also performed at certain religious festivals in ancient Greek tradition.
- **Chronicles:** The written history of important national or international events over a long period arranged in a chronological order. If events are arranged on yearly basis, they are called **annals**. Example: Shakespeare used Holinshed's chronicles as sources for his *history plays*.
- **Cliché:** A French word for the stereotype used in printing. In a literary sense, it means an outdated usage. Example "I beg your pardon" or "sincerely yours" are standard cliché.
- **Climax:** The highest point of emotion or a turning point in a work of literature such as a drama or a story.

- **Comedy:** A fictional work meant to interest, amuse and make people happy. Generally, the term is applied only for movies or plays.
- **Conceit:** A comparison of two things which are diametrically opposed to each other. This type of figure speech was commonly used by metaphysical poets like John Donne.
- **Confessional Poetry:** Poetry that deals with the intimate feelings, emotions and experiences of the poet's own personal life. Example: The Poetry of Sylvia Plath and Emily Dickinson.
- **Conflict:** The struggle between the protagonist and the antagonist in the story. Internal conflict occurs when the character struggles within himself and external conflicts occurs when he struggles with external forces.
- **Connotation and Denotation:** The denotation of a word is its direct or primary meaning. The connotation is its range of secondary meaning. Example: "home" denotes the house where one lives, but connotes privacy, intimacy, comfort, security etc.
- **Denouement:** The final outcome or the ending of the plot in drama or fiction during which the complications and conflicts of the plot are finally decided.
- **Diction:** The choice of words in a phrase or a line. It is used for special poetic effects.
- **Didactic Literature:** The type of literature that is meant to instruct or teach something. It gives great importance to rules, regulations and the moral aspects of literature.
- **Drama:** A type of literature written in the form of dialogues to be performed by actors in a theatre. It has many other elements such as stage, setting, script, director etc.
- **Dramatic Monologue:** A speaker's monologue of self-revelation at a critical moment in his life. It is invented by Robert Browning. Examples: "My Last Duchess", "Andrea del Sarto," and many other dramatic monologues of Browning.

- **Elegy:** A long poem written on the subject matter of death or loss of someone precious. Examples: Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and W. H. Auden's *In Memory of W. B. Yeats*.
- **Empathy:** Complete identification of the observer with the observed objects or his ability to identify totally with the observed object by forgetting the ego. It is different from sympathy in which feelings for another is expressed from our point of view.
- **Enjambment:** A poetic term for the continuation of the lines of poetry without using proper punctuation breaks for achieving the poetic effects of smoothness and melody. Example: lines 1 to 8 of Sonnet 116 by Shakespeare.
- **Epic:** An interesting long story narrated in the form of poetry which is formal in style on a serious subject. Example: *Paradise Lost* by John Milton.
- **Epigram:** A witty, pointed saying or an inscription in verse found on a tomb. Later it meant any catchy poetic lines or phrases used for inscriptions.
- **Epiphany:** A term used by James Joyce for a secular experience that signifies a sudden sense of radiance or mystical revelation felt while observing an ordinary object.
- **Epithet:** A statement describing a special or distinctive quality of something. Example: "*silver snarling trumpets*" mentioned in *Eve* of St. Agnes by Keats.
- **Euphemism:** An inoffensive expression commonly used for disagreeable or embarrassing words. Example: "passed away" is commonly used instead of death.
- **Epigraph:** A quotation or a phrase used as an introduction for a book or a chapter. Sometimes, it is used to show the source for the title or to indicate the theme of the book.
- **Epitaph:** A literary inscription or a phrase usually inscribed on a monument or a tombstone for the remembrance of the dead person.

- **Euphony:** A repetition of sweet or melodious sounds employed for creating the smooth flow of prose or poetry as opposed to cacophony which is rough and sonorous.
- **Exposition:** The introduction of characters and setting given at the beginning of a play or a novel. It gives the reader an idea about the background information of that work of literature.
- **Fable:** A brief tale or an interesting story often told to children to illustrate a moral as part of their character formation.
- **Falling Action:** It is a term commonly used in drama to describe the events that expose the resolution or the mysteries which were not clear during the climax of the play.
- **Fancy and Imagination:** The creative or imaginative power of the mind. Although these terms are used synonymously, Coleridge believes that “fancy” is merely associative memory while imagination has the power to shape and unify creativity in more effective ways than fancy.
- **Fiction and Truth:** Fiction is the opposite of truth. Since fiction is an invention of the imagination, it is often used as a synonym for novels and short stories.
- **Figurative Language:** Employing language for special meaning and effect through poetic devices such as simile or metaphor instead of expressing an idea directly in simple language.
- **Flashback:** A technique that reminds the reader about an incident or a scene that appeared or referred to earlier in that work of literature.
- **Foil:** A person or character with strikingly opposite quality in comparison to another important character in the same work of literature.
- **Foreshadowing:** Providing hints, clues or suggestions to the reader in order to indicate future events by the writer in a work of literature.
- **Genre:** The classification of different type of literature based on certain criteria or variables. Example: poetry is classified as

classical, lyrical, romantic etc.

- **Hyperbole:** An exaggerated statement used mainly for emphasis or humorous effect.
- **Imagery:** The objects of sense perception or qualities of mind created as vivid images or pictures in the mind of the reader. It can also be created by literal description.
- **Irony:** A direct contrast between **what is real** and what is not. **Verbal Irony** is a kind of understatement deliberately used to deceive people. Example: Caesar is an **honourable** man.
- **Literal:** An exact replica of something or a word-by-word representation of anything that is written or expressed by another person.
- **Literary criticism:** The art of identifying and analysing works of literature based on certain rules and norms or specific criteria for evaluating the authors and their works.
- **Malapropism:** This happens when you speak a similar sounding word instead of the intended word. For example, instead of saying a certain restaurant is prosperous, you say it is preposterous.
- **Masque:** A form of entertainment which is a combination of music, drama and dance in Renaissance Italy and England.
- **Melodrama:** It is drama produced with musical accompaniment for intensifying the emotional tone of the various scenes. Originally it included all musical plays including the opera.
- **Metaphor:** A direct comparison between two objects without using “as, like or similar to”. It says one thing is another thing. Example: He was a lion in the fight.
- **Metonymy:** A figure of speech that substitutes the name of a thing or an object for another related object. Example: *The White House*. It stands for the US Government.

- **Mood:** The atmosphere in a literary work created by the writer through figurative language, strong imagery and special diction.
- **Motif:** A frequently recurring idea or a symbolic image that functions as a unifying element in a literary work.
- **Myth:** A set of certain beliefs or stories in certain culture of ancient origin which were once believed to be true by that particular cultural group or set of people.
- **Narrator:** A person who narrates or describes the events in a work of literature. If one of the characters narrates the story using “**I**”, it is **first person narrative**. If the author directly tells the story using “**he, she, they**”, it is **third person narrative**.
- **Novel:** A work of fiction that tells a story in narrative form of considerable length. (Normally more than 100 pages). *Example:* Pride and prejudice. It is distinguished from a **short story** which has usually 1 to 20 pages maximum, and a **novelette** which has 50 to 100 pages.
- **Objective:** The type of narration in which the author presents the fictional characters and their actions as a detached observer.
- **Onomatopoeia:** A figure of speech in which the meaning of certain words can be guessed easily from the sound of the word itself. *Example:* **Crash! Blast! Splash! Thud!**
- **Oxymoron:** A literary device that combines two contradictory words into a single phrase that gives the special effect of a paradox. *Example:* “**wise fool**,” “**cruel kindness**.”
- **Parallelism:** A form of repetition that uses similar grammatical structure to make the expression more concise, clear and powerful. *Example:* Lincoln’s line “**of the people, by the people, for the people**.”
- **Paradox:** A statement which is often seem to be logically contradictory or absurd, yet on deep reflection, it makes good sense. *Example:* Child is the father of man (Wordsworth).

- **Pastoral:** Literary work that reflects the natural settings of peace and simplicity present in the pastoral life of shepherds.
- **Parody:** A humorous imitation of a popular literary work for the purpose of serious criticism or a reflection of adulation.
- **Personification:** A literary device that attributes human qualities or characteristics to lifeless objects. Example: The whole house seems to be thinking (Richard Wilbur).
- **Plot:** The storyline developed by the actions of the characters that result into a logical sequence of events in a work of literature such as a novel, short story or a drama.
- **Point of view:** The specific opinion or stance adopted in a narrative by the characters or the author in a literary work. Example: I/ He/She.
- **Protagonist:** The main character or the hero in a work of literature. The protagonist carries forward the story through his interactions and conflicts with other characters.
- **Pun:** A witty remark that manipulates the meaning of words through the skilful application of their multiple meanings.
- **Resolution:** The final act of solving the complications or unknown mysteries of a dramatic work after the climax of the play.
- **Rhyme scheme:** The pattern of ending sounds in the lines of a poem. Example: The rhyme scheme of the poem “The World Is Too Much with Us; Late and Soon” is: **ABBA, ABBA, CD, CD, CD.**
- **Rising Action:** The stage of progress or an increasing interest in dramatic action developed through the conflict in characters before the tuning point or the climax.
- **Satire:** A literary work that ridicules certain customs or makes fun of human follies and vices for improving society or life in general.
- **Setting:** The background or the place and time of action in a work of literature such as a drama, novel or a story.

- **Simile:** A figure of speech that compares two dissimilar objects by using words such as “*similar to, like or as*”. Example: My love is like a red rose.
- **Soliloquy:** A dramatic device in which a character speaks out his thoughts aloud to reveal his state of mind or secret plans.
- **Spoonerism:** A speech mistake when the first consonant of two words are switched. Example: If you say "bunny phone" instead of "funny bone," you've uttered a spoonerism.
- **Stream of Consciousness:** A technique that is used in some literary works in which the story is revealed through the stream of consciousness or the thoughts, sensations and responses of the characters.
- **Style:** Style means the method of writing used in a piece of literature. Style is how something is said, not what is said
- **Subjective:** A literary work in which the author’s views and beliefs are represented in the plot and characterization of literary work either directly or indirectly.
- **Suspense:** The element of excitement, tension or any other type of emotional involvement experienced by the reader in response to a literary work.
- **Syllogism:** A technique which employs deductive reasoning in arguments to establish the truth or validity of something.
- **Symbol:** An object, sign, or a word that signifies, or stands as representing an idea, object, or relationship. Example: A red rose is a symbol of love.
- **Synecdoche:** A figure of speech where a portion of something is used to represent the entire thing. Example: All hands to the garden.
- **Syntax:** The style of writing or the grammatical structure of a sentence.

- **Theme:** The theme is the central idea in a work of literature as revealed through the plot or the events in relation to life in general or about the qualities of people.
- **Tone:** the overall atmosphere of a literary work that reflects the author's thought patterns or attitude about the subject.

UNIT III

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

It is important for students to understand how English literature has achieved its present status through centuries of accumulated experiences of great writers through the ages. As literature is a reflection of society, it is essential that EFL students should understand how the social and cultural history of English people influenced and shaped English Literature. It can help them to understand and appreciate English literature more effectively in meaningful ways. In every culture, literature begins as a form of entertainment and in the course of time it develops, influences and shapes the culture of the people by becoming an integral part of their social consciousness. Therefore, from time immemorial, literature is intimately connected to history and reflects the civilization of the people. Therefore, studying the history of a people or race can give us valuable insights about the literature of that people.

The Anglo-Saxons were the first occupants of Britain, and their history served as the foundation for English literature. Following the fall of the Roman Empire, they started moving to Britain, and by 670 A.D., they had taken over most of the British islands. They originally belonged to Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, the three Germanic tribes. They brought the Anglo-Saxon language along with them which is a combination of Celtic and Latin that later came to be known as Old English. Therefore, the history of English Language began with advent of Anglo-Saxon people. We can roughly divide the history of English literature starting with the Anglo-Saxon period into eight key periods. Each historical era bears the names of notable authors or influential English kings. The eight key eras of English literature are as follows:

1. The Anglo-Saxon Period or Old English Period (450–1066)
2. The Anglo-Norman Period or the Middle English period (1066–1500)
3. The Renaissance Period (1500–1660)
4. The Neoclassical Period (1660–1798)
5. The Romantic Period (1798–1837)

6. The Victorian Period (1837–1901)
7. The Modern Period (1901–1945)
8. The Contemporary Period (1945–Today)

1. The Anglo-Saxon Period or The Old English Period (450-1066 AD)

The fifth through eleventh centuries are referred to as the Anglo-Saxon period in English literature. It is also referred to as the Old English era. The Germanic tribes of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes moved to Britain after the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the early fifth century and established their dominance there. Old English, a language made up of a combination of Latin and Celtic words, was the language that these Anglo-Saxon invaders brought with them. As a result, Old English was the first literary language in England that created the original Anglo-Saxon literature. It had a diverse range of religious literature as well as epic poems, historical chronicles, riddles, and other literary forms. Anglo-Saxon England, or the period from the seventh century to the decades before the Norman Conquest of 1066, is frequently referred to as the **period of Old English literature**.

Literature of the Anglo-Saxons

The term "Anglo-Saxon literature" refers to poetry and prose produced in Old English in the early medieval England between the seventh century and the years leading up to the Norman Conquest in 1066, a time period that is frequently referred to as "Old English literature". During this early settlement period itself, the Anglo-Saxon England produced poetry and prose. The seventh-century poetry Caedmon's Hymn is usually recognized as the first existing poem in English literature as it was discovered in an 8th-century copy of Bede's book on the Ecclesiastical History of the English People. Old English literature is made up of the following genres such as sermons and saints' biographies, biblical translations and early Church Fathers' Latin writings, in addition to legal, medical and geographic writings. Around four hundred manuscripts of the period are estimated to be available in the form of poetry and chronicles of narrative histories in prose.

Old English Poetry

The poem Beowulf, which typically begins the traditional canon of English literature, is the most famous work of Old English literature. The literature of the period mainly centred on various types of poetry depending on the

life-style and traditions of the people. The most distinguishing poetic work of the period was the **epic poem Beowulf**. Since most of the Anglo-Saxon poetry was meant to be sung, the written records are hard to be found. That explains why there are so few available traces. **Beowulf is the first epic poem** in English which tells the story of a courageous hero's exploits. The fortunes of kings and nations, as well as other historical events, are frequently mentioned and alluded to in this poem. Heroic poetry components, Christian ideals, synecdoche, metonymy, and irony are important aspects in Anglo-Saxon poetry. Following their conversion to Christianity, the Anglo-Saxon poets started composing religious poetry. As a result, religion is covered in a large section of Anglo-Saxon poetry. **Caedmon and Cynewulf** were two of the most well-known religious poets of the Anglo-Saxon era. Caedmon is well-known for his work "Caedmon's Hymn" which glorifies God.

Old English Prose

Since Anglo-Saxon England was primarily the domain of monks, nuns, and ecclesiastics, early medieval written prose can be divided into "Christian" and "secular" categories. Homilies, saints' biographies, and Latin-to-Old English translations of the Bible make up the majority of the Old English prose that has survived. The Anglo-Saxons gradually replaced Latin prose with English, which was constructed according to the conventions of everyday speech. However, they adopted many of the Latin grammar conventions. The majority of the well-known Latin Chronicles were translated into English by the illustrious Anglo-Saxon monarch Alfred the Great. Aelfric, the priest was the other eminent author of this period. His most well-known works include Grammar, Homilies, and Lives of the Saints. During King Alfred the Great's reign, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was created, and it functioned as a historical record of Anglo-Saxon history for more than three hundred years. The Anglo-Saxon period (450–1066 A.D.) flourished in England until Harold, the last of the Saxon monarchs, was overthrown by William of Normandy in 1066. The Anglo-Saxons undoubtedly had lives full of bravery, magnificence and brutality. All these components were present in their literature, which was a true expression of their way of life.

2. The Anglo-Norman Period or the Middle English Period (1066-1500 AD)

English culture, law, language, and character underwent a significant upheaval as a result of the Norman Conquest. Only the poor and powerless

spoke English as their primary language. Norman-French, meanwhile, became the language of the wealthy. It also evolved to represent prestige and social standing. The primary goal of Anglo-Norman writing was to appease the tastes of the Norman kings. Additionally, the only people with the authority to support literary writing at that period were the monarchs and courtiers. The Normans brought their sophisticated French language and culture with them. Anglo-French literature or Norman-French literature are the two terms used to describe this era's writing. We also refer to the Anglo-Norman period in the history of English literature as the Middle English period because it was a part of the Middle Ages.

The Normans brought with them their soldiers, artisans, merchants, historians, minstrels, and scholars. With their help, they hoped to resuscitate knowledge, cherish special moments, celebrate victories, and sing songs of romance and adventure. Among the most popular genres of writing among the Anglo-Normans were chronicles, religious and didactic writing, poetry, romances, and plays. The public, who at the moment urgently needed an outside stimulation, was awakened by the Norman Conquest. A new perspective quickly took hold of the people, and they gradually came to share a common hope. As a result, the Anglo-Saxons' hostility toward the Normans was replaced by national solidarity along with the evolution of Middle English literature.

The Literature of the Middle English period

Many Old English grammatical elements were either simplified or lost entirely over the Middle English era. The reduction streamlined the inflections of nouns, adjectives, and verbs. Norman terminology was also heavily incorporated into Middle English, particularly in the fields of politics, law, the arts, religion, and poetic diction. Old Norse impacts on conventional English language became increasingly pronounced, while Germanic influences persisted as its primary origins. The later Middle English period started to experience the Great Vowel Shift with the writings of authors like John Wycliffe and Geoffrey Chaucer. The *Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer is still the most researched and widely read work of the time. In short, a new literary style arose during this time. In contrast to the bravery, seriousness, and cruelty of the Anglo-Saxon literature, the Normans introduced lyrical tales of love and adventure. The Anglo-Norman period was therefore chivalric rather than heroic. The popularity of romance novels increased throughout the Anglo-Norman or the Middle English Period, making it the most read genre. These romances were renowned for their storytelling rather than their poetry. The majority of them actually came

from Latin and French roots. They related stories of Alexander the Great, Charlemagne, the Trojan War, and King Arthur.

The Early Middle English Period

The main source of historical information about medieval people are the chronicles or the histories of kings written in Anglo-Norman. Additionally, they included various social gatherings and period-appropriate legends. But religious or didactic texts were another outstanding achievement of the Middle English Period. These texts were formed into **Mystery and Miracle plays**. In contrast to the Mystery plays, which were based on biblical themes, Miracle plays depicted the lives of saints. Since only churchmen or priests had the power to produce and perform these plays, they chose Latin as the language of expression. During the early Middle English period, morality plays also gained in popularity. In actuality, the primary theme of these plays was allegory. The fight in the human spirit was presented by personified abstractions in the Morality plays. These plays specifically served to inform the public about the Bible, the lives of saints, and the conflict between good and evil. These plays therefore also belonged to the didactic and religious writing of that time.

The Late Middle English Period

Geoffrey Chaucer's renowned work, the *Canterbury Tales*, which was written in the second part of the Middle English language, established the groundwork for modern English poetry. Another notable poet of the time was William Langland. He authored numerous poems and held an important position in literature. His best-known poem is '*A Vision of Piers the Plowman*'. Langland's poem satirizes corrupt religious rituals while also addressing the moral issues of the day. He raises moral, political, and social issues in the majority of his satirical poems. The evolution of English poetry during the Middle Ages also owed much to John Gower. In the 14th and 15th century, he wrote the poems that were the English equivalent of courtly medieval poetry. Gower was primarily a moralist and narrative poet. *Confession Amantis*, his most well-known poem, was composed as a dialogue between the poet and the heavenly interpreter. John Gower, like Chaucer, made substantial contribution to the growth of the English language and literature.

The Age of Chaucer which spanned from 1343 to 1400 appeared around the conclusion of the Middle English era. In the literary history of English literature, it is the most important era. The *Canterbury Tales* is Chaucer's

most significant composition. It is a compilation of tales told by travellers from various social groups who are travelling to Canterbury to visit Thomas Becket's shrine. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, a turning point in English poetry, greatly improved the English language and meter to the point where it could be usefully applied to any situation. Chaucer made a significant contribution to the development of English literature by directing poetry away from theological and metaphysical topics and toward the time-honoured practice of direct imitation of nature. After Chaucer, English poetry went through a decline that lasted for about a century. There was no good literature produced between the year 1400 and the Renaissance in the year 1500.

3. The Renaissance Period (1500–1660)

The Elizabethan Period or Shakespeare's Age is known as the Renaissance Period in the history of English literature. It is also known as the 'golden age' of English literature. The field of theatre had the biggest impact on English writing during the Renaissance. The eminent playwrights of this time period include William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Lyly, George Peele, Thomas Kyd, and Robert Greene. These writers all produced a lot of work. Shakespeare was the best playwright of the Elizabethan era and under his leadership Elizabethan drama reached its zenith. The standard he set for English drama has not yet been surpassed. The Elizabethan drama consisted of themes of vengeance, internal conflicts, good vs. evil, melodramatic moments, and protagonists who are both heroes and villains creating tragic as well as comic circumstances. The presence of supernatural beings like ghosts and witches, and the use of blank verse were the other important aspects of Elizabethan drama.

The "University Wits" were a renowned group of playwrights during the Elizabethan era. They were actually a group of literary folks with experience. Marlowe was the best dramatist in this group; the others, Lyly, Peele, Greene, Lodge, and Nash, were all lesser writers. Marlowe nevertheless made a significant contribution to Elizabethan drama. Despite the fact that his plays differed from Shakespeare's in both content and technique, he elevated the drama's subject matter. Marlowe was responsible for the drama's elegance, dignity, and poetic radiance. He undoubtedly laid the foundation upon which Shakespeare erected the magnificent structure. Marlowe has been appropriately referred to as "the Father of English Dramatic Poetry. The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus is one of his best-known works. *Tamburlaine* and *The Jew of Malta* are the other notable