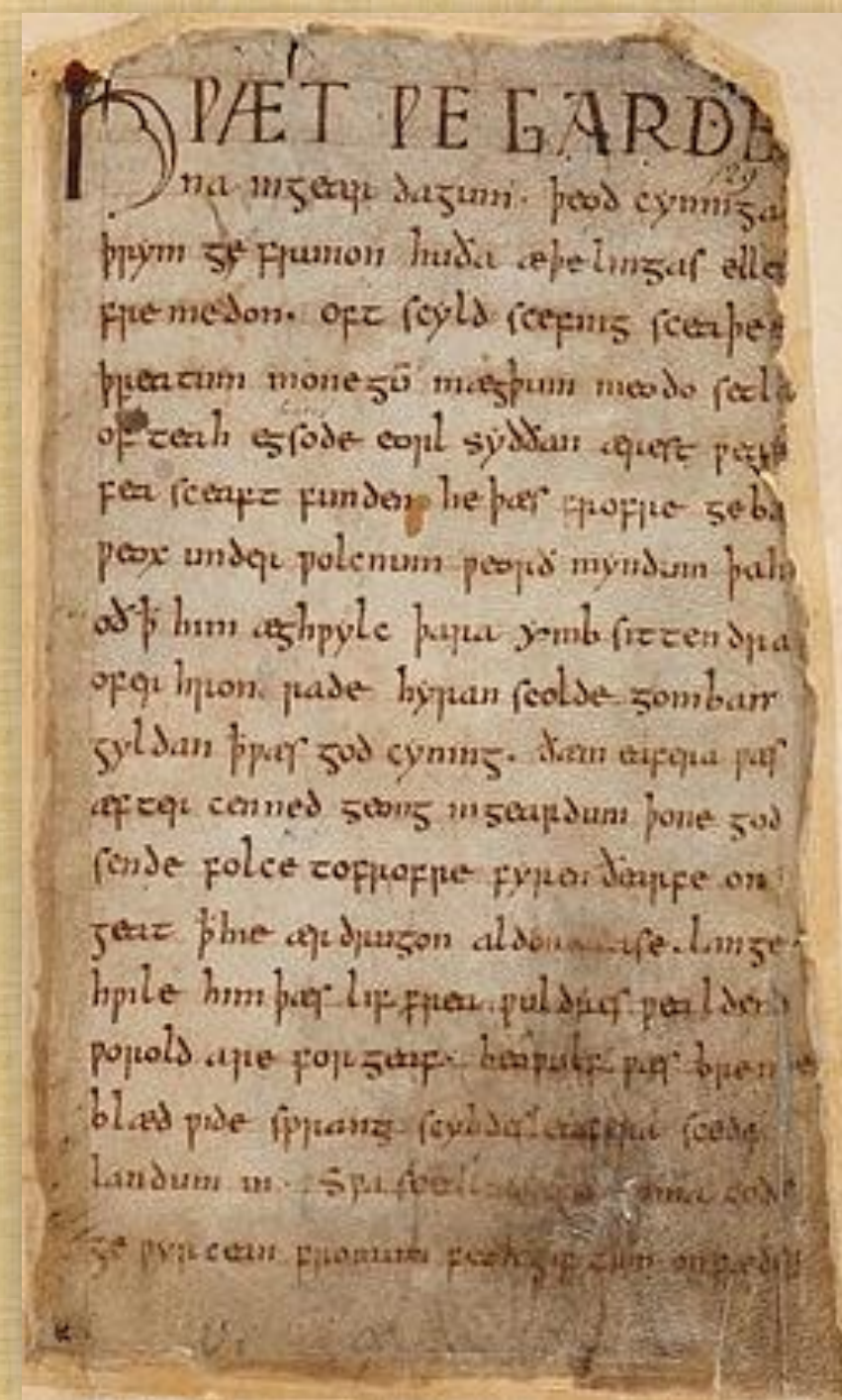


English

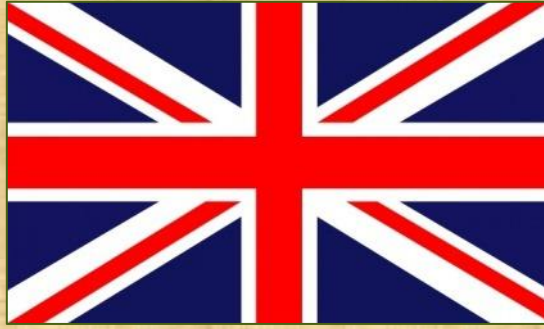
LITERATURE

LECTURE 1

Old English and Medieval Literature



NB:



Nowadays England is only a part of the country that includes Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and that also has been invaded by lots of different people. So whatever we call "English", in reality owes something to each of the people who have influenced and contributed to the development of the country now called the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Old English literature

(sometimes referred to as Anglo-Saxon literature)

is written in Old English (Anglo-Saxon) in Anglo-Saxon England

from the 7th century to the decades after the Norman Conquest of 1066

Historical background



Old English was spoken in very different dialects until 1066, when England was invaded by William the Conqueror and the Normans from France, who were descended from Scandinavian adventures. It was a heavily inflected language (i.e. the words changed form to indicate person, number, tense, case and mood) and its vocabulary was almost entirely Germanic. After conversion to Christianity became more general in the 7th century, some of the Old English poems, until then passed or only orally, were written down and probably modified, by monks. Only about 30.000 lines of these poems have survived.

For about 500 years, almost all Old English poetry had the following characteristics:

1. Old English poetry was sung or recited aloud usually accompanied by the harp, which provided a regular rhythm



2. Old English poetry is often called alliterative poetry - each line of the verse was made up of two half-lines, separated by a pause and joined by alliteration, or the repetition of consonant and vowel sounds at the beginning of words.

Hige sceal þe heardra, | | heorte þe cēnre,
mōd sceal þe māre, | | swā ūre mægen lýtlað
("Will must be the harder, courage the bolder,
spirit must be the more, as our might lessens.")

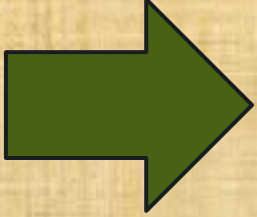
3. The abundance of metaphors


Guess!

Who/what are those metaphors about?

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------|
| 1) "the swan's road" | a) body |
| 2) "the bone-house" | b) woman |
| 3) the "life destroyer" | c) sea |
| 4) "a devil shaped" | d) sword |

2 types of literature:

 **pagan literature**
*(memory songs, wise sayings, spells,
short verses (1-2 lines))*

 **popular heroic epic songs**

“Battle of Maldon”

(by an unknown poet)

! an Anglo-Saxon (Old English) poem

! the greatest battle poem in English

! describes a battle between the English and Viking warriors from Denmark in 991 AD at Maldon in Essex on the River Blackwater, then called the River Panten.



Map showing the location
of the Battle of Maldon

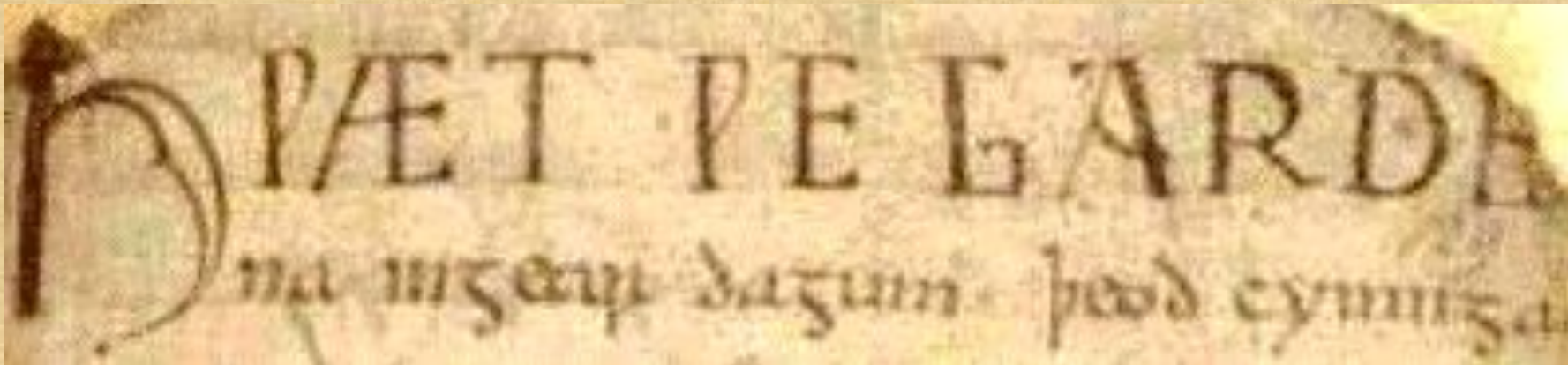
The original manuscript of "Battle of Maldon" was destroyed in a fire in the 18th century and survived only in transcript



“Beowulf”

! the oldest known Anglo-Saxon epic narrative \ poem

! the cornerstone of all British poetry



“Beowulf”

the manuscript dates from about the 10th century, although the poem was probably composed two and a half centuries before that.

The epic consists of two parts.

➔ The first part tells about Beowulf freeing the Danes from two monsters.

➔ The second - depicts Beowulf as a wise king in Jutland. He is already an old man when he has to defend his country against a fire-dragon. He defeated the dragon and died himself.

In the 3rd century Christianity penetrated into the British Isles



Christian Literature:

- “*The History of the English Church*” by Venerable Bede (“the father of English history”)
- “Paraphrase” by Cædman,
 - “Elene” and “Juliana” by Cynewulf (the first who introduced female into his creations).

Venerable Bede (672(3)-735)



Venerable Bede (672(3)-735)

- was an English monk

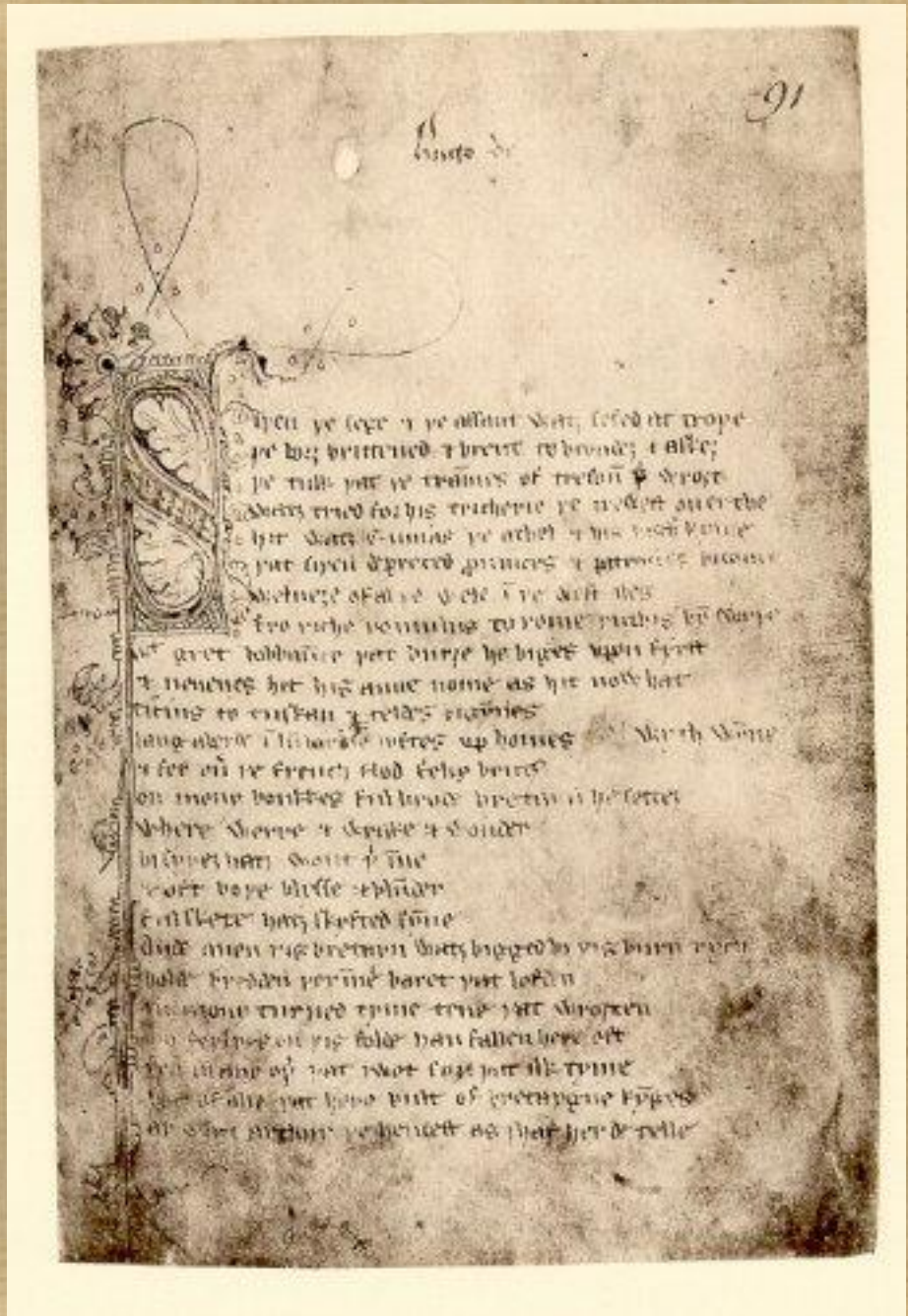
In 1899, Bede was made a Doctor of the Church by Leo XIII, a position of theological significance; **he is the only native of Great Britain to achieve this designation.** Bede was moreover a skilled linguist and translator, and his work made the Latin and Greek writings of the early Church Fathers much more accessible to his fellow Anglo-Saxons, contributing significantly to English Christianity.

Middle English literature

Middle English is a term used to describe the language that came into being in the century or so after the Norman Conquest (1066) and lasted until about 1500. During those years, the inflectional system of Old English was weakened and a large number of words were introduced from France.

Much of Middle English poetry was written in rhyming verse in which stressed syllables alternated with unstressed syllables, adopted from the French

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Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400)



Geoffrey Chaucer, known as the Father of English literature,

is widely considered the **greatest English poet** of the Middle Ages and was the first poet to be buried in Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey.

“The Canterbury Tales”



"The Canterbury Tales", begun in 1386, consists of stories told by some of the 30 pilgrims who set off from the Tabard Inn in Southwark, London, to visit the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury murdered in his own cathedral in 1170. G. Chaucer joined the group and described almost all the pilgrims in this company, each of whom practised a different trade (often dishonestly).

The Host of the Tabard, Harry Bailey, proposed that he joined them as a guide and that each of the pilgrims should tell tales (two on the outward journey, two on the way back); whoever told the best tale would win a supper, at the other pilgrims' cost when they return. The pilgrims agree, and G. Chaucer warns his readers that he must repeat each tale exactly as he heard it, even though it might contain frank language.

In fact, the collection is incomplete and only 24 stories are told (including 2 by G. Chaucer).



The General Prologue is one of the most interesting parts of the work because it acquaints the reader with medieval society.



Reading
General prologue one
can make an
investigation into the
social system of
England.

Other G. Chaucer's main works:

- “The book of the Duchess” (1370)
an elegy (a poem written to show sorrow for the dead) for the beautiful first wife of his patron
- “The House of Fame” (1370)
a lighthearted dream-vision, in which the poet is carried off by an eagle to learn whether those in the service of love are happy or not
- “The Parliament of Fowls” (1375-1385)
a delightful poem in celebration of St. Valentine's Day.

William Langland (1330-1386)



“Piers Plowman”

Folk Poetry

In the 15th century folk poetry flourishes in England and Scotland.

A folk song is a short poem in rhymed stanzas set to a melody.

Thus mowing-songs, spinning and weaving-songs were made up to the measured motion of that kind of work. Harvest-songs and wedding-songs were set to the measured motion of a dance.

The brightest example of a folk poetry - ballads, which could be:

- lyrical-epic poems (narratives)
- lyrical-dramatic poems (incidents in action)

In terms of the content, the ballads are divided into:

- historical,
- heroic,
- romantic.

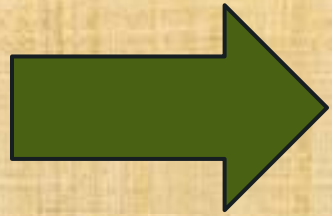
The Robin Hood Ballads



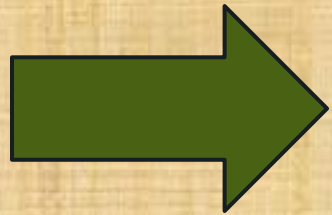
Robyn stood in Bernyslale,
And leued hym to a tree,
And by hym stode Lytell Johan,
A good yeman was he.



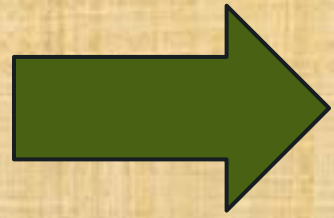
Dramatic Art



The Morality Plays

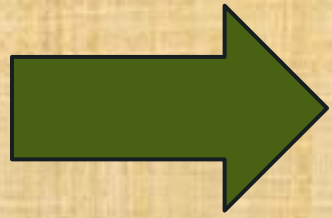


The Mystery Plays (or Miracle Plays)



The Morality Plays

are moral allegories that dramatise human life by personifying the forces of good and evil. "Everyman" (1509-1519) tells the story of Everyman's life when Death calls him away from the world. Among the "characters" in the play are Beauty, Knowledge and Strength. Such plays were probably encouraged by churchmen because they thought them to be more edifying entertainment than many of the other plays of the period.



The Morality Plays

are not allegories but collections of dramas, with recognisable human characters, based on incidents from the Bible and from the lives of the saints.

They were performed in church in Latin, they are full of humour and energy and contain much which derived from pre-Christian dramatic ritual.

The names of their authors are unknown.