

UG TRB

ENGLISH

(Competitive Exam)

UNIT-1

STUDY MATERIALS

The Age of Chaucer (1340-1400)

The beginning or the end of a social or literary age cannot be definitely dated. The process of change from one Age to another is a process of slow evolution which cannot be assigned to a particular date. However, for the sake of convenience and chronological study we take some important historical or literary event to mark the date of the beginning or end of a particular Age. The Age of Chaucer is dated from 1340 to 1400 because in 1340 Chaucer was born and in 1400 Chaucer died.

Chaucer, the first really national poet of England, had the rare distinction of having lived through the reigns of three English monarchs. He was born in the reign of Edward III, lived through the reign of Richard II, and died in the reign of Henry IV. This was a period of glaring social contrasts and rapid political changes. In the words of W. H. Hudson, "Edward's reign marks the highest development of medieval civilization in England. It was also the

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midsummer of English chivalry. The spirit of his court was that of romantic idealism which fills Chaucer's own *Knight's Tale*, and the story of his successive wars with Franch, and of the famous victories of Crecy and Poitiers, as written in the *Chronicles* of Froissart, reads more like a brilliant novel than a piece of sober history.

Strong in its newly established unity, England went forth on its career of foreign conquests in a mood of buoyant courage, and every fresh triumph served to give further stimulus to national ambition and pride. " But there was another side of the picture too, which was dark and dismal. With the increase of trade, the commercial classes accumulated huge wealth and lived in extravagant luxury. So did the royal families and the nobility. They lived a gay and debonair life. The masses of the people lived in deplorable poverty and misery. Further, epidemic after epidemic ravaged the country.

The fierce Plague, called the Black Death, broke out in 1348-49. This swept away in a single year more than a third of the entire population of the country. The plague reappeared in 1362, 1367 and 1370. These epidemics were followed by famine. As a result, vagrants, robbers and thieves multiplied in the country. Therefore, much of the glamour and gaiety of life had gone and the people had to face stern realities of life. The worst phase of this degradation was corruption in the Church. The clergy had become corrupt, profligate, demoralized and degraded. They stooped to the level of befooling, cheating and even robbing the people.

Chaucer in the *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* rightly draws the portraits of the fat, pleasure-loving Monk, the merry and wanton Friar, the roguish Pardoner, and the greedy and lusty priests. This was the shocking state of things in the religious world in England in Chaucer's age. However, religious pilgrimages in large groups of pilgrims were quite in vogue in this age. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* are woven through the texture of a similar pilgrimage.

Geoffrey Chaucer		William Langland:
Poems	<i>The Canterbury Tales</i>	<i>Piers the Plowman (A Vision)</i>
	<i>Anelida and Arcite</i>	<i>A Treatise on the Astrolabe.</i>
	The "Parlement of Foules"	Sir Thomas Malory
	<i>The Book of the Duchess</i>	<i>Morte d' Arthur</i>

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	The House of Fame <i>The Legend of Good Women</i> <i>The Romaunt of the Rose</i> <i>Troilus Cryseyde</i>	Sir Thomas More (Prose) Utopia
Essay/prose	A Treatise on the Astrolabe	Wyclif <i>The Bible</i>
John Gower		John Lydgate
Poems	<i>Confessio Amantis</i> <i>Vox Clamantis</i> <i>Speculum Meditantis</i>	<i>Fades of Princes</i> <i>The Temple of Glass</i> <i>Story of Thebes.</i>
King James I		
Poems	<i>The King's Quair</i> <i>Peblis to the Play</i> <i>Christis Kirk on the Green</i>	

Geoffrey Chaucer 14th 1340-1400

- Age of Chaucer is a link bet the old and the New – age of transition 1373 – he began his Canterbury tn, Boccaccio furnished he ex for Chaucer's Canterbury tales greatest work of the ales.
- In his Decamero English period.
- C borrowed ideas for his C.T from Boccacio'sDecamaron .
- Fatter of English Poetry reason 1. set up the standard English Lang 2. First to teach the art of versification. C combines in himself the best elements of French and English culture. This is evident by comparing him with his two contemporaries – Langland and Gower .Langland seeks to revive old English tradition Gower stands for foreign culture chaucer stands midway bet Langland and Gower.
- was familiar with the works of Virgil and Ovid and Latin prose writers.
- The Black Death Occured(**4 times**) **in England** during the reign of Edward III (1348-49)

Period**Period**

2. The book of the Duchess(1369) offer consolation
English

Italian

To the ofGauant to the death of his French life
Wife Blanche

"House of the fame"

Roman de la rose

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- allegory-love poem transacted in to English. Hundred years of war began (C.T – greater work of this period) in the reign of Edward III

Chaucer – The poet

C Introduced 7 line decasyllabic stanza riming abab bcc known as rime royal was also called Triolus verse, Cressida verse, the Chaucerian stanza.

- 7 line stanza (decasyllabic)
- 10 syllable couplet called heroic couplet (the five beat line, in stanza or couplet)

Introduced

- Terzarima a seetian to "The complaint to his Lady"
- Popularised Freeh formes – Roundel and the balled

Chaucer' s Lang

(14th imp for growth growth of Eng. Lang during the first half of 14th French was the chief lang of nobility.

- In the age of Chaucer there were four dialects prevalent in England-northern southerly, the East midland and the west midland. Chaucer chose midland dialect because it was also used by the upper classes of society and it was really living.
- Poet of the lusty spring – Chaucer
first great Eng humorist – Chaucer
In C's P. to C. tales he gives an account of (14th social and religious condition – because religion is a part of life by the middle of (14th Eng was becoming the common tongue of the nation. parliament was opened by an English speech in 1363.
- The kind of humour C and Shakespeare reveals based on insight and sympathy 30 pilgrims – each has to tell a story (**The discussion was held a "Tabard Inn southwark"**)
- On the way to the shrine of Thomas Becket Prologue is a picture of medieval society but it is in the process of disintegration.
- It tells about the society
The knight and "The squire – represent old tradition of chivalry

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The friar, the monk, The pardoner parish priest, Oxford scholar – denounced the abuses and corruptions of the church.

A shipman – a blend of merchant

Sailor and pirate – merchant, a number of guild members Miller, the Manciple, the Reeve and Wife of Bath – ugly things about the medieval church.

The friar – bears witness to the worldliness and corruptions growing up among the clergy. He was so popular with the Franklin and respectable women of the town – licenced to hear confessions. Let the sinner give silver to the poor Friars and his sins were remitted at once.

friar ought to be led to poverty but he led a merry and jovial life. paying little heed to religious concerns moved about like a master or Pope.

Wife of bath

C's masterly creation quite respectable women in the society.

- Dressed fashionably
- First he go up to altar he make offerings
- Wide traveler – had been to Jerusalem

30 pilgrims including the host belong to diverse professions

Knight and his son – represent war like elements

Represent by the man of law the Doctor, the oxford clerk and the poet –**The learned and the liberal**

The merchant and The shipman – Higher commercial community

The wife of Bath – Expert cloth maker

Haberdasher and his associates – Belong to the class of smaller London traders and manufacturers

Playman, the miller and the Franklin- Agriculturists

Manciple and Reeve – Upper servants represent down

Yeoman and cook – Lower servants represent country

The monk, The monastery the prioress from her convent, her attendant priests, the village parson, the roaming – Religious order people.

Friar, the pardoner and the sunnour – Religious order people.

C gives distinctions among these characters by pointing out the difference in their clothes, manner of speech habits and tendencies and the characteristics of each profession. These are real human beings.

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Example:- The host, the reeve, the man of Law, the Franklin are drawn from living models.

Some of the characters seem to live even today

Example:- The knight, The squire

The prologue is rightly called – the social picture of England of the late 14th as Dryden says “There is God’s plenty” Chaucer is “the poet of the lusty spring” – says H.A. Beers

Chaucer – 1340 – 1400**Born in London**

Chaucer lived during the period of three kings –Edward III Richard II and Henry IV

During the rule of Edward III – there was medieval civilization in England Chaucer wrote knight’s tale – it was a chronicle of historical accounts.

- 1.Trade expansion – resulted – increase of wealth
- 2.Living conditions of the people – Miserable
- 3.Terrific epidemic called Black Death many people died
- 4.During the Frech wars the condition of the country –worsened
- 5.There was necessity for taxing the people - these situations brought the symptoms of social umest.

100 years of war began in his reign King Richard II was unwise. The conflict between the king and the people. In the age of Chaucer evil increased to a greater extent. There was corruption in churches. Chaucer lived in this period. He wanted to reveal the shocking state of things of the churches. There was also another prominent person lived at this age.

John Wyclif – morning star of reformation

- wanted to revive the spiritual Christianity of England
- wrote religious pamphlets.
- Produced the complete Eng version of the Bible

Later part of the (14th– period of social umest and the beginning of a new religious movement and also new learning.

Petrarch (1304-74) and Boccaccio (1313-75) – considered to be the leaders of this revival.

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- They spread the spirit of humanism in England. This situation later on gave rise to renaissance. But the spirit of humanism was infused in Chaucer's age.

The divine comedy of Dante was the final and supreme expression of the world of medieval Christendom. The Oxford scholars – Duns, Scotus

William Occam – are among last of the medieval school men

Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400)

Son of John Chaucer. After his marriage, he became a valet in the king's chamber. Chaucer died in 1400 and was buried in the Westminster Abbey. The place afterwards came to be called 'poet's corner' [FP – Free Period, IP – Italian Period]

ENGLISH PERIOD**Works**

1369 – The Book of the Duchess – (FP)

1372 – Troilus and Criseyde – (IP)

1377 – The Parliament of Fowls (IP)

1379 – The House of Fame (IP)

1384 – The Legend of Good Women – (unfinished work) (adapted from Latin Wives of Boccaccio's De Claris Mulieribus)

1387 – The Canterbury Tales (EP)

1391 – The Complaint of Venus (EP)

1399 – The Complaint of Chaucer to His Empty Purse. Chaucer was influenced by the Italian master of Dante and Boccaccio.

English period

In his Decameron, Boccaccio furnished the example for C. C. T – greatest work of English period.

Chaucer – Not a poet of the people.

- Court poet
- wrote only for the high class readers and cultured society
- never took painful subjects
- not a serious reformer

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- rightly called the morning star of Renaissance
- Mostly written in 'out of door atmosphere'
- Father of English poetry
- First great painter of characters
- First great English humorist
- Calls himself 'an unlettered man'
- First creator of human characters in English literature
- Poet of the lusty spring

Characters of C.T

The knight, a squire and yeoman – military profession.

A prioress, a nun (her secretary) – connected with Christian church
Ecclesiastical group. member of RC religious community. A monk, A friar, A
summoner, A pardoner, A poor parson, parish priest, a clerk of oxford
(student of divinity)

- A lawyer, A physician and many miscellaneous

Characters

- Ruling Class: knight, squire
- Clergy: monk, friar, prioress, parson summoner, pardoner
- Middle Class: Franklin, Reeve, doctor, oxford student, wife of Bath,
sergeant at law
- Trade Class: guildsmen, cook, miller, host, manciple, merchant.
- Peasants: skipper, plowman, yeoman

The Canterbury Tales is a collection of stories written in Middle English by Geoffrey Chaucer at the end of the 14th century. The tales (mostly in verse, although some are in prose) are told as part of a story-telling contest by a

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group of pilgrims as they travel together on a journey from Southwark to the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral. In a long list of works, including *Troilus and Criseyde*, *House of Fame*, and *Parliament of Fowls*, *The Canterbury Tales* was Chaucer's magnum opus. He uses the tales and the descriptions of the characters to paint an ironic and critical portrait of English society at the time, and particularly of the Church. Structurally, the collection bears the influence of *The Decameron*, which Chaucer is said to have come across during his first diplomatic mission to Italy in 1372. However, Chaucer populates his tales with 'sondry folk' rather than Boccaccio's fleeing nobles.

Summary of the Poem

In the beauty of April, the Narrator and 29 oddly assorted travelers happen to meet at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, London. This becomes the launching point for their 60-mile, four-day religious journey to the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket at the Cathedral in Canterbury. Great blessing and forgiveness were to be heaped upon those who made the pilgrimage; relics of the saint were enshrined there, and miracles had been reported by those who prayed before the shrine. Chaucer's pilgrims, however, are not all traveling for religious reasons. Many of them simply enjoy social contact or the adventure of travel.

As the travelers are becoming acquainted, their Host, the innkeeper Harry Bailey, decides to join them. He suggests that they pass the time along the way by telling stories. Each pilgrim is to tell four stories—two on the way to Canterbury, and two on the return trip—a total of 120 stories. He will furnish dinner at the end of the trip to the one who tells the best tale. The framework is thus laid out for the organization of *The Canterbury Tales*.

Chaucer, the Narrator, observes all of the characters as they are arriving and getting acquainted. He describes in detail most of the travelers which represent a cross-section of fourteenth-century English society. All levels are represented, beginning with the Knight who is the highest ranking character

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socially. Several levels of holiness and authority in the clergy are among the pilgrims while the majority of the characters are drawn from the middle class. A small number of the peasant class are also making the journey, most of them as servants to other pilgrims.

As the travelers begin their journey the next morning, they draw straws to see who will tell the first tale. The Knight draws the shortest straw. He begins the storytelling with a long romantic epic about two brave young knights who both fall in love with the same woman and who spend years attempting to win her love.

Everyone enjoys the tale and they agree that the trip is off to an excellent start. When the Host invites the Monk to tell a story to match the Knight's, the Miller, who is drunk, becomes so rude and insistent that he be allowed to go next that the Host allows it. The Miller's tale is indeed very funny, involving several tricks and a very dirty prank as a young wife conspires with her lover to make love to him right under her husband's nose.

The Miller's fabliau upsets the Reeve because it involves an aging carpenter being cuckolded by his young wife, and the Reeve himself is aging and was formerly a carpenter. Insulted by the Miller, the Reeve retaliates with a tale about a miller who is made a fool of in very much the same manner as the carpenter in the preceding rendition.

After the Reeve, the Cook speaks up and begins to tell another humorous adventure about a thieving, womanizing young apprentice. Chaucer did not finish writing this story; it stops almost at the beginning.

When the dialogue among the travelers resumes, the morning is half gone and the Host, Harry Bailley, urges the Man of Law to begin his entry quickly. Being a lawyer, the Man of Law is very long-winded and relates a very long story about the life of a noblewoman named Constance who suffers patiently and virtuously through a great many terrible trials. In the end she is rewarded for her perseverance.

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The Man of Law's recital, though lengthy, has pleased the other pilgrims very much. Harry Bailley then calls upon the Parson to tell a similar tale of goodness; but the Shipman, who wants to hear no more sermonizing, says he will take his turn next and will tell a merry story without a hint of preaching. Indeed, his story involves a lovely wife who cuckolds her husband to get money for a new dress and gets away with the whole affair.

Evidently looking for contrast in subject matter, the Host next invites the Prioress to give them a story. Graciously, she relates a short legend about a little schoolboy who is martyred and through whose death a miracle takes place.

After hearing this miraculous narrative, all of the travelers become very subdued, so the Host calls upon the Narrator (Chaucer) to liven things up. Slyly making fun of the Host's literary pretensions, Chaucer recites a brilliant parody on knighthood composed in low rhyme. Harry hates Chaucer's poem and interrupts to complain; again in jest, Chaucer tells a long, boring version of an ancient myth. However, the Host is very impressed by the serious moral tone of this inferior tale and is highly complimentary.

Since the myth just told involved a wise and patient wife, Harry Bailley takes this opportunity to criticize his own shrewish wife. He then digresses further with a brief commentary on monks which leads him to call upon the pilgrim Monk for his contribution to the entertainment.

The Monk belies his fun-loving appearance by giving a disappointing recital about famous figures who are brought low by fate. The Monk's subject is so dreary that the Knight stops him, and the Host berates him for lowering the morale of the party. When the Monk refuses to change his tone, the Nun's Priest accepts the Host's request for a happier tale. The Priest renders the wonderful fable of Chanticleer, a proud rooster taken in by the flattery of a clever fox.

Harry Bailley is wildly enthusiastic about the Priest's tale, turning very bawdy in his praise. The earthy Wife of Bath is chosen as the next participant, probably because the Host suspects that she will continue in the same bawdy

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vein. However, the Wife turns out to be quite a philosopher, prefacing her tale with a long discourse on marriage. When she does tell her tale, it is about the marriage of a young and virile knight to an ancient hag.

When the Wife has concluded, the Friar announces that he will tell a worthy tale about a summoner. He adds that everyone knows there is nothing good to say about summoners and tells a story which proves his point.

Infuriated by the Friar's insulting tale, the Summoner first tells a terrible joke about friars and then a story which condemns them, too. His rendering is quite coarse and dirty.

Hoping for something more uplifting next, the Host gives the Cleric his chance, reminding the young scholar not to be too scholarly and to put in some adventure. Obliging, the Cleric entertains with his tale of the cruel Walter of Saluzzo who tested his poor wife unmercifully.

The Cleric's tale reminds the Merchant of his own unhappy marriage and his story reflects his state. It is yet another tale of a bold, unfaithful wife in a marriage with a much older man.

When the Merchant has finished, Harry Bailley again interjects complaints about his own domineering wife, but then requests a love story of the Squire. The young man begins an exotic tale that promises to be a fine romance, but Chaucer did not complete this story, so it is left unfinished.

The dialogue resumes with the Franklin complimenting the Squire and trying to imitate his eloquence with an ancient lyric of romance.

There is no conversation among the pilgrims before the Physician's tale. His story is set in ancient Rome and concerns a young virgin who prefers death to dishonor.

The Host has really taken the Physician's sad story to heart and begs the Pardoner to lift his spirits with a happier tale. However, the other pilgrims want something more instructive, so the Pardoner obliges. After revealing himself to be a very wicked man, the Pardoner instructs the company with an allegory

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about vice leading three young men to their deaths. When he is finished, the Pardoner tries to sell his fake relics to his fellow travellers, but the Host prevents him, insulting and angering him in the process. The Knight has to intervene to restore peace.

The Second Nun then tells the moral and inspiring life of St. Cecelia. About five miles later, a Canon and his Yeoman join the party, having ridden madly to catch up. Conversion reveals these men to be outlaws of sorts, but they are made welcome and invited to participate in the storytelling all the same.

When the Canon's Yeoman reveals their underhanded business, the Canon rides off in a fit of anger, and the Canon's Yeoman relates a tale about a cheating alchemist, really a disclosure about the Canon.

It is late afternoon by the time the Yeoman finishes and the Cook has become so drunk that he falls off his horse. There is an angry interchange between the Cook and the Manciple, and the Cook has to be placated with more wine. The Manciple then tells his story, which is based on an ancient myth and explains why the crow is black.

At sundown the Manciple ends his story. The Host suggests that the Parson conclude the day of tale-telling with a fable. However, the Parson preaches a two-hour sermon on penitence instead. *The Canterbury Tales* end here.

Although Chaucer actually completed only about one-fifth of the proposed 120 tales before his death, *The Canterbury Tales* reflects all the major types of medieval literature.

The Book of the Duchess, also known as ***The Deth of Blaunche*** is the earliest of Chaucer's major poems, preceded only by his short poem, "An ABC," and possibly by his translation of [*The Romaunt of the Rose*](#). Most sources put the date of composition after September 12, 1368 (when Blanche of Lancaster died) and 1372, with many recent studies privileging a date as early as the end of 1368.

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At the beginning of the poem, the sleepless poet lies in bed, reading a book. A collection of old stories, the book tells the story of **Ceyx** and **Alcyone**. The story tells of how Ceyx lost his life at sea, and how Alcyone, his wife, mourned his absence. Unsure of his fate, she prays to the goddess **Juno** to send her a dream vision. Juno sends a messenger to **Morpheus** to bring the body of Ceyx with a message to Alcyone. The messenger finds Morpheus and relays Juno's orders. Morpheus finds the drowned Ceyx and bears him to Alcyone three hours before dawn. The deceased Ceyx instructs Alcyone to bury him and to cease her sorrow, and when Alcyone opens her eyes Ceyx has gone.

The poet stops relaying the story of Ceyx and Alcyone and reflects that he wished that he had a god such as Juno or Morpheus so that he could sleep like Alcyone and describes the lavish bed he would gift to Morpheus should he discover his location. Lost in the book and his thoughts, the poet suddenly falls asleep with the book in his hands. He states that his dream is so full of wonder that no man may interpret it correctly. He begins to relay his dream.

The poet dreams that he wakes in a chamber with windows of stained glass depictions of the tale of Troy and walls painted with the story of The Romance of the Rose. He hears a hunt, leaves the chamber, and inquires who is hunting. The hunt is revealed to be that of **Octavian**. The dogs are released and the hunt begins, leaving behind the poet and a small dog that the poet follows into the forest. The poet stumbles upon a clearing and finds a knight dressed in black composing a song for the death of his lady. The poet asks the knight the nature of his grief. The knight replies that he had played a game of chess with **Fortuna** and lost his queen and was checkmated. The poet takes the message literally and begs the black knight not to become upset over a game of chess.

The knight begins the story of his life, reporting that for his entire life he had served Love, but that he had waited to set his heart on a woman for many years until he met one lady who surpassed all others. The knight speaks of her surpassing beauty and temperament and reveals that her name was "good, fair White." The poet, still not understanding the metaphorical chess game,

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asks the black knight to finish the story and explain what was lost. The knight tells the story of his fumbling declaration of love and the long time it took for the love to be reciprocated and that they were in perfect harmony for many years. Still the narrator does not understand, and asks the whereabouts of White. The knight finally blurts out that White is dead. The poet realizes what has occurred as the hunt ends and the poet awakes with his book still in hand. He reflects on the dream and decides that his dream is so wonderful that it should be set into rhyme.

SIR THOMAS MALORY

Le Morte d'Arthur (originally spelled ***Le Morte Darthur***, Middle French for "the death of Arthur" is a compilation by Sir Thomas Malory of Romance tales about the legendary King Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot, and the Knights of the Round Table. The book interprets existing French and English stories about these figures, with some of Malory's own original material (the Gareth story).

Book I: "From the Marriage of King Uther unto King Arthur that Reigned After Him and Did Many Battles" (Caxton I–IV)

Arthur is born to Uther Pendragon and Igraine and then taken by Sir Ector to be fostered in the country. He later becomes the king of a leaderless England when he removes the fated sword from the stone. Arthur goes on to win many battles due to his military prowess and Merlin's counsel. He then consolidates his kingdom.

This first book also tells "The Tale of Balyn and Balan", which ends in accidental fratricide, and the begetting of Mordred, Arthur's incestuous son by his half-sister, Morgause (though Arthur did not know her as his half-sister). On Merlin's advice, and reminiscent of Herod's killing of the innocents in scripture,

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Arthur takes every newborn boy in his kingdom and sends them to sea in a boat. The boat crashes and all but Mordred, who later kills his father, perish. This is mentioned matter-of-factly, with no apparent moral overtone. Arthur marries Guinevere, and inherits the Round Table from her father Leodegrance. At Pentecost, Arthur gathers his knights at Camelot and establishes the Round Table company. All swear to the Pentecostal Oath as a guide for knightly conduct.

In this first book, Malory addresses 15th century preoccupations with legitimacy and societal unrest, which will appear throughout the rest of the work. As Malorian scholar Helen Cooper states in *Sir Thomas Malory: Le Morte D'arthur - The Winchester Manuscript*, the prose style (as opposed to verse), which mimics historical documents of the time, lends an air of authority to the whole work. She goes on to state that this allowed contemporaries to read the book as a history rather than as a work of fiction, therefore making it a model of order for Malory's violent and chaotic times during the War of the Roses. Malory's concern with legitimacy reflects the concerns of 15th century England, where many were claiming their rights to power through violence and bloodshed. Genealogy was a way to legitimize power in a less arbitrary manner, and Malory calls this into question.

The Pentecostal Oath (the Oath of the Round Table) counterbalances a lack of moral centre exemplified in the fratricide in "The Tale of Balyn and Balan". Also, once in power, Arthur becomes a king of dubious morals even while he is held up as a beacon of hope. Arthur's most immoral acts are the begetting of Mordred (which is not a strong example, since Arthur had lain with a woman whom he did not know was his half-sister) and the following mass infanticide, which only add to Arthur's shaky morality and cast Merlin in a negative light from which he never emerges. There is even the notion of being overly moral, in that Arthur on two occasions is prepared to burn Guinevere at the stake (reminiscent of King Saul's willingness to sacrifice even his son, Jonathan, if he had done wrong). Arthur's unique notion of morality plagues him for the whole of his reign. The attempt to kill off the infants harks to the tale of Herod seeking to kill the infant Jesus. Thus there is a mixture of

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splendid, David-like, kingship, and low, Herod-like royalty, that both find their place in Arthur.

In the end, the book still holds out for hope even while the questions of legitimacy and morality continue in the books to follow. Arthur and his knights continually try and fail to live up to their chivalric codes, yet remain figures invested with Malory's desperate optimism.

Book II: "The Noble Tale Between King Arthur and Lucius the Emperor of Rome" (Caxton V)

This book, detailing Arthur's march on Rome, is heavily based on the Middle English Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, which in turn is heavily based on Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. The opening of Book V finds Arthur and his kingdom without an enemy. His throne is secure, his knights have proven themselves through a series of quests, Sir Lancelot and Sir Tristan have arrived and the court is feasting. When envoys from Emperor Lucius of Rome arrive and accuse Arthur of refusing tribute, "contrary to the statutes and decrees made by the noble and worthy Julius Caesar", Arthur and his knights are stirring for a fight. They are "many days rested" and excited, "for now shall we have warre and worshype." Arthur invokes the lineage of Ser Belyne and Sir Bryne, legendary British conquerors of Rome, and through their blood lineage demands tribute from Lucius under the argument that Britain conquered Rome first. Lucius, apprised of the situation by his envoys, raises a heathen army of the East, composed of Spaniards and Saracens, as well as other enemies of the Christian world. Rome is supposed to be the seat of Christianity, but it is more foreign and corrupt than the courts of Arthur and his allies. Departing from Geoffrey of Monmouth's history in which Mordred is left in charge, Malory's Arthur leaves his court in the hands of Sir Constantine of Cornwall and an advisor. Arthur sails to Normandy to meet his cousin Hoel, but he finds a giant terrorizing the people from the holy island of Mont St. Michel. This giant is the embodiment of senseless violence and chaos, a monster who eats men and rapes women to death. He uses sex as a violent act of control and appetite, divorced from sensuality or reason. Arthur battles him alone, an act of public relations intended to inspire his knights. The

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fight is closely documented by Malory, a blow-by-blow description of blood and gore. The giant dies after Arthur "swappis his genytrottys in sondir" and "kut his baly in sundir, that oute wente the gore". When Arthur does fight Lucius and his armies it is almost anticlimactic, when compared to his struggles with the giant. Arthur and his armies defeat the Romans, Arthur is crowned Emperor, a proxy government is arranged for the Roman Empire and Arthur returns to London where his queen welcomes him royally.

This book is Malory's attempt to validate violence as a right to rule. In the Geoffrey of Monmouth history Arthur refutes the basis of Rome's demands because "nothing acquired by force and violence is justly possessed by anyone". His demand of tribute is a parallel request that emphasizes the absurdity of Rome's request. In the end, Malory seems to find violence lacking. Despite the neat resolution with Arthur as Emperor he never again tries this "might makes right" tactic. Similarly, Malory's treatment of the Giant of Mont St. Michel seems to be an exploration of violence in his own society where powerful men committed seemingly senseless acts of violence.

Book III: "The Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot Du Lac" (Caxton VI)

In this tale, Malory establishes Lancelot as King Arthur's most revered knight. Among Lancelot's numerous episodic adventures include being enchanted into a deep sleep by Morgan le Fay and having to escape her castle, proving victorious in a tournament fighting on behalf of King Bagdemagus, slaying the mighty Sir Turquine who had been holding several of Arthur's knights prisoner, and also overcoming the betrayal of a damsel to defend himself unarmed against Sir Phelot.

These adventures address several major issues developed throughout *Le Morte Darthur*. Among the most important is the fact Lancelot always adheres to the Pentecostal Oath. Throughout this tale he assists damsels in distress and provides mercy for knights he has defeated in battle. However, the world Lancelot lives in is too complicated for simple mandates. This can be seen when a damsel betrays Lancelot and he must fight Sir Phelot unarmed. Although Lancelot aspires to live by an ethical code, the actions of others make it difficult for the Pentecostal Oath to fully establish a social order.

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Another major issue this text addresses is demonstrated when Morgan le Fay enchants Lancelot. This action reflects a feminization of magic along with a clear indication that Merlin's role within the text has been diminished. The tournament fighting in this tale indicates a shift away from war towards a more mediated and virtuous form of violence.

On courtly love, Malory attempts to shift the focus of courtly love from adultery to service by having Lancelot admit to doing everything he does for Guinevere, but never admit to having an adulterous relationship with her. However, a close parsing of his words can perhaps allow Lancelot to retain his honorable word, for he never says that he has not lain with the queen, but rather that if anyone makes such a claim, he will fight them (the assumption being that God will cause the liar to lose). Further, since Lancelot—who in all of the book never breaks his word or lies—claims that the queen was never untrue to her lord, then it seems to be the case that he must consider his love of the queen to be somehow pure or special, not an act of unfaithfulness to the king he loves and serves. Although this forbidden love is the catalyst of the fall of Camelot (i.e., the Round Table, for it was at Camelot/Winchester that the Round Table met, though Arthur lived and governed from another location), the book's moral handling of the adultery between Lancelot and Guinevere (and the love between Tristan and Isoud) implies that it is understood that if a love is somehow true and pure—especially if the knights be especially noble and honorable—that it is seen more as a foible than the depraved act of adultery. Only in the end of the book, when Arthur is dead and Guinevere has become a nun, does she reproach herself and Lancelot for their love, now understanding that it brought about the fall of Camelot, the death of 100,000 knights, and her great sorrow. Thus, she wills to spend the rest of her life offering penitence for what, in earlier chapters, seemed of no particular moral concern (outside of the care to not be caught in the act). In fact, it is understood that Lancelot is of such honor that he would never have committed adultery without the express willingness or invitation of Guinevere.

In this way, Malory focused on the ennobling aspects of courtly love. The attempt is undercut by the other characters who constantly insinuate that

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Lancelot is sleeping with Guinevere. Lancelot's obsessive denial that the queen had been untrue implies that he only defines himself through his actions towards women. Furthermore, Lancelot and Guinevere function within the French romantic tradition wherein Guinevere provides Lancelot with order. On numerous occasions he refuses the love of other women and sends Guinevere knights he has defeated in battle who must appeal to her for forgiveness. This proves somewhat problematic because it provides some evidence of Lancelot's love for the queen, which is ultimately used to force division between Lancelot and Arthur.

Book IV: "The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney" (Caxton VII)

The tale of Sir Gareth begins with his arrival at court as *le bel inconnu*, or the fair unknown. He comes without a name and therefore without a past. Sir Kay mockingly calls the unknown young man "Beaumains," and treats him with contempt and condescension. An unknown woman, later revealed to be the Dame Lynette, eventually comes to court asking for assistance against the Red Knight of the Red Lands, and Gareth takes up the quest. On his quest, he encounters the Black, Green, Red, and Blue knights and the Red knight of the Red Lands. He kills the Black Knight, incorporates the others into Arthur's court, and rescues Lynette's sister Lyonesse. Lustily in love with Lyonesse, Gareth conspires to consummate their relationship before marrying. Only by the magical intervention of Lynette is their tryst unsuccessful, thus preserving Gareth's virginity and, presumably, his standing with God. Gareth later counsels Lyonesse to report to King Arthur and pretend she doesn't know where he is; instead, he tells her to announce a tournament of his knights against the Round Table. This allows Gareth to disguise himself and win honor by defeating his brother knights. The heralds eventually acknowledge that he is Sir Gareth right as he strikes down Sir Gawain, his brother. The book ends with Gareth rejoining his fellow knights and marrying Lyonesse.

In the book, there are only two knights that have ever held against Sir Lancelot in tournament: Tristram and Gareth. This was always under conditions where one or both parties were unknown by the other, for these knights loved each other "passingly well." Gareth was knighted by Lancelot

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himself when he took upon him the adventure on behalf of Dame Lynette. Much later, Gareth is accidentally slain by his beloved Lancelot when Guinevere is rescued from being burnt at the stake by King Arthur.

This story seems unengaged with the problems that Malory addresses elsewhere in the text: there is no known source for this book, and in other tales, knights are always interacting with other knights from the Round Table, but not here. There are no consequences for Gareth's battles with them as there are during battles with other knights from the Round Table.

The second half of the book brings into question Gareth's true commitment to the chivalric code. He displays decidedly underhanded behavior in his quest for worship and personal fulfillment. Gareth uses deceit to achieve his aims ; however, pays a price for his deception as he strikes his brother Gawaine from his horse - he breaks one of the strongest bonds of loyalty by winning honor through the defeat of a kinsman.

Although the book concludes happily, it raises a number of questions of whether Gareth is a successful knight . The book presents matrimony as one possible way of validating the knightly order, but Gareth's example is fraught with complications that serve to undermine it as a viable option. In one sense, his marriage has been presented as a stabilizing force in chivalric society - Gareth's tale stands in contrast to the Tristram or the Lancelot. However, Gareth's readiness to sleep with Lyonesse before marriage questions how dedicated Gareth is to the ideal.

Book V: "The First and the Second Book of Sir Tristrans de Lione" (Caxton VIII–XII)

In "The Fyrste and the Secunde Boke of Syr Trystrams de Lyones," Malory tells the tales of Sir Tristan (Trystram), Sir Dinadan, Sir Palamedes, Sir La Cote De Male Tayle, Sir Alexander, and a variety of other knights. Based on the French Prose *Tristan*, or a lost English adaptation of it, Malory's Tristan section is the literal centerpiece of *Le Morte D'Arthur* as well as the longest of the eight books.

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The book displays a very realistic and jaded view of the world of chivalry. It is rife with adultery, characterized most visibly in Sir Tristan and the Belle Isolde. However, it should be noted that Sir Tristan had met and fallen in love with Isolde earlier, and that his uncle, King Mark, jealous of Tristan and seeking to undermine him, appears to seek marriage to Isolde for just such a hateful purpose, going so far as to ask Tristan to go and seek her hand on his behalf (which Tristan, understanding that to be his knightly duty, does). Sir Tristan is the namesake of the book and his adulterous relationship with Isolde, his uncle Mark's wife, is one of the focuses of the section.

The knights, Tristan included, operate on very personal or political concerns rather than just the standard provided by the world of Pentecostal Oath as we have seen it so far. One knight, Sir Dinidan, takes this so far as to run away or refuse to fight if he sees any risk. However, it should be understood that Sir Dinidan is a playful, humorous knight that, in later chapters, shows himself to be brave and noble. It is unclear whether his refusals to fight are part of his comic character or otherwise. Other knights, even knights of the Round Table, make requests that show the dark side of the world of chivalry. In one episode, Sir Bleoberys, one of Lancelot's cousins, claims another knight's wife for his own and rides away with her until stopped by Sir Tristan. In another, when Tristan defeats Sir Blamore, another knight of the Round Table, Blamore asks Tristan to kill him because he would rather die than have his reputation tarnished by the defeat.

The variety of episodes and the alleged lack of a cohesive nature in the Tristan narrative raise questions about its role in Malory's text entirely. However, the book foreshadows the rest of the text as well as includes and interacts with characters and tales discussed in other parts of the work. It can be seen as an exploration of the secular chivalry and a discussion of honor or "worship" when it is founded in a sense of shame and pride. If Le Morte is viewed as a text in which Malory is attempting to define knighthood, then Tristan becomes an important critique of chivalry and knighthood as he interacts with the real world, rather than attempting to create an example as he does with some of the other books.

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Of all the knights, Tristan most mirrors that of Lancelot. He loves a queen, the wife of another. Also, Tristan is considered a knight as strong and able as even Lancelot, though they became beloved friends. We find in the book, and only in passing in the latter chapters, that Tristan, after taking Isolde from King Mark and living with her for some time (due to King Mark's treasonous behavior, etc.), returned her to King Mark, only to be later treasonously killed by King Mark while he, Tristan, was "harping" (he was noted in the book for being one of the greatest of musicians and falconers).

Book VI: "The Noble Tale of the Sangreal" (Caxton XIII–XVII)

Malory's primary source for "The Noble Tale of the Sangreal" is the French Vulgate Cycle's *La Queste Del Saint Graal*. Within Malory's version, the text chronicles the adventures of numerous knights in their quest to achieve the Holy Grail. The Grail first appears in the hall of King Arthur "coverde with whyght samyte", and it miraculously produces meat and drink for the knights. Gawain is the first to declare that he "shall laboure in the Queste of the Sankgreall". His reason for embarking on the quest is that he may see the Grail "more opynly than hit hath bene shewed" before, in addition to the potential for more "metys and drynkes". Likewise, Lancelot, Percival, Bors, and Galahad also decide to undergo the quest. Their exploits intermingle with encounters with young maidens and hermits, who offer advice and interpret dreams along the way. Despite the presence of hermits, the text overall lacks an officiating Catholic presence. It might be argued, however, that this is not the case, for not only does the pope send a papal bull to end the war between Arthur and Lancelot, but there are bishops, the "receiving the Savior"/communion, making of the cross, and references to the Virgin Mary. There are also instances of penance when hermits advise Gawain, Lancelot, and others to atone for their sins. Whereas Gawain simply refuses to do so, Lancelot recognizes his offense of placing Queen Guinevere before God. And though he does at that point renounce this transgression, later, after seeing all of the Grail that he will be permitted to see, he yields and falls again for Guinevere. The only knights to achieve the Grail are Percival, Bors, and Galahad. The story culminates with Galahad vanishing before the eyes of his

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fellow knights as his soul departs "to Jesu Cryste" by means of a "grete multitude of angels [who] bare hit up to hevyn".

After the confusion of the secular moral code as manifested in the Pentecostal Oath within "The Fyrst and the Secunde Boke of Syr Trystrams de Lyones", Malory attempts to construct a new mode of chivalry by placing an emphasis on religion and Christianity in "The Sankgreal". However, the role of the Catholic Church is drastically subverted within the text, and this illustrates 15th-century England's movement away from the establishment of the Church and toward mysticism. Within the text the Church offers a venue through which the Pentecostal Oath can be upheld, whereas the strict moral code imposed by religion foreshadows an almost certain failure on the part of the knights. For example, Gawain is often dubbed a secular knight, as he refuses to do penance for his sins, claiming the tribulations that coexist with knighthood as a sort of secular penance. Likewise, Lancelot, for all his sincerity, is unable to completely escape his adulterous love of Guinevere, and is thus destined to fail where Galahad will succeed. This coincides with the personification of perfection in the form of Galahad. Because Galahad is the only knight who lives entirely without sin, this leaves both the audience and the other knights with a model of perfection that seemingly cannot be emulated either through chivalry or religion.

Book VII: "Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere" (Caxton XVIII–XIX)

At the beginning of the book, "Sir Launcelot and Queene Gwenyvere," Malory tells his readers that the pair started behaving carelessly in public, stating that "Launcelot began to resort unto the Queene Guinevere again and forget the promise and the perfection that he made in the Quest... and so they loved together more hotter than they did beforehand"(Cooper, 402). They indulged in "privy draughts together" and behaved in such a way that "many in the court spoke of it"(Cooper, 402).

This book also includes the "knight of the cart" episode, where Mellyagaunce kidnapped Guinevere and her unarmed knights and held them prisoner in his castle. After Mellyagaunce's archers killed his horse, Launcelot was forced to ride to the castle in a cart in order to save the queen.

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Knowing Lancelot was on his way, Mellyagaunce pleaded to Guinevere for mercy, which she granted and then forced Lancelot to stifle his rage against Mellyagaunce.

It is in this same book where Malory mentions Lancelot and Guinevere's adultery. Malory says, "So, to passe upon this tale, Sir Launcelot wente to bedde with the Quene and toke no force of his hurte honed, but toke his plesaunce and hys lykngge untyll hit was the dawning of the day" (633). Sir Mellyagaunce, upon finding blood in Guinevere's bed, was so convinced of her unfaithfulness to Arthur that he was willing to fight in an attempt to prove it to others. After Guinevere made it known that she wanted Mellyagaunce dead, Launcelot killed him even though Mellyagaunce begged for mercy (but only after Mellyagaunce agreed to continue fighting with Lancelot's helmet removed, his left side body armor removed, and his left hand tied behind his back—Lancelot felt it necessary to finish the bout, but would not slay Mellyagaunce unless Mellyagaunce agreed to continue fighting).

This is the first time Malory explicitly mentions the couple's adultery. Malory purposely shows this event as occurring once. He intends for his readers to believe the couple's adultery was much more than a singular incident. The moment lacks romance or chivalry. The entire text depends upon this adulterous moment, and yet Malory sums it up into one sentence. Malory's refusal to expand upon their adultery demonstrates his insistence that adultery is always dangerous and never ennobling. But it could also be argued that Malory's reluctance to describe their physical adultery demonstrates a reluctance on his part to condemn them for it, which is supported by his assertion that Guinevere had a good end to her life because she was a true and honest lover to Lancelot. The book ends with Lancelot's healing of Sir Urry of Hungary, where Malory notes that Lancelot is the only knight out of hundreds to be successful in this endeavor.

Malory presents Guinevere in a more negative light than his French predecessors. Guinevere is so contemptible in this book that it is difficult to understand Lancelot's reason for loving her. Malory goes so far as to suggest Guinevere uses charms or enchantments to win Lancelot's love. While

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Guinevere remains unlikeable throughout this book, Lancelot is a more problematic character. He is a flawed knight, certainly, but the best one Malory gives us. He has committed treason unto King Arthur and yet is the only knight virtuous enough to heal Sir Urry. After healing Sir Urry, Lancelot wept as a "chylde that had bene beatyn," (644) because he recognized his own failure as a person and as a knight. Malory tries to contrast virtue and love with desire and failure as he further emphasizes the instability of the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere and, ultimately, the text itself.

There is some reason to think that Malory may have been ambivalent about their adultery because it was supposedly of such a noble and endearing type. That is, it was not simply sexual, but based on a true love of each other (though both loved Arthur also). Guinevere is given to fits of jealousy and pettiness when she finds that Lancelot has shown any degree of affection toward another woman, regardless of the situation (e.g., the enchantment that caused him to sire Galahad). But though she has these flaws, Arthur and Lancelot both hold her to be the best woman of the world.

Book VIII: "The Death of Arthur" (Caxton XX-XXI)

Mordred and Agravaire have been scheming to uncover Lancelot and Guinevere's adultery for quite some time. When they find an opportune moment to finally and concretely reveal the adulterous relationship, Lancelot kills Agravaire and several others and escapes. Arthur is forced to sentence Guinevere to burn at the stake, and orders his surviving nephews, Gawain, Mordred, Gareth, and Gaheris, to guard the scene, knowing Lancelot will attempt a rescue. Gawain flatly refuses to be part of any act that will treat the queen shamefully. His younger brothers, Gaheris and Gareth, unable to deny the king's request that they escort Guinevere to the stake to be burnt, advise that they will do so at his command, but they will not arm themselves except for their helmets. When Lancelot's party raids the execution, many knights are killed, including, by accident, Gareth and Gaheris. Gawain, bent on revenge for their deaths, prompts Arthur into a war with Lancelot, first at his castle in northern England. At this point the Pope steps in and issues a bull to end the violence between Arthur's and Lancelot's factions. Shortly thereafter, Arthur

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pursues Lancelot to his home in France to continue the fight. Gawain challenges Lancelot to a duel, but loses and asks Lancelot to kill him; Lancelot refuses and grants him mercy before leaving. This event plays out twice, each time Lancelot playing a medieval version of rope-a-dope due to Gawain's enchantment/blessing to grow stronger between 9 a.m. and noon, then striking down Gawain, but sparing his life.

Arthur receives a message that Mordred, whom he had left in charge back in Britain, has usurped his throne, and he leads his forces back home. In the invasion Gawain is mortally injured, and writes to Lancelot, asking for his help against Mordred, and for forgiveness for separating the Round Table. In a dream, the departed Gawain tells Arthur to wait thirty days for Lancelot to return to England before fighting Mordred, and Arthur sends Lucan and Bedivere to make a temporary peace treaty. At the exchange, an unnamed knight draws his sword to kill an adder. The other knights construe this as treachery and a declaration of war. Seeing no other recourse, at the Battle of Salisbury, Arthur charges Mordred and impales him with a spear. But with the last of his strength, Mordred impales himself even further, so as to come within striking distance of King Arthur, then gives a mortal blow to Arthur's head.

As he is dying, Arthur commands Bedivere to cast Excalibur into the lake, where it is retrieved by the hand of the Lady of the Lake. A barge appears, carrying ladies in black hoods (one being Morgan le Fay), who take Arthur to his grave.

After the passing of King Arthur, Malory provides a denouement, mostly following the lives (and deaths) of Guinevere, Lancelot, and Lancelot's kinsmen.

When Lancelot returns to Dover, he mourns the deaths of his comrades. Lancelot travels to Almesbury to see Guinevere. During the civil war, Guinevere is portrayed as a scapegoat for violence without developing her perspective or motivation. However, after Arthur's death, Guinevere retires to a convent in penitence for her infidelity. Her contrition is sincere and permanent; Lancelot is unable to sway her to come away with him. Instead,

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Lancelot becomes a monk, and is joined in monastic life by his kinsmen. Arthur's successor is appointed (Constantine, son of King Carados of Scotland), and the realm that Arthur created is significantly changed. After the deaths of Guinevere and Lancelot, Sirs Bors, Hector, Blamore, and Bleoberis head to the Holy Land to crusade against the Turks, where they die on Good Friday.

William Langland

The English poet, William Langland (c.1332-c.1400), was probably born at Ledbury in Herefordshire. He became a clerk but having married early, could not take more than minor orders, and possibly earned a poor living by singing in a chantry and by copying legal documents. He lived many years in London in poverty. His famous *Vision Concerning Piers Plowman* exhibits a moral earnestness and energy which is brightened by his vivid glimpses of the lives of the poorest classes of 14th century England.

Piers Plowman or Visio Willelmi de Petro Plowman is an allegorical moral and social satire, written as a "vision" of the common medieval type. The poet falls asleep in the Malvern Hills and dreams that in a wilderness he comes upon the tower of Truth (God) set on a hill, with the dungeon of Wrong (the Devil) in the deep valley below, and a "fair field full of folk" (the world of living men) between them. He describes satirically all the different classes of people he sees there; then a lady named Holy Church rebukes him for sleeping and explains the meaning of all he sees. Further characters (Conscience, Liar, Reason and so on) enter the action; Conscience finally persuades many of the people to turn away from the Seven Deadly Sins and go in search of St. Truth, but they need a guide. Piers (Peter), a simple Plowman, appears and says that because of his common sense and clean conscience he knows the way and will show them if they help him plow his half acre. Some of the company help, but some shirk; and Piers becomes identified with Christ, trying to get men to work toward their own material relief from the current abuses of worldly power. In the last section of the poem, much less coherent than the rest, the dreamer goes on a rambling but unsuccessful summer-long quest, aided by Thought, Wit, and Study, in search of the men who are Do-Well, Do-Bet and Do-Best.

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Wycliffe's Bible is the name now given to a group of Bible translations into Middle English that were made under the direction of, or at the instigation of, John Wycliffe. They appeared over a period from approximately 1382 to 1395. These Bible translations were the chief inspiration and chief cause of the Lollard movement, a pre-Reformation movement that rejected many of the distinctive teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. In the early Middle Ages, most Western Christian people encountered the Bible only in the form of oral versions of scriptures, verses and homilies in Latin (other sources were mystery plays, usually conducted in the vernacular, and popular iconography). Though relatively few people could read at this time, Wycliffe's idea was to translate the Bible into the vernacular.

[...] it helpeth Christian men to study the Gospel in that tongue in which they know best Christ's sentence.

Long thought to be the work of Wycliffe himself, it is now generally believed that the Wycliffite translations were the work of several hands. Nicholas of Hereford is known to have translated a part of the text; John Purvey and perhaps John Trevisa are names that have been mentioned as possible authors. The translators worked from the Vulgate, the Latin Bible that was the standard Biblical text of Western Christianity, and the text conforms fully with Catholic teaching. They included in the testaments those works which would later be called deuterocanonical by most Protestants, along with 3 Esdras which is now called 2 Esdras and Paul's epistle to the Laodiceans.

Although unauthorized, the work was popular. Wycliffite Bible texts are the most common manuscript literature in Middle English. Over 250 manuscripts of the Wycliffite Bible survive.

Surviving copies of the Wycliffite Bible fall into two broad textual families, an "early" version and a later version. Both versions are flawed by a slavish regard to the word order and syntax of the Latin originals; the later versions give some indication of being revised in the direction of idiomatic English. A wide variety of Middle English dialects are represented. The second, revised group of texts is much larger than the first. Some

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manuscripts contain parts of the Bible in the earlier version, and other parts in the later version; this suggests that the early version may have been meant as a rough draft that was to be recast into the somewhat better English of the second version. The second version, though somewhat improved, still retained a number of infelicities of style, as in its version of Genesis 1:3

Latin Vulgate: **Dixitque Deus fiat lux et facta est lux**

Early Wycliffe: **And God seide, Be maad liȝt; and maad is liȝt**

Later Wycliffe: **And God seide, Liȝt be maad; and liȝt was maad**

King James: **And God said, Let there be light: and there was light**

The familiar verse of John 3:16 is rendered in the later Wycliffe version as:

For God louede so the world, that he ȝaf his oon bigetun sone, that ech man that bileueth in him perische not, but haue euerlastynge lijf.

John Gower

Confessio Amantis ("The Lover's Confession") is a 33,000-line Middle English poem by John Gower, which uses the confession made by an ageing lover to the chaplain of Venus as a frame story for a collection of shorter narrative poems. According to its prologue, it was composed at the request of Richard II. It stands with the works of Chaucer, Langland, and the Pearl poet as one of the great works of late 14th century English literature.

In genre it is usually considered a poem of consolation, a medieval form inspired by Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* and typified by works such as *Pearl*. Despite this, it is more usually studied alongside other tale collections with similar structures, such as the *Decameron* of Boccaccio, and particularly Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, with which the *Confessio* has several stories in common.

The Age of Shakespeare The Elizabethan Age (1558-1625)

What in Literature we call the Age of Shakespeare, we call it the Elizabethan Age in the history of England. The period of Queen Elizabeth's reign over England (1558-1603) is rightly called the Golden Period in the

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history of England as also in the history of English Literature. Broadly speaking, it is the Age of Shakespeare. In literary terms, it is called the period of Renaissance.

The term '*Renaissance*' means rebirth or revival. In the present context, it means the rebirth or revival of Greek and Italian culture, learning, literature, art, painting and architecture, etc. in other European countries, notably in Germany, France and England. It was around the middle of the fifteenth century that the Turks invaded and conquered most part of the Greek empire, with the result that the great Greek philosophers, scholars and artists started fleeing from Greece and spreading out in other European countries. The exodus of Greek scholars gained great momentum on the fall of Constantinople at the hands of the Turks in 1453. Many of them found shelter in Italy. Gradually Italy became the centre of Greek (Classical) art and literature. In course of time, the Greek and Italian scholarship, art and literature reached England through France and found England a very favourable country for their growth and advancement. Greek and Italian models began to be imitated or even copied in England.

English poets, dramatists and authors became crazy about Greek models. Marlowe's plays, Shakespeare's Tragedies, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Sidney's *Arcadia*, Ben Johnson's Comedies, Bacon's Essays are all based directly or indirectly on the Greek classical models. Plato and Aristotle prescribed the principles of philosophy and literary criticism. The English authors felt proud in being able to imitate the classical models. This spirit of imitating the classical models persisted in English Literature upto the eighteenth century, when Pope went to the extent of saying:

*"Know well each Ancient's proper character;
His fable, subject, scope in every page;
Religion, country, genius of his Age:
Without all these at once before your eyes,
Cavil you may, but never criticize.
Be Homer's works your study and delight,
Read them by day, and meditate by night;*

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*Thence form your judgement, thence your maxims bring
And trace the Muses upward to their spring. "*

But this does not mean that the Elizabethan poets, dramatists and authors were mere imitators. They just took models from the ancients and then produced their own original works which are the glory of English Literature. Shakespeare, Spenser, Bacon, Ben Johnson and many others are counted among the greatest authors of the world.

In this way, as a critic says, "every breeze was dusty with the pollen of Greece, Rome and of Italy," and even the general atmosphere was charged with the spirit of the Renaissance or new learning. Consequently, an immense impetus was given to the sense of beauty, chivalry and aesthetic faculties and the growing love of everything that made for the enrichment of life and prosperity.

Another important current that flowed along with the Renaissance was that of Reformation. It was a current for reformation in religion for rescuing it from age-old superstitious and unnecessary rituals. This interest in religion was naturally accompanied by a deepening of moral earnestness and spiritual values. It was also an age of new discoveries and explorations of new lands through adventurous voyages across uncharted seas and oceans.

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The recent discoveries of new worlds beyond the seas, and the thrilling tales brought home by daring explorers, like Hawkins, Drake, Frobisher and Raleigh, quickened the popular curiosity and the zest for adventure, kindled fresh ideas about many things, and did much to enlarge the boundaries of men's minds. Thus it was an age when "men lived intensely, thought intensely and wrote intensely. " It was also an age of intense patriotism, when people took a keen interest in England's past, pride in England's greatness, hatred of England's enemies and unflinching loyalty to England's Queen.

The people sank all their minor differences and stood shoulder to shoulder in defence of their country. "At such a time, when passions were strong, and speculation was rife, and a great public existed eager to respond to the appeal of genius, everything conspired to bring out of each man the best that was in him. " By virtue of its wonderful fertility and of the variety and splendour of its production, this period as a whole ranks as one of the greatest in the annals of the world's literature.

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