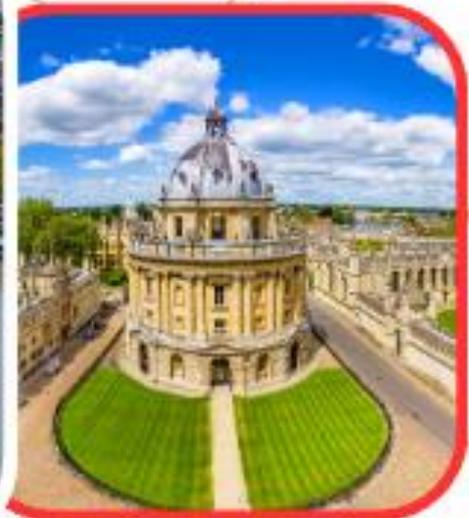




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THE DEVELOPMENT OF MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE: KEY WORKS AND AUTHORS

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Abstract: Middle English literature represents a crucial period in the history of English letters, spanning roughly from the late 11th century to the late 15th century. This era follows the Norman Conquest of 1066, which brought significant linguistic and cultural changes to England. Middle English evolved from Old English, absorbing Norman French and Latin influences, thus shaping the language and literature that would later define English identity. This period witnessed the emergence of notable works and authors who contributed to the rich tapestry of medieval literature, setting the stage for the Renaissance and beyond.

Keywords: Middle English, medieval literature, Geoffrey Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales, Langland, Pearl Poet, medieval romance, allegory, Norman Conquest

The Development of Middle English Literature
Historical Context

The Norman Conquest of 1066 was a turning point for English language and literature. With the Norman rulers speaking Old Norman French, English became a language of the common people while French and Latin dominated the court and official documents. Over time, these languages intermixed, leading to the development of Middle English, which was more accessible to a broader population.

Key Works and Authors

1. Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343–1400)

Often hailed as the “Father of English literature,” Chaucer is best known for The Canterbury Tales, a collection of stories told by pilgrims traveling to Canterbury. Written in vernacular Middle English, this work demonstrated the flexibility and richness of the language, blending humor, social commentary, and poetic skill.

2. William Langland (c. 1332–c. 1386)

Langland is credited with Piers Plowman, an allegorical narrative poem that explores social and religious themes through a dream vision. The poem’s critique of corruption and moral decay reflects the period’s social tensions.

3. The Pearl Poet (Late 14th century)





The Pearl Poet, also known as the Gawain Poet, is the name given to an anonymous medieval English author active in the late 14th century. This mysterious figure is credited with a remarkable collection of Middle English alliterative poems that remain some of the most significant and artistically accomplished works of the period. An anonymous author responsible for a series of religious poems including Pearl, Patience, Cleanness, and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. These works combine chivalric romance with deep spiritual allegory, showcasing the blend of secular and religious concerns in Middle English literature.

4. Medieval Romance and Allegory

Medieval romance and allegory are two of the most significant and enduring genres of Middle English literature. Both played a vital role in reflecting the social values, religious beliefs, and cultural ideals of medieval society, yet they approached storytelling in distinct ways. Beyond these authors, Middle English literature flourished in genres such as romance and allegory. Works like Sir Gawain and the Green Knight highlight themes of chivalry, honor, and supernatural challenges, while allegorical texts often addressed moral and theological questions.

Conclusion: The development of Middle English literature reflects a dynamic interplay of linguistic, cultural, and social changes in medieval England. Through the works of Chaucer, Langland, the Pearl Poet, and others, Middle English literature not only entertained but also engaged with the pressing issues of the time. These key works and authors laid the foundation for the future growth of English literature, bridging the medieval and Renaissance worlds.

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