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INTRODUCTION

«**Outline of English Literature**» is a course for students studying English literature at intermediate or advanced level of English. It is designed to motivate and involve students in effective studying process. It contains the best texts available in chronological order from the Old English period to the Beginning of the 21st century. The texts included to the course book have been chosen to illustrate the historical background of literature in each period and the basic events of a writer's life, which influences his/her literary activity. The material presented has been sometimes abridged but never simplified. The aim is that students will not only be studying about English literature but will be expected to read, interpret and enjoy authentic texts.

«**Outline of English Literature**» consists of eleven units and a variety of supplement material. Each unit contains:

- the *information about the writers* of a certain period with the *critical articles* on their works. The text is supplied with special markers (📖, ☑) on the margins.

Coming across:

- 📖 1.4 – you are welcome to refer to Supplement 1.4 of the unit to read the extract of a literary work suggested;
- ☑ 4 – you can clarify the term you have come across, turning to the Glossary available at the end of the textbook;
- the *supplements* which include the *examples of the works of the writers* introduced in the unit;
- *self-control section* which presents the *assignments* to reinforce students' knowledge of the material of the unit. It is integrated into three modules according to their difficulty:
 - *warm-up* – the simplest activity – a set of questions – aimed at recollecting the material of the unit. Completing the assignment, one can refer to the information of the unit;

- *understanding and interpretation* – a variety of questions focused on assisting comprehension and guiding students towards their own understanding of the authors and their works;
- *language and style* – is linked to *understanding and interpretation*, extend students' knowledge of the language and style of the author and how they achieve the effects on the reader, aims to engage the students in literary-critical study;
- *challenges* – present the most challenging assignments of different types. They appear at the end of each unit and are designed to recognize students' talent and individuality and develop their creativity and curiosity.

«**Outline of English Literature**» is designed for the students to get information about English literature, broaden their outlook, develop a high level of target language competence, enjoy the works of English writers and love literature!

Good Luck!

Unit 1

OLD ENGLISH AND MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

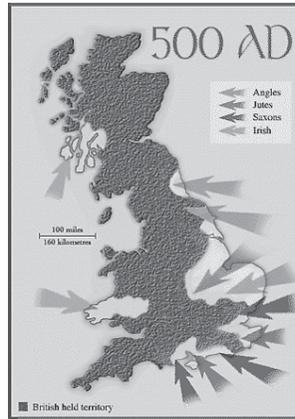
1. Historical background. Old English («Battle of Maldon», «Beowulf»)
2. Historical background. Middle English (W.Langland, G.Chaucer)
3. The literature of the 15th century (folk songs and ballads, T.Malory, dramatic art)

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: the Iberians, the Celts, the Romans, the Angles and Saxons and the Normans. So whatever we call «English» in the textbook, 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.

The Celts migrated to Britain from central and western Europe about 1000 BC. Their language, belonging to the Indo-European family, comprising most of the languages in Europe, India and southwestern Asia, survived until comparatively recently in Wales, Ireland, northwest Scotland, the Isle of Man and Cornwall.

Anglo-Saxon is the name given to the people and sometimes the Old English language after the colonisation of Britain in the 5th century AD by tribes of Germanic origin: the Angles (who conquered the north), the Saxons (south) and the Jutes (southwest).

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



Great Britain in 500 A.D.

to Christianity became more general in the 7th century, some of the Old English poems, until then passed on only orally, were written down and probably modified by monks. Only about 30.000 lines of these poems have survived.

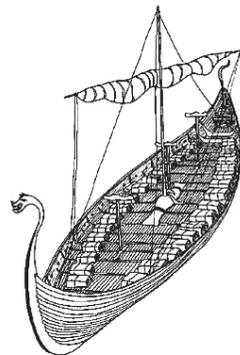
For about 500 years, almost all Old English poetry had the following characteristics:

- 5 - Old English poetry was sung or recited aloud usually accompanied by the harp, which provided a regular rhythm;
 - 58 - 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. So, Old English poetry is often called alliterative poetry;
 - 115 - each half-line consisted of two «feet» (a «*foot*» contains a number of unstressed syllables and a stressed syllable);
 - 96 - the alliteration linking the two half-lines fell on the stressed syllables.
- Although the metrical *style* of Old English was later replaced by the *rhyming* poetic forms brought in by the Normans, alliterative verse, in a modified style, continued to be written until the 15th century;
- 70 - abundance of *metaphors* («the swan's road» – the sea, «the bone-house» – the body, the «life destroyer» – a sword, «a devil shaped» – woman).

At this period two types of literature can be defined:

- 46 1) pagan literature (memory songs, wise sayings, spells, short verses (1–2 lines);
- 2) popular heroic *epic* songs.

1.1 *«Battle of Maldon»* was called the greatest battle poem in English. It is an Anglo-Saxon (Old English) poem by an unknown poet. In fact, England in the tenth century was not a safe place, especially if you lived near the coast. Much of the kingdom was under Viking rule, and the rest was subject to repeated raids. So the poem 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.



Viking longship

The Danish invaders are on the island of Northey at the mouth of the river waiting for the tide to go out. Byrhtnoth, the earl of Essex, is at the head of the English warriors on the mainland. A messenger from the Danes offers peace if they pay a sum of money. Byrhtnoth, however, rejects the offer. Then the tide begins to go out and Byrhtnoth far too confident is tricked into letting the enemy cross to the mainland. Byrhtnoth dies and many of his men run away. A brave few continue the fight until they too are defeated. The second half of the poem is a powerful expression of their loyalty and determination to avenge their leader's death.



Byrhtnoth, All Saints Church (south), Maldon

The original manuscript of «*Battle of Maldon*» was destroyed in a fire in the 18th century and survived only in transcript. Nowadays, the poem is often thought of as a traditional piece of heroic propaganda in praise of ancient standards of military conduct and courage. This view, however, rather undervalues the quality of the fine verse, which is both simple and direct. In fact, it is much less ornate than other Old English poems in existence. Its movement is swift and firm and manages to convey the sense of the whole battle through a series of speeches and individual actions.

«*Beowulf*» – is the oldest known Anglo-Saxon epic narrative *poem* and is considered to be the cornerstone of all British poetry. Like «*Battle of Maldon*», the manuscript dates from about the 10th century, although the poem was probably composed two and a half centuries before that.

📖 1.2
 76



The manuscript from Beowulf

The image above contains the first line and half of *Beowulf* from the first leaf of the manuscript: **HÆWT WE GARDE (na in geardazum þeodcyninȝa)**. Because there were sounds in Old English (600–1100 AD) that were not thought to be represented by the Roman alphabet, Old English

used runic characters for those sounds. The runes were «asc» (pronounced «ash») (æ), «eth» (ð), «thorn» (þ), and «wen» (looks similar to a «p» but with a smaller curved bow).

Beowulf survives in only one manuscript copied around 1000 AD. This manuscript is in the British Library, London.

The narrative refers to events which are supposed to have taken place in the late 5th and 6th centuries, although many of the folk-tale elements had probably been passed down orally from generation to generation through poems and songs. From the pagan traditions the poem took the love of war and the virtues of courage; from the Christian tradition it took morality, obedience to God and avoidance of pride. The poem is sometimes seen both as a *conflict* between good and evil, in some ways similar to the stories in the Christian Old Testament, as well as a pagan story with a monster and a hero.

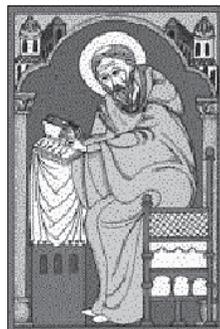
☑ 35

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** is mainly represented by «*The History of the English Church*» by the **Venerable Bede**, who is considered to be «the father of English history», the «*Paraphrase*» by **Cædman**, «*Elene*» and «*Juliana*» by **Cynewulf**, who is the first who introduced female into his creations.

Venerable Bede (672(3)–735)

Historian and Doctor of the Church, **Venerable Bede**, born 672 or 673; died 735. In the last chapter of his great work on the «*Ecclesiastical History of the English People*» Bede has told us something of his own life, and it is, practically speaking, all that we know. His words, written in 731, when death was not far off, not only show a simplicity and piety characteristic of the man, but they throw a light on the composition of the work through which he is best remembered by the world at large. He writes:



Venerable Bede

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Дука Марія Володимирівна

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(англійською мовою)

Директор видавництва Р.В. Кочубей
Головний редактор В.І. Кочубей
Технічний редактор Н.Ю. Курносова
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Комп'ютерна верстка В.Б. Гайдабрус, Д.І. Іовенко

ТОВ «ВТД «Університетська книга»
40030, м. Суми, вул. Кірова, 27, 5-й поверх
E-mail: publish@book.sumy.ua

Відділ реалізації
Тел./факс: (0542) 21-26-12, 21-11-25
E-mail: info@book.sumy.ua

Підписано до друку 08.02.06.
Формат 60x90 ¹/₁₆. Папір офсетний. Гарнітура Таймз.
Друк офсетний. Ум. друк. арк. 27,75. Обл.-вид. арк. 26,64.
Тираж 1000 прим. Замовлення №

Свідоцтво про внесення суб'єкта видавничої справи
до Державного реєстру видавців, виготівників і розповсюджувачів
видавничої продукції ДК № 489 від 18.06.2001

Надруковано відповідно до якості наданих
діапозитивів у ПП Семісал О.В.
Україна, м. Харків, вул. Академіка Проскури, 11