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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

It may interest the many teachers and others who have found this book of use to know why it was added to the existing text-books on the subject. The idea of this book arose from the author's own need during many years' experience as a lecturer in English and American literature to supply the book which could serve as a basis for effective literature lessons at which the students might be expected to understand, learn and appreciate the beauties of great English and American writers, the makers of song and story of their age.

The book presents a survey of the most significant aspects of the literary process in Great Britain and the United States of America, its historical, social and economic background.

Considerable stress has been laid on the life of the various authors and the relationship of themselves and their work to the times in which they lived to stimulate class discussions and involve students in effective work on the literary matters.

The present volume is intended as a text-book for English and American literature studies at the universities and is designed to be used in a wide range of literary courses to develop a high level of language and literature competence of the learners. It is likewise meant for readers who are interested in English and American literature and want to gain an insight into its making and learn the language and style, and the creative genius of the writers.

The author of this volume realizes that it is hard to satisfy all the tastes and all the needs of millions of admirers of culture and arts and this book is but a glimpse of the glorious world from Anglo-Saxon period and Shakespeare to the newer voices of the end of the XXth and the beginning of the XXI century of Great Britain and the USA.

INTRODUCTION

Major literary genres

Fiction comes directly from oral traditions found in numerous cultures of the world. Sometimes there were storytellings or story-singing contests, as in the classical age of Greek letters. These early stories were about figures or events familiar to particular groups. New characters with new characteristics appeared. A work of fiction usually possesses characters, plot, setting, point of view, theme, and, sometimes, symbols. Fiction is a shared experience. The writer introduces the readers into his or her created world. William Faulkner, the American writer and a Nobel Laureate, said that "the primary job of any writer is to tell you a story, a story out of human experience – I mean by that, universal, mutual experience, the anguishes and troubles and griefs of the human heart, which is universal, without regard to race or time or condition. He wants to tell you something which has seemed to him so true, so moving, either comic or tragic, that it's worth repeating." The most held opinion is that fiction is created from a mixture of fact and fancy. Telling a good story is considered to be a primary function of fiction, but telling a truthful story is equally important.

Literature is commonly divided into three major genres: poetry, prose, and drama. Each major genre can in turn be divided into lyric, concrete, dramatic, narrative, and epic.

Prose

Prose can be divided into fiction (novels, novellas and short stories) and nonfiction (biography, autobiography, letters, essays, and reports).

Novel is a long fictional story written in prose. It is one of the most popular forms of literature.

The subject matter of novels covers the whole range of human experience and imagination. Some novels portray true-to-life characters and events. Writers of such realistic novels try to represent life as it is. In contrast to realistic novels, romantic novels portray

idealized versions of life. Some novels explore purely imaginary worlds. For example, science-fiction novels may describe events that take place in the future or on other planets. Other popular kinds of novels include detective novels and mysteries, whose suspenseful plots fascinate readers.

Some novels point out evils that exist in society and challenge the reader to seek social or political reforms. Novels may also provide knowledge about unfamiliar subjects or give new insights into familiar ones.

The novel has four basic features that together distinguish it from other kinds of literature. First, a novel is a narrative - that is, a story presented by a teller. It thus differs from a drama, which presents a story through the speech and actions of characters on a stage.

Second, novels are longer than short stories, fairy tales, and most other types of narratives. Novels vary greatly in length, but most exceed 60,000 words. Because of their length, novels can cover a longer period and include more characters than can most other kinds of narratives.

Third, a novel is written in prose rather than verse. This feature distinguishes novels from narrative poems.

Fourth, novels are works of fiction. They differ from histories, biographies, and other long prose narratives that tell about real events and people. Novelists sometimes base their stories on actual events or the lives of real people. But these authors also make up incidents and characters. Therefore, all novels are partly, if not entirely, imaginary.

The basic features of the novel make it a uniquely flexible form of literature. Novelists can arrange incidents, describe places, and represent characters in an almost limitless variety of ways. They also may narrate their stories from different points of view. In some novels, for example, one of the characters may tell the story. In others, the events may be described from the viewpoint of a person outside of the story. Some novelists change the point of view from one section of a story to another. Novelists also vary their treatment of time. They may devote hundreds of pages to the description of the events of a single day, or they may cover many years within a few paragraphs.

Poetry

Perhaps the oldest kind of literature known to humanity, poetry in its earliest stages was told or sung, but during its long and continuing evolution it has become part of the written tradition and has been use for several purposes. Foremost among the many uses of poetry has been its ability as lyric, narrative, and epic to pay homage to the gods and to recount the history of specific groups of people.

Both European and American poets have been most influenced by Greek culture, in which the writers were known as poets, a title that carried both responsibility and praise. Greek literature consisted in large measure of plays that were written in poetry, a convention of the time. Roman poets adopted most of the rules of the Greeks, later revived during the Renaissance. Beginning with Geoffrey Chaucer, poetry in England flowered and spread throughout the English-speaking world and far beyond. Poetic forms are: verse, poem, song, ode, sonnet, ballad, elegy, parody, epigram, etc.

But what is poetry? According to William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge, the major role of poetry was to stand in opposition to science. Coleridge wrote: "poetry is not the proper antithesis to prose, but to science. Poetry is opposed to science." A great and influential man of writing of the Romantic period wrote that "Poetry begins where matter of fact or science ceases..." The American poetess of the 19th century Emily Dickinson alludes nearly to the same thing:

To clothe the fiery thought
In simple words succeeds,
For still the craft of genius is
To mask a king in weeds.

Poetry is often full of ideas, too, and sometimes poems can be powerful experiences of the mind, but most poems are primarily about how people feel rather than how people think. Poetry can be the voice of our feelings.

Though prose and poetry have much in common and a number of poets also write prose fiction, nevertheless, commonly accepted differences between the two genres are that poetry is generally written in meter, thus creating rhythm, and prose is not; rhyme is a characteristic feature of poetry (though not required) which prose doesn't have. Poetry distills, compresses and refines knowledge through selective use of language, while prose is considered "ordinary" language. Poets are binding themselves in the chains of traditional

poetic forms and then creating interaction between different elements of poetic technique. But nothing about poetry is as important as the way it makes us feel with the help of imagination, symbols, and invention.

Sometimes poetry is freed from the old rules, evolves from the confinement of rigid structure and sometimes content. This is what we now know as free verse – the kind of poetry which was fired by a new kind of poet, epitomized by the great American poet Walt Whitman, poetry which relies heavily on imagery.

Poets employ various strategies and elements of poetic technique to frame their vision of human experience in verse: theme, diction, tone, imagery, symbolism, simile and metaphor, personification and apostrophe, mete, rhythm and rhyme, sound, structure, and form.

Drama

Drama can be divided into serious drama, tragedy, comic drama, melodrama, and farce.

Drama differs from other forms of literature in that it demands a stage and performances. It can be enjoyed by both spectators and readers. But the fact is that most plays are written to be produced, and must be performed. The word "drama" comes from the Greek meaning "a thing done". The playwright supplies dialogues for the characters to speak and stage directions that give information about costumes, lighting, scenery, properties, the setting, music, sound effects, and the characters' movements and ways of speaking. From its beginnings, drama, like other forms of literature, was meant to tell the story of humankind in conflict with the world. A play is human action or human experience dramatized for stage production. Poetic elements of technique and strategies in a play must be made visible. Through plot, a playwright "imitates" movements of existence, adjusting the rhythm to fit the mode of presentation, whether that mode is comedy or farce, tragedy or melodrama, tragicomedy or pantomime.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

Unit 1

The Anglo-Saxon Period

(449-1066)

Introduction to the unit: The Anglo-Saxon Heritage

The Anglo-Saxon period lasted six centuries, which are usually called by historians the "Dark Ages". On the one hand this was a period of bloody conflicts, ignorance, violence and barbarism, on the other hand it was also a time of creativity and dynamic changes. It showed the flourishing of arts and crafts, communication and trade, which gradually led to the relations of Britain and continental Europe. Before the Romans came to the isles, life of Britons was very primitive. They planted corn, lived upon fish and the flesh of their cattle. Though they were good warriors. They also built many temples and altars.

Julius Caesar first invaded Britain in 55 B. C., yet he was unable to conquer it. The Romans conquered Britain only in A. D. 43. The Romans brought their civilization. They were skilled engineers, they built military fortifications, bridges, castles, public baths and stone roads. What is even more important, they brought a system of laws and a unity of government to Britain.

In A. D. 410 the Roman legions were recalled to defend their home Empire, leaving the islands open to the Germanic tribes who had been raiding the coast of Roman Britain for decades. First came the Jutes in A. D. 449. They were followed by the Saxons and the Angles. By the middle of the sixth century Anglo-Saxons were established in various parts of Britain. They were brave, hardy, artistic, poetic people and had a highly developed feeling for beauty. They assimilated many of the customs, arts and laws of the conquered people, while retaining their uniquely Germanic traditions and values. They had no written language yet, so the songs, stories and poems were handed down from generation to generation by scops and gleemen - professional creators and singers or minstrels, who

entertained the company with retellings of stories and poems about the exploits of tribal heroes.

In time, the pagan Anglo-Saxons adapted to the Christian religion. Britain became a province of the Roman Church. The monasteries became the centres of intellectual, literary, artistic and social activities in Anglo-Saxon Britain. Original works were written mostly in scholarly Latin and Greek. In the 7th century appeared a poet, Caedmon by name, who wrote in Anglo-Saxon. Another writer was Cynewulf, who was the first to introduce female characters in his works, such as "Elene", "Juliana" and others. Their poems deal with themes and subjects from the Bible and Church tradition, yet they are distinctly Germanic in their fascination with the sea and with heroic deeds. Written in Old English, these poems are similar in imagery, rhythm, and spirit to the literature derived from Anglo-Saxon oral tradition. The greatest of the writers was the Venerable Bede (673-735), author of *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Bede is regarded as the "father of English history".

During the late eighth and ninth centuries, Britain was invaded by the warlike Danes, or Vikings. After nearly a century of violence, Alfred the Great led a successful campaign against the Danes. He won a great battle at Maldon in 891. He is famous not only for having built the first English Navy but for trying to enlighten his people. A well educated man, King Alfred did much for the establishment of schools and the rebuilding of monasteries. He translated Bede's *History* and also Pope Gregory's *History of the World* from Latin into Old English. The first historical records were kept in English in his time. To him the English owe the famous "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle" which is the first history of England and the first prose in English literature. It is still an invaluable source of information to the historian. His works are classic examples of Anglo-Saxon prose style.

Virtually all written literature of the Anglo-Saxon period dates from Christian times. But Anglo-Saxon literature is far from uniformly Christian. The oral traditions, reflecting pagan values, endured for many centuries. Among the first literary genres were wise sayings, spells, oral compositions and epic poems. *Beowulf* is the most familiar of the Anglo-Saxon poetic forms, the heroic epic. Other epic poems are *The Fight at Finnsburg* (X-XI century), *Waldere* (X c.), *The Battle of Maldon* (X-XI). Another form is the elegiac lyric which recalls the glories of the past. Among them is *The Seafarer* - an anonymous poem probably composed in the eighth century. In this poem an old sailor recalls the loneliness and hardship of life at sea while also describing the fascination of the sea.

All epics share common characteristics. First, the hero, the main character, is of noble birth or at least of high social position. Often the hero is a prominent historical or legendary figure. Second, the setting is vast, involving entire races, the world, or the universe. Third, the action consists of deeds requiring great courage and valor. Sometimes, supernatural forces – gods or demons – help or hinder the actions of the hero, who might also possess superhuman capabilities.

BEOWULF

The earliest and most famous of poems, written a century or two before the time of King Alfred the Great, was *Beowulf*. It tells of the deeds of Beowulf and how he rid the land of three terrible monsters – Grendel, who for twelve years had haunted Heorot, the hall of Hrothgar, the King of the Danes; Grendel's mother, more fearsome even than Grendel himself, who came to avenge the death of her son; and a dragon that lay coiled round a hoard of hidden treasure, breathing out such fiery flames that the people could see them from far and wide.

The epic *Beowulf* probably was first recorded in the eighth century by English monks. The heroic deeds recalled in the epic, however, supposedly took place during the third or fourth century, in the area that is now northern Germany, Denmark, and southern Sweden. The heroes of *Beowulf* are the Geats and the Danes, tribes that shared a common Germanic heritage and a common heroic tradition with the Anglo-Saxon conquerors of Britain. Through the Anglo-Saxons, Beowulf, a distinctly Germanic hero, became the great epic hero of the English people.

The epic consists of two parts. The first part tells us how Beowulf freed the Danes from two monsters. Hrothgar, King of the Danes, had built a beautiful palace called Heorot. He and his warriors rejoiced there every night celebrating their victories. But in the vicinity lake there lived a terrible monster Grendel who attacked the palace and killed the men. This continued twelve years till Beowulf, a cousin of Higlac, the king of the Geats, heard about the tragedy and decided to come for help. One night Beowulf fought with Grendel and defeated him. Although one monster has died, another still lives. Grendel's mother, a water witch, a sea-wolf, living in a murky cold lake, has brooded on her loss until, finally, she emerges from her den bent on revenge. Beowulf followed the

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