



Universitas  
**Esa Unggul**

**INTRODUCTION TO LINGUISTICS**  
**(PBI 321)**

**2<sup>nd</sup> MODUL**  
**HISTORY OF LITERATURE**

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# HISTORY OF LITERATURE

## A. Learning Objectives

After completing this course, students are expected to be able to identify, classify, and elaborate the history of literature which covers:

1. History of literature in Anglo-Saxon
2. History of literature in Medieval
3. History of literature in English Renaissance

## B. Explanation

After reading an article and a module in the link given in the previous meeting and listening to video, have you got the point of literature definition? Now, we have understood that not all written text can be categorised as literature. It can be a literature if it is a literature genre such prose fiction, poem, and drama using a metaphor language that may be interpreted in different meaning by different people. If not, a written text can be classified as personal essays, academic articles, or other kinds of text except literature.

For this meeting, we are going to learn the history of literature itself in different era in which most of them were affected by social and political condition. The history includes history of literature in Anglo-Saxon, in Medieval, and in English Renaissance.

### 1. Anglo-Saxon Period

Anglo-Saxon was known as the Old English literature since it was the time when English literature embarked. It started when the Anglo (Germanic) came to Britain and conquered it in 5<sup>th</sup> century. At the first time, the literature was in oral form of a verse literature or poetry. People delivered the literature verbally from one generation to the other. The

figures of this era were *Beowulf* who focused on pagan poetry, and *Caedmon* and *Cynewulf* who concerned on religious poetry.

*Beowulf* poem was based on folk legends of primitive tribes in northern which consisted of more than 3,000 line and conveyed verbally. It was not a Christian poem but a pagan poem using a lot of metaphors and understatements. On the other hand, *Caedmon*, known as the first religious poet of England composed many poems by using biblical material while *Cynewulf* created poems about a deep love for Christ and reverence for Virgin Mary.

Besides poetry, a prose came up in 8<sup>th</sup> century. The first prose was written by *Venerable Bede* in which his book told about historical events in that period and some Anglo-Saxon mythological legends. Another figure was *Alfred the Great* known as a translator expert. He tried to contributed in education by translating Latin works into English which recorded the main happening in Anglo-Saxon period. The last one was Aelfric who wrote a large number of religious works in Greek and Latin in which a lighter, clearer, and more musical prose were introduced.

## 2. Medieval English literature

Literature in this period, 11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century, was various and extensive in range and in interest as three languages existed in England as French was spoken by Kingdom family, English was used by the lower class society, and Latin was spoken by scholars and clergymen. However, most of books were written in Latin and French such as histories and chronicles, while the most common one was romance.

Romance that came up in this era was a long composition written in prose form and verse or poem form. It described the life and adventures of a noble hero. Nevertheless, it exaggerated the immoral value of human and unreal with the central character in this was a knight. It contained

adventures of a skilled man who fought the king. In fact, it was written for upper class and nothing to do with society.

### 3. English Renaissance

This literature started in 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century although in Italy it started in 14<sup>th</sup> century. Its genre or style was poetry and drama epic or long poem. It was also a non-fiction prose, sometime was translation and lyrical style. Literature in this era could be an elegy - a poem for funeral or dead, a tragedy – a prose dealing with tragic events and having unhappy ending, and a comedy – a composition which showed a humour or satirical tone to make people laugh.

Furthermore, the literature was a pastoral, a written text which portrayed an idealized version of country life. For poem, it was a blank verse, a verse without rhyme. The focus of the literature was humanism stressed and religious. Some literature were performed on the stage, but because they showed violence, it eventually was closed. For poem, people at that era intended to set music within it.

William Shakespeare, a famous writer we know until this time, appeared in this period. His work were accepted widely since it was universal. His genre was tragi-comedy which meant plays he made tried to mix between tragedy and comedy. His popular writings were Julius Caesar, Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, and others. Besides Shakespeare, Marlowe was the next famous writer who created a work of 'Dr. Faustus' which talked about tragical history of life and death of Doctor Faustus. The next well-known writer in this period was Ben Jonson who wrote satirical play, 'The Alchemist', and others.

Also, this period had four different era in which each had its own characteristic in producing literature; those are Elizabethan Era in 1558-1603, Jacobian Era in 1603-1625, and Puritan Age in 1625-1660.

a. Elizabethan Era in 1558-1603

It was the greatest history of literature since dramas and poetries were supported by Queen, hence it was called 'Elizabethan'. During that time, drama was prominent though it changed from religious content to secular. The actors were male only due to inequality issue.

b. Jacobian Era in 1603-1625

There were two primary contributions in this era: play and poetry. A play was a revenge play which meant the main actor took a revenge to the antagonist actor ending with the death of both actors, the main and his enemy. The second was poetry; they called it metaphysical poetry as it was imaginative, creative, and clever. The writer used metaphors and imagery language in his poem which talked about love, existence, and life.

c. Puritan Age in 1625-1660

Puritan meant a group of English protestants in 16<sup>th</sup> century who regarded the reformation of church under Elizabeth 1's reign. The literature came up in this era was poem about paradise. Interestingly, play was closed in this era owing to Civil war.

The explanation above shows how the literature appeared at the first time, how it was famous in certain time, and how social and political affect the form of literature. In other words, you have understood the meaning of literature, then how it develops from time to time including its famous writer.

### C. Exercise

1. How was the first time a literature delivered when it was created?
2. Why was in the English renaissance the play closed?
3. Mention the three different era in English renaissance and their characteristic!

### D. Answer key

1. At the first time, the literature was in oral form of a verse literature or poetry. People delivered the literature verbally from one generation to the other.
2. Some literatures in English renaissance performed on the stage was closed because they showed violence.
3. The first one was Elizabethan Era in 1558-1603. It was the greatest history of literature since dramas and poetries were supported by Queen, hence it was called 'Elizabethan'. During that time, drama was prominent though it changed from religious content to secular. The actors were male only due to inequality issue.

The second one was Jacobian Era in 1603-1625. There were two primary contributions in this era: play and poetry. A play was a revenge play which meant the main actor took a revenge to the antagonist actor ending with the death of both actors, the main and his enemy. The second was poetry; they called it metaphysical poetry as it was imaginative, creative, and clever. The writer used metaphors and imagery language in his poem which talked about love, existence, and life.

The last one was Puritan Age in 1625-1660. Puritan meant a group of English protestants in 16<sup>th</sup> century who regarded the reformation of church under Elizabeth 1's reign. The literature came up in this era was poem about paradise. Interestingly, play was closed in this era owing to Civil war

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