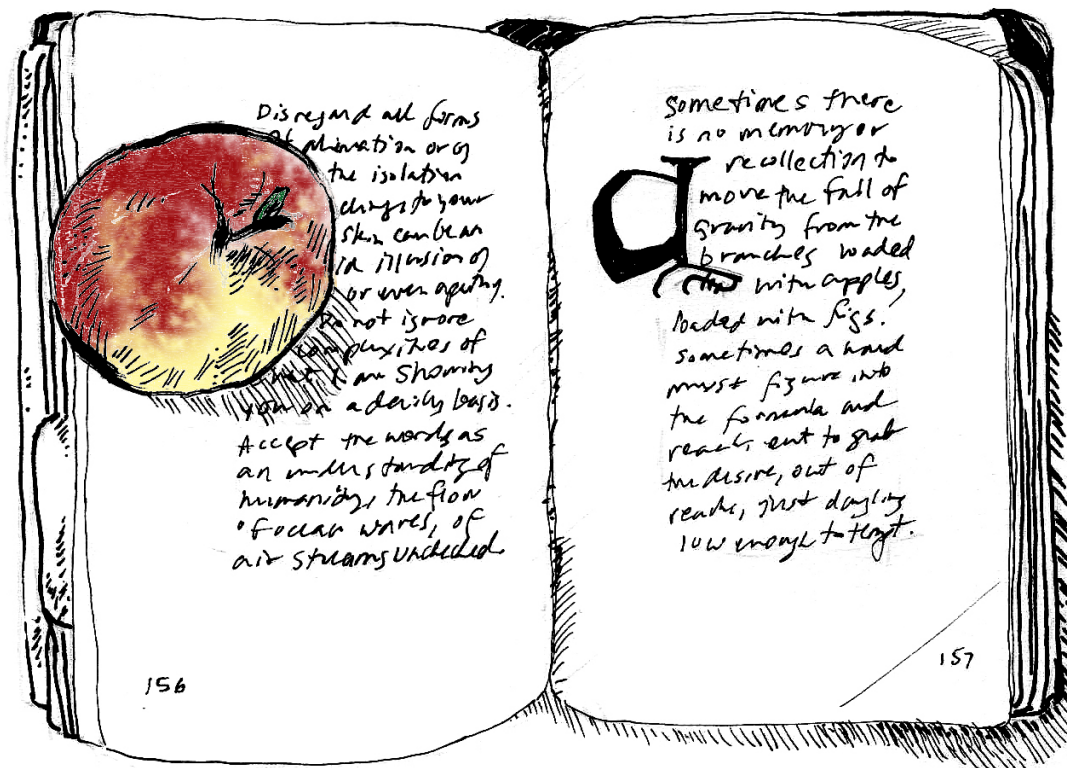


Our English Heritage



English Heritage

Examining colonial America's ideals, it should be evident why today a strong emphasis is placed on English literary history.

Where other European countries failed, England managed against the odds to colonize North America with successful ports of export. Spain and France each attempted to build colonies as far north as the Carolinas to establish a strong hold on the new territory.

Until Jamestown was established in the 1620's, no other colonial attempt survived beyond a few years.

Consequently, a steady flow of citizens— due to its acquired naval powers over Spain— Western Europe for the most part could only obtain passage into North America through England.

English Heritage

North America maintained much of the English culture and ideals, trade and commerce, clothing and culinary tastes, language and literature.

Basic cultural literature common between England and America include:

- literary classics
- folklore, myth, and superstition
- songs and ballads
- proverbs, sayings

English Heritage

Religions of most Americans are shaped by English sensibilities:

- Anglican
- Puritan
- Quaker
- Calvinism
- Scottish Presbyterianism
- Catholic

When we examine the literary history of England, many of these ideals will be reviewed and examined in-depth.

By analyzing the past English sensibilities, we can see what shapes the current trends and diverse changes in the American cultural landscape.

English Heritage

Items to keep in mind:

Following the logic of the *Longman Anthology*, the course is divided into three general periods in history:

Middle Ages (The Dark Ages)

- Anglo-Saxon Period (449-1066)
- Norman Rule (1066-1485)
- Plantagenet Rule
- Lancaster Rule
- York Rule
- Tudor Rule

English Renaissance

- Elizabethan Age (1485-1625)

Restoration

- The Age of Reason (1660-1750s)

Old English

Middle English

Early Modern English

Modern English

How Dark were the Dark Ages?

For a number of years many editors and historians have tried to say the title “Dark Ages” is a misnomer.

One major argument they make is the fact the current history of the Twentieth Century and Twenty-first Century has been just as equally violent and troublesome as the Middle Ages.

However it can be countered, looking at other factors such as

- short life expectancy and high infant mortality
- frequent war and threats of invasion
- lack of schooling for working class
- suppression of working class by feudal system
- high illiteracy within all classes
- frequent plagues / lack of medical or dental care

How Dark were the Dark Ages?

Those in power enforced a flawed hierarchical system to retain their control.

The Roman church and English nobles ensured their positions by utilizing a strong system of political and religious control.

- by some accounts, the Middle Ages lasted up to eight hundred years (8)
- anyone resisting the order in place was labelled heretical and executed or forced into exile

Despite the frankness of some views, it is important to acknowledge the time period collectively represents some years of cultural diversity and outside influences.

Damrosch, David and Kevin J. H. Dettmar, Ed. *The Longmoan Anthology of British Literature*. 4th ed. New York: Longman. 2010. Print.

A Complex History

Great Britain has always maintained a multi-cultural society.

Various groups of different races and nationalities have settled in the region over the course of recorded history.

- remains of Stone Age villages dating from the Upper Paleolithic Period have been found in regions of England itself
- the Roman Empire held territory in England from the years 43-449
- the name England comes from the Germanic people (Angles) who settled in the region during the Fifth and Sixth Centuries, the Anglo-Saxon period
- it was unified state in the year 927, also during the Anglo-Saxon period
- due to the Norman Conquest of England in 1066, French influences impacted the court culture for a number of centuries

What is British Literature?

Great Britain	United Kingdom	British Islands	British Isles
England	Great Britain	United Kingdom	British Islands
Scotland	Northern Ireland	Isle of Man	Ireland
Wales		Jersey	
		Guernsey	

In this fashion, on our reading list can include writers from England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

A Brief History

Using the Father of English History, the Venerable Bede (627-735) as a guide, he explains in his text *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*:

- first, a Germanic people known as the **Jutes** often invaded British territory during the Fourth Century, mingling with the Celtic people and the Romans
- *around the same time* the **Anglo-Saxons** invaded with the territory, creating the term Angleland and establishing six centuries of control (449-1066)
 - > at first the island was a cluster of small kingdoms
 - > slowly over the centuries, Roman Christianity merged into the pagan landscape; around 597 Augustine, the First Archbishop of Canterbury, a Benedictine monk, founded the first English church; he began converting the pagan leaders
 - > the Vikings (**Danes**) began their repeated campaigns of settling within the region also during this time

A Brief History

During this latest wave of cultural transitions between pagan and Catholic beliefs, as well as between Danish and Anglo-Saxons cultures, the history of English literature begins.

Over time, the Anglo-Saxons developed a diverse literary culture:

- writings of poetry by the Christian-Saxon poets
 - > Cædmon, earliest known English poet from the Seventh Century
 - > Cynewulf, from the Tenth Century
- the epic of *Beowulf* was recorded during the Eighth Century by cleric scribes
- verse riddles from the Tenth Century collected in the *Exeter Book*, also known as the *Codex Exoniensis*
- Old English is the assimilation of many languages including dialects from the Norsemen Vikings (Danes), Latin, and Celts.