

# 1 Medieval English, 500–1500

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What should we call this period of ‘medieval literature’ that straddles nearly a millennium and two languages? The ‘Dark’ and ‘Middle Ages’ (of which ‘medieval’ is simply the Latinate form), were terms applied retrospectively and pejoratively by writers in the seventeenth century to describe the period between classical and Renaissance learning; the ‘medievales’ generally perceived themselves as modern, sometimes even corruptly sophisticated in comparison to earlier, simpler days. ‘Literature’ is equally problematic, not existing as a word in English until the fourteenth century. For most of the period, that body of writing containing what we now call ‘literature’ encompassed without division texts that today we categorise as religious, historical, legal and medical. Poets were certainly popular figures, but their business was often primarily to commemorate historical events. Their poems, even if they contained marvels, had little to do with ‘fiction’ as we understand it; and even if they were well crafted, had little to do with any abstract notion of the aesthetic. ‘Medieval’ ‘literary’ art had no theory of itself but rather entailed verbal skill used in the service of a person (queen, bishop, overlord, patron), institution (monastery, the Church, the Crown) or for an occasion (coronation, feast, holy day, battle). Such art did not exist for its own sake but to serve the purpose in hand and to fill a belly.

Furthermore, how do we name a period that so lacks internal coherence? It moves from a Germanic tribal economy to late Old English feudalism, to the ‘high’ feudalism of the Normans, to the emergence of the state bureaucracy, centralisation of power, and urban economy that brought England to the eve of its precociously early capitalism. It starts at a moment when the essentially urbanised experience of theatre is inconceivable, and ends at a time when Old English heroic poetry is largely unintelligible both culturally and linguistically. We can indeed explain each historically formative event in terms of the conditions created by previous events, and thereby construct the past as a linear sequence of cause and effect that stretches both before the medieval era and after it. Yet taking this medieval period as a discrete historical epoch in its own right, we must ask what its literature distinctively meant. History and literature are divided in modern disciplinary parlance and then united in an artificial synthesis imposed on a body of medieval writing that recognised no such distinction in the first place. Literature is not some constant that

progresses unchanged through the eras; its very meaning changes according to the epoch in which it occurs. We must ask what made its dominant genres – heroic poetry, romance, saint’s life, mystery play – assume the form they did when they did. We must consider the possibility that literature as we understand it today simply does not map on to the medieval landscape of poetic and scribal production. To read medieval literature well is thus to read medieval literature historically. The history of medieval literature is less an adjunct to the study of medieval literature, by way of explanation of obscure terms and quaint manners, than its very foundation.

## Chronology

### Key

- IF Insular French, referring to the predominantly Norman-influenced dialect of French that developed in England after 1066. Also refers broadly to any French written in England.
- AS Anglo-Saxon, the collective term for the inhabitants of England after the immigration of the Germanic tribes from the fifth century. The name comes from the two most populous tribes, the Angles and the Saxons. Used more precisely, the term is distinguished from the native Britons, inhabiting the island prior to invasion, and from the Danes, who invaded from the eighth to eleventh centuries.
- fl.* flourished
- L. Latin, the language of learning and of the Church; in use continuously throughout the medieval period and across western Europe.
- ME Middle English, referring to the English language from the thirteenth to late fifteenth centuries. English from the twelfth and late eleventh centuries is transitional, and can be understood as either late OE or early ME.
- OE Old English, referring to the conglomeration of dialects used in England from the earliest written vernacular (roughly early seventh century) until the Norman invasion. Most OE writing is in the West Saxon dialect.
- OF Old French, language of continental France, as distinct from its insular counterpart, Insular French.

Unless designated otherwise, all texts are in English (whether Old or Middle).

### Note

There is often a lag between the date in which a work was composed and the earliest surviving manuscript of it. Anglo-Saxon poetry is particularly vulnerable to this kind of delayed date of record. *The Dream of the Rood*, for example, is known to have existed in some form by the late seventh century, but the manuscript in which it exists dates from some three hundred years later.

|                            | HISTORY AND CULTURE  | LITERATURE   |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| 449                        | Bede's date for arrival of Germanic mercenaries. King Arthur possibly a British resistance leader fighting the invaders  |  |
| Late C. 5th / early C. 6th |  | Gildas, <i>The Ruin of Britain</i> (L.), source for Bede   |
| 597                        | St Augustine brings Roman Christianity (and script) to Kent  |  |
| c. 602–3                   | Æthelbert, King of Kent, first Anglo-Saxon ruler to convert  | Æthelbert establishes written law, first known OE writing (preserved only in later manuscripts)  |
| 616                        | Edwin (–633), King of Northumbria, converts to Christianity  |  |
| c. 625                     | Sutton Hoo ship burial   |  |
| c. 632                     | Penda (–655), pagan King of Mercia   |  |
| 635                        | Cynewig, first West Saxon king baptised  |  |
| 642                        | Oswald, King of Northumbria, killed by Penda   |  |
| 643                        |  | Earliest original date for <i>Widsith</i> and <i>Deor</i> (in Exeter Book, c. 950), also <i>Battle of Finnsburgh</i> and <i>Waldere</i>  |
| 656                        | Mercia converts to Christianity  |  |
| 657                        |  | (–680) 'Cædmon's Hymn', and possibly <i>Genesis A</i> , <i>Exodus</i> and <i>Daniel</i> (in Junius manuscript, c. 950)   |
| 664                        | Synod of Whitby establishes supremacy of Roman Christianity  |  |
| c. 678                     | English Christian missions to the Continent  | Earliest original date for <i>Beowulf</i> , latest ninth century   |
| 688                        |  | Ine (–726), King of Wessex, establishes law code   |
| c. 698                     |  | Lindisfarne Gospels (L.); <i>Dream of the Rood</i>   |
| 730                        | (–750) Ruthwell Cross  |  |
| 731                        |  | Bede, <i>Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i> (L.)   |
| 757                        | Offa (–96), King of Mercia   |  |
| c. 782                     |  | Poetic elegies, including: <i>Wanderer</i> , <i>Seafarer</i> , <i>Wife's Lament</i> and <i>Ruin</i> (all in Exeter Book, c. 950)   |
| 793                        | First Danish invasions. Monastery at Lindisfarne sacked  |  |
| 796                        |  | <i>fl.</i> Nennius, <i>History of the Britons</i> (L.); early reference to historical Arthur   |
| c. 800                     | Four remaining kingdoms: Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Wessex  | 'Cynewulf' poems (from runic signature): <i>Juliana</i> , <i>Christ II</i> (in Exeter Book, c. 950), <i>Fates of the Apostles</i> , <i>Elene</i> (in Vercelli Book, c. 950) OE riddles |
| c. 851                     |  | <i>Genesis B</i>   |
| 869                        | Danes kill Edmund, King of East Anglia   | Edmund venerated as saint  |
| 871                        | Alfred the Great, King of Wessex, then of Anglo-Saxons   | Possible date of <i>Andreas</i>  |
| 875                        | York becomes separate Scandinavian kingdom   |  |
| 878                        | Defeat of Danish leader Guthrum at Edington (Wilts.). Treaty of Wedmore. Guthrum baptised                                |  |
| c. 880                     | Kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons. Boundaries of Danelaw established: Dane and Englishman given equal legal value (or wergild) | Alfredian law-code and translations. <i>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i> begun  |

|         | HISTORY AND CULTURE  | LITERATURE  |
|---------|--|---|
| 899     | Edward the Elder, son of Alfred, King of Anglo-Saxons  |   |
| 924     | Æthelstan, son of Edward, King of Anglo-Saxons, then of English (927)  |   |
| 937     | Battle of Brunanburh: Æthelstan defeats Norsemen and Scots   | <i>Battle of Brunanburh</i> recorded as poem in <i>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i>  |
| 939     | Edmund, first king to succeed to all England   |   |
| 946     | King Eadred, brother of Edmund   |   |
| c. 950  |  | Exeter Book (–c. 1000), Vercelli Book (containing earliest homilies), Junius manuscript. <i>Beowulf</i> manuscript probably late tenth or early eleventh century  |
| 955     | King Eadwig, son of Edmund   |   |
| 959     | Edgar, brother of Eadwig, King of England<br>Dunstan (–988), Archbishop of Canterbury  | Monastic Benedictine Revival  |
| 961     | Oswald (–992), Bishop of Worcester, Archbishop of York from 971  | Oswald major figure in Benedictine Revival  |
| 963     |  | Æthelwold (–984), Bishop of Winchester, teacher of Wulfstan and Ælfric, translates <i>Rule of St Benedict</i> (L.) into OE; writes <i>Regularis Concordia</i> (L.), standardising monastic, liturgical observance |
| c. 971  |  | Blickling Homilies, anonymous   |
| 975     | King Edward ‘the Martyr’, son of Edgar   | Edward venerated as saint; murder lamented by <i>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i> , Byrhtferth of Ramsey and Wulfstan (1014)   |
| 978     | Æthelræd II, ‘the Unready’, half-brother of Edward the Martyr  |   |
| c. 980  | Second wave of Viking invasion (–1066)   |   |
| 985–7   |  | Abbo of Fleury at Ramsey; commemorates death of Edmund (d. 869)   |
| c. 991  |  | <i>Apollonius of Tyre</i> , only OE romance, in manuscript with Wulfstan’s homilies   |
| 990–2   |  | Ælfric, <i>Catholic Homilies</i>  |
| 991     | Battle of Maldon. Danegeld first paid  | <i>Battle of Maldon</i> composed within twenty years  |
| c. 996  |  | Ælfric, <i>Lives of the Saints</i>  |
| 997     |  | Byrhtferth of Ramsey, <i>Life of St Oswald</i> (L.) (Archbishop of York, d. 992)  |
| c. 998  |  | Ælfric, Latin <i>Grammar</i> in OE, <i>Colloquy</i> (L.), and Old Testament translations and paraphrases  |
| 1013–14 | Swein Forkbeard, King of Denmark, deposes Æthelræd   |   |
| 1014    | Æthelræd reinstated  | Wulfstan, Archbishop of York, ‘“Wolf’s” Sermon to the English’ <i>Sermo Lupi ad Anglos</i>  |
| 1016    | King Edmund Ironside, son of Æthelræd and Ælfgifu; defeated by (Danish) Cnut; murdered same year<br>King Cnut; King of Denmark from 1018 |   |
| 1035–7  | Kingdom divided between Harold Harefoot and Harthacnut, sons of Cnut by different mothers  |   |
| 1037    | King Harold Harefoot   |   |

|         | HISTORY AND CULTURE   | LITERATURE  |
|---------|---|---|
| 1040    | King Harthacnut   |   |
| 1042    | King Edward the Confessor, son of Æthelræd II and Emma of Normandy                              |   |
| 1066    | Harold II   |   |
| 1066    | Battle of Hastings: William of Normandy defeats Harold  | <i>Song of Roland</i> (OF) allegedly sung to the Normans before battle. Earliest record of poem dates from twelfth-century IF version |
| 1066    | William I   |   |
| 1068–70 | William eliminates resistance throughout England  |   |
| 1070–1  | Hereward the Wake, rebellion in East Anglia   |   |
| 1086    | Domesday land survey completed. Oath of Salisbury: main landowners swear fealty to William      |   |
| 1087    | William II, son of William I  |   |
| 1096–9  | First Crusade. William II attends. Jerusalem stormed 1099                                       |   |
| 1100    | Henry I, son of William I   | (–1125) <i>Gesta Herewardi</i> , L. translation of (lost) English account of outlaw Hereward the Wake                                 |
| 1125    |   | William of Malmesbury, L. writings, including <i>History of the Kings of the English</i> and <i>Life of St Dunstan</i>                |
| 1128    | First Cistercian abbey in England (order founded 1098 in reaction to Benedictine opulence)      |   |
| c. 1133 |   | Henry of Huntingdon, <i>History of the English</i> (L.)   |
| 1135    | Stephen, Henry I's nephew, claims throne from Matilda, Henry's daughter. Intermittent civil war |   |
| c. 1137 |   | Geoffrey of Monmouth, <i>History of the Kings of Britain</i> (L.); first sustained account of King Arthur                             |
| c. 1140 |   | Geoffrey Gaimar, <i>Estoire des Engleis</i> (IF), includes account of Havelock the Dane   |
| 1147–9  | Second Crusade  |   |
| 1147    |   | Ælred (–1167), Abbot of Rievaulx, later canonised. L. spiritual and historical works, including life of Edward the Confessor          |
| c. 1150 |   | Play <i>Mystère d'Adam</i> (IF) probably composed in England  |
| 1153    | Treaty of Winchester (or Wallingford): Stephen retains throne, Matilda's son Henry heir         |   |
| 1154    | Henry II, son of Henry I  | OE Peterborough Chronicle ends  |
| 1155    | Pope allegedly grants Henry lordship of Ireland   | Wace, <i>Roman de Brut</i> (IF), based on Geoffrey of Monmouth; <i>Roman de Rou</i> (c. 1160)   |
| 1159    |   | fl. John of Salisbury; L. treatises on political theory ( <i>Policraticus</i> ) and logical arts ( <i>Metalogicon</i> )               |
| 1164    | Constitutions of Clarendon: Henry seeks control over Church                                     |   |
| 1166    | Assize of Clarendon: Henry lays foundation of trial by jury of English common law               |   |

|           | HISTORY AND CULTURE  | LITERATURE  |
|-----------|--|---|
| c. 1167   | (–1170) Oxford halls of residence for English scholars founded; scholars previously had studied at University of Paris   | <i>Cnut's Song</i> , <i>Poema morale</i> , <i>Proverbs of Alfred</i> , verses of St Godric, <i>Paternoster</i> poem (first use of extended rhyming couplets in English)   |
| 1169–71   | Invasion of Ireland led by Richard of Clare ('Strongbow')  |   |
| 1170      | Thomas Becket murdered after years of conflict with Henry over jurisdiction of Church and state; (canonised 1173)  | Approximate date for <i>Vie d'Edouard le Confesseur</i> (IF) by the Nun of Barking  |
| 1174      | Treaty of Falaise; William I of Scotland pays homage to Henry  |   |
| 1176      | Assize of Northampton further increases administration of centralised royal justice  |   |
| c. 1177   |  | Richard FitzNigel, <i>Dialogus de Scaccario</i> (L.), on methods of government. Nigel Wireker, <i>Mirror of Fools</i> (L.), satire on manners and clerical vices  |
| c. 1180   |  | William Fitzstephen (L.). <i>Life of Thomas Becket</i> (includes account of London). Marie de France at English court; writes <i>Fables</i> and <i>Lais</i> (IF). Drama, <i>La Seinte Resureccion</i> (IF)                                |
| 1180–6    |  | John of Ford, <i>Life of St Wulfric of Haselbury</i> (L.) (d. 1154)   |
| 1181–92   |  | Walter Map, <i>Trifles of Courtiers</i> (L.), satire of court life  |
| 1187      | Jerusalem retaken by Saladin   |   |
| 1189–92   | Third Crusade  |   |
| 1189      | Richard I, son of Henry II; leads Crusade to Holy Land (1190)  | Approximate date for <i>Owl and the Nightingale</i>   |
| c. 1190   |  | (–1225) Katherine Group (alliterative prose): <i>Seinte Marherete</i> , <i>Seinte Iulene</i> , <i>Seinte Katerine</i> , <i>Sawles Warde</i> and <i>Hali Meidhad</i> (MS. Bodley 34)<br>Lazamon's <i>Brut</i> , derived from Bede and Wace |
| c. 1196–8 |  | William of Newburgh, <i>History of English Matters</i> (L.)   |
| 1199      | John I, brother of Richard   |   |
| c. 1200   |  | Marian lyrics. Ælfric's <i>Grammar</i> transcribed<br>Religious elegies: <i>The Grave</i> and <i>Soul's Address to the Body</i> . Geoffrey of Vinsauf, <i>Poetria Nova</i> (L.)   |
| 1202–4    | Fourth Crusade   |   |
| 1204–6    | Philip Augustus of France retakes Normandy, Anjou and other territories  |   |
| c. 1205   |  | <i>Ormulum</i> , metrical paraphrase of gospels; develops unique phonetic spelling system   |
| 1209      | Cambridge halls of residence established   |   |
| 1210      |  | <i>Roman de Waldef</i> (IF), apparently based on an English source  |
| 1215      | Pope Innocent III, Fourth Lateran Council: requires annual confession for Christians, and distinctive garb for Jews; clarifies doctrine of transubstantiation; establishes marriage as sacrament; increases penalties against heretics |   |

|         | HISTORY AND CULTURE  | LITERATURE  |
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|         | John signs Magna Carta, grants concessions to barons, liberties to towns<br>Civil war; Prince Louis of France besieges Rochester |   |
| 1216    | Henry III, son of John, nine years old   |   |
| 1217    | Jews to wear yellow badges marking alien status  |   |
| c. 1220 |  | <i>Ancrene Riwe</i> (or <i>Ancrene Wisse</i> )  |
| 1221    | Dominican (Blackfriars) order established in England.<br>Founded 1216 to combat heresy   |   |
| 1224    | Franciscan friars (Greyfriars) in England  |   |
| c. 1225 |  | 'Wooing Group', prose prayers to Christ:<br><i>Wohung of Ure Lauerd, On Lofsong of ure Louerde, On Ureison of ure Louerde</i>               |
| 1227    | Order of St Clare founded – female mendicants<br>Henry III achieves majority   |   |
| 1228–9  | Fifth Crusade  |   |
| 1230–1  |  | <i>Genesis and Exodus</i> (metrical paraphrase of Old Testament books). <i>Vices and Virtues</i> (prose dialogue)                           |
| 1235    |  | <i>fl.</i> Matthew Paris, monk of St Albans, illustrated <i>Chronicles</i> (L.)   |
| 1237    | Treaty of York, Anglo-Scottish borders fixed   |   |
| c. 1240 | <i>Curia Regis</i> (King's Grand Council of barons and prelates) as embryonic <i>Parlement</i>                                   | Walter Bibbesworth, <i>Tretiz</i> (IF). <i>Roman de Gui de Warewic</i> (IF)   |
| c. 1242 |  | <i>fl.</i> Bartholomaeus Anglicus, <i>De Proprietatibus Rerum</i> (L.) (encyclopaedic treatise)   |
| 1248–54 | Sixth Crusade  |   |
| c. 1250 |  | First English (metrical) romances: <i>King Horn, Floris and Blancheflur. Physiologus</i> (L.), allegorical interpretation of animal natures |
| 1258    | Provisions of Oxford, Simon de Montfort attempts regulation of King's finances   |   |
| 1259    | Treaty of Paris. Henry III acknowledges French claim to territories in France  |   |
| c. 1260 |  | (–1300) Robert of Gloucester, metrical chronicle of England   |
| 1264    | Feast of Corpus Christi instituted   |   |
| 1265    | Battle of Evesham, Simon de Montfort killed  |   |
| c. 1265 |  | Duns Scotus (–1308), Scots philosopher of logic   |
| 1270    | Seventh Crusade. Prince Edward attends   |   |
| 1272    | Edward I, son of Henry III   | Approximate date for <i>Havelock the Dane</i>   |
| 1275    | First formal meeting of Parliament   | Approximate date for English fabliaux, <i>Dame Sirith, Fox and the Wolf</i>   |
| 1279    | Statute of Mortmain: limits Church's right to inherit land held by knight's fee  |   |
| c. 1280 |  | <i>South English Legendary</i> , versified saints' lives and miracles   |
| 1282–3  | Edward invades Wales, establishes himself as ruler, proclaims son Edward Prince of Wales (1301)                                  |   |

| HISTORY AND CULTURE |  | LITERATURE   |
|---------------------|--|--|
| c. 1285             |  | Hereford <i>Mappa Mundi</i>  |
| 1290                | Jews expelled from England   |  |
|                     | Statute (Quia Emptores) bars granting of new feudal rights (sub-infeudation), except by the Crown, and makes land held in 'fee simple' (fully 'owned') freely transferable |  |
| 1292                | Inns of Court established for training English lawyers   |  |
| c. 1290s?           |  | <i>Of Arthour and of Merlin</i> (in Auchinleck Ms.), non-alliterative romance<br><i>Harrowing of Hell</i> , semi-dramatic verse dialogue<br>Metrical romances: <i>Havelok the Dane</i> , <i>Arthour and Merlin</i> , <i>Kyng Alisaunder</i> , <i>Sir Tristrem</i> , <i>Amis and Amiloun</i>  |
| 1297                | Battle of Stirling Bridge, William Wallace defeats Edward; Wallace defeated at Falkirk (1298), executed 1305   |  |
| c. 1300             |  | <i>Cursor Mundi</i> , biblical poem<br><i>Lay Folks' Catechism</i><br><i>Land of Cockaigne</i><br>Richard Rolle (–1349), devotional writing (L. and vernacular)  |
| 1303                |  | Robert Mannyng of Brunne, <i>Handlyng Synne</i> (verse translation of IF penitential treatise)   |
| 1307                | Edward II, son of Edward I   |  |
| c. 1310?            |  | <i>William of Palerne</i> , early romance of Alliterative Revival  |
| 1314                | Battle of Bannockburn, Robert Bruce defeats English; ends English control in Scotland  |  |
| 1315–17             | Great famine   |  |
| 1320                | Declaration of Arbroath: letter to Pope from Scottish barons, declaring right to self-rule   |  |
| 1326–7              | Edward II deposed and murdered   |  |
| 1327                | Edward III, son of Edward I  |  |
| c. 1330             |  | Auchinleck manuscript (London): large miscellany of religious and didactic poetry, including <i>A Pennyworth of Wit</i> ; romances, including: <i>Sir Orfeo</i> , <i>Kyng Alisaunder</i> , <i>Floris and Blanchefleur</i> , <i>Degare</i> , <i>Arthour and Merlin</i> , <i>Horn Childe and Maiden Rimmild</i><br>Harley lyrics, large collection of lyrics, religious, amatory, satiric, political |
| 1333                |  | <i>fl.</i> Laurence Minot, political (particularly anti-Scots) verse   |
| 1337                | Hundred Years' War begins  |  |
| 1338                |  | Robert Mannyng, <i>Chronicle</i> (translation of Peter of Langtoft's IF <i>Chronicle</i> )   |
| 1340                |  | Dan Michel of Northgate, <i>Ayenbite of Inwit</i> ( <i>Remorse of Conscience</i> ), Kentish prose translation of French confessional treatise  |
| 1340                |  | (–1370) <i>fl.</i> Dafydd ap Gwilym, Welsh poet  |
| 1344                |  | Richard of Bury, <i>Philobiblon</i> : L. treatise in praise of books   |

|            | HISTORY AND CULTURE   | LITERATURE   |
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| 1346       | Battle of Crécy   |  |
| 1348       | Order of the Garter established   |  |
| 1348–50    | Black Death, estimated population loss at one-third to one-half   |  |
| c. 1350    | First paper-mill built in England   | <i>Pride of Life</i> , morality play<br>Romances: <i>Tale of Gamelyn</i> , <i>Athelston</i> ,<br><i>William of Palerne</i> , <i>Stanzaic Morte Arthur</i> , <i>Sir Isumbras</i> ,<br><i>Sir Eglamour of Artois</i> , <i>Octavian</i> , <i>Sir Amadace</i><br>Richard Ledred, L. account of witch trial of Alice Kyteler, Kilkenny, Ireland |
| 1350–1400  |   | Romances, including <i>Sege of Melayne</i> , <i>Emaré</i> ,<br><i>Sir Gowther</i> , <i>Sir Firumbras</i> , <i>Sir Degrevant</i> ,<br><i>Gest Historyale of the Destruction of Troy</i>   |
| 1351       | Statute of Labourers fixes wages  |  |
| c. 1352    |   | <i>Winner and Waster</i> , alliterative poem   |
| 1356       | Battle of Poitiers  |  |
| 1360       | Treaty of Brétigny, nine-year peace between England and France  | <i>Pricke of Conscience</i> , long devotional poem in rhyming couplets   |
| 1361       | Black Death<br>Jean Froissart in England (–1367)  |  |
| 1362       | English declared official language of law courts  | Approximate date, <i>Piers Plowman</i> , A-text  |
| c. 1370    |   | (–1387) Geoffrey Chaucer, early writings: dream visions, translations, <i>Troilus and Criseyde</i>   |
| c. 1373    |   | (–1388) Julian of Norwich, <i>Revelations of Divine Love</i> (short and long versions)   |
| c. 1374–9  |   | John Gower, <i>Mirour de l'Omme</i> (IF)   |
| c. 1375    |   | <i>Northern Homily Cycle</i> being expanded from early C14 version   |
| 1376       | 'Good' Parliament attempts reform of court corruption<br>John Wycliffe preaches disendowment of clergy<br>Black Prince dies | Earliest record of York mystery plays<br>John Barbour's (Scots) poem, <i>The Bruce</i>   |
| 1377       | 'Bad' Parliament, flat-rate poll tax<br>Richard II, grandson of Edward III  | Approximate date of <i>Piers Plowman</i> , B-text  |
| 1378       | Great Schism (–1417), rival popes in Rome and Avignon   |  |
| 1379       | Income-differentiated poll tax  | John Wycliffe, <i>De Eucharistia</i> (L.) (on transubstantiation)  |
| 1380       | Flat-rate poll tax  |  |
| c. 1380    |   | <i>Cloud of Unknowing</i><br>Romances: <i>Apollonius of Tyre</i> ; Thomas Chestre, <i>Sir Launfal</i>  |
| 1381       | Peasants' Revolt<br>University of Oxford condemns Wycliffe's teachings  |  |
| 1382       |   | Wycliffite complete translation of Bible   |
| 1384       |   | ME <i>Speculum Vitae</i> investigated for heresy   |
| c. 1385    |   | Thomas Usk (d. 1388), <i>Testament of Love</i><br>John Gower, <i>Vox Clamantis</i> (L.)<br>Sir John Clanvowe, <i>Boke of Cupide</i>  |
| c. 1386–90 |   | John Gower, <i>Confessio Amantis</i> (ME)  |

| HISTORY AND CULTURE |   | LITERATURE  |
|---------------------|---|---|
| 1387                |   | <i>fl.</i> John Trevisa, translates <i>Polychronicon</i> and <i>On the Properties of Things</i>   |
| c. 1387             |   | Geoffrey Chaucer (–1400), <i>Canterbury Tales</i>   |
| 1388                | 'Merciless' Parliament impeaches Richard's advisers                               |   |
| c. 1390             |   | <i>Piers Plowman</i> , C-text<br>Alliterative <i>Parlement of the Thre Ages</i> and <i>St Erkenwald</i><br>Alliterative <i>Morte Arthure</i>  |
| 1390s               |   | <i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i> , <i>Pearl</i> , <i>Patience</i> , <i>Cleanness</i><br>Vernon manuscript, compilation of earlier vernacular religious works: <i>Ancrene Riwe</i> , <i>Speculum Vitae</i> , Walter Hilton's <i>Scale of Perfection</i> , <i>Piers Plowman</i> A-text, <i>Northern Homily Cycle</i> , <i>South English Legendary</i> |
| c. 1392             |   | Earliest mention of Coventry plays  |
| c. 1395             |   | <i>Pierce the Ploughman's Crede</i>   |
| 1399                | Richard deposed and murdered. Henry IV, cousin of Richard II                      | (–1406) <i>Richard the Redeless</i> and <i>Mum and the Sopsegger</i>  |
| c. 1400             |   | <i>fl.</i> John Mirk, <i>Festial</i> (sermons); verse treatise, <i>Instructions for Parish Priests</i>  |
| Early 1400s         |   | <i>A Tretis of Miraclis Pleyinge</i> , a Wycliffite tract criticising devotional drama  |
| 1400–9              | Welsh rebellion led by Owain Glyndwr  |   |
| 1401                | Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, establishes Lollard heresy inquisitions |   |
| 1402                |   | Thomas Hoccleve (–1421): <i>Letter of Cupid</i> , <i>Regiment of Princes</i> , 'Lament for Chaucer'   |
| c. 1404–5           |   | Christine de Pisan, OF works, including <i>Cité des Dames</i>   |
| c. 1405–10          |   | <i>Dives and Pauper</i> , long prose dialogue on Ten Commandments   |
| c. 1408             |   | <i>fl.</i> John Lydgate (–c. 1428): <i>Troy Book</i> , <i>Life of Our Lady</i> , <i>Siege of Thebes</i> , <i>Fall of Princes</i> , <i>Pilgrimage of the Life of Man</i>   |
| c. 1410             |   | Edward, Duke of York, <i>The Master of Game</i> , hunting treatise<br>Nicholas Love, <i>Mirroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ</i>  |
| 1413                | Henry V, son of Henry IV  |   |
| c. 1413             |   | Margery Kempe (–c. 1439), religious experiences and writings  |
| 1414                | Sir John Oldcastle, Lollard revolt; executed 1417                                 |   |
| 1415                | Battle of Agincourt   |   |
| 1418                |   | (–c. 1509) Paston letters   |
| 1420                | Treaty of Troyes. Henry acknowledged Duke of Normandy and heir to French throne   |   |
| c. 1422             |   | Earliest record of Chester plays  |
| 1422                | Henry VI, son of Henry V (nine months old)  |   |
| c. 1424             |   | James I of Scotland, <i>Kingis Quair</i>  |