

Introducing English Literature

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Why Study Literature through Ages?

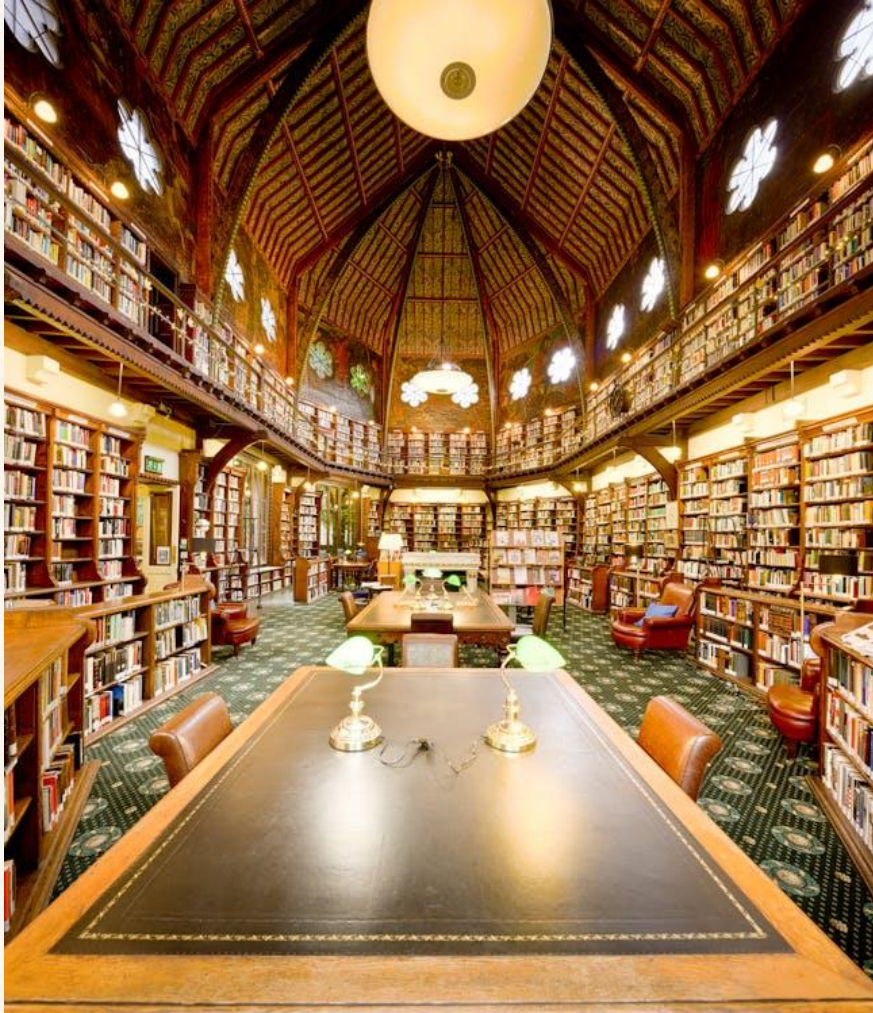


Image: Oxford Library by M. Beckwith

- Literature mirrors society, politics, religion, culture
- Each age = new philosophies, forms, styles, and themes
- Shows continuity and transformation in English writing

Old English (450–1066)

- Context: Anglo-Saxon culture, Christianity's spread
- Literary Features: epic poetry, oral tradition, alliteration, elegies
- Works: Beowulf, "The Wanderer," Caedmon's Hymn
- Transformation: Pagan → Christian worldview



Image Source: <https://www.history.org.uk/primary/resource/3865/anglo-saxons-a-brief-history>

Middle English (1066–1500)

- Context: Norman Conquest, feudal society, church dominance
- Features: chivalric romances, allegory, religious drama
- Works: Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Langland's *Piers Plowman*
- Transformation: Rise of vernacular English as a literary medium



Image: Clockwise, from top left: Detail of the 11th-century [Bayeux Tapestry](#), showing [Harold Godwinson](#); 15th-century stained glass from [York Minster](#), showing a scene from [the Apocalypse](#); [Salisbury Cathedral](#), built in the 13th century; the 9th century [Ormside Bowl](#).

The Renaissance (1500–1660)

- Context: Humanism, Reformation, printing press
- Features: sonnets, blank verse, flourishing drama
- Authors: Shakespeare, Spenser, Marlowe, Sidney
- Transformation: Classical revival + celebration of humanism

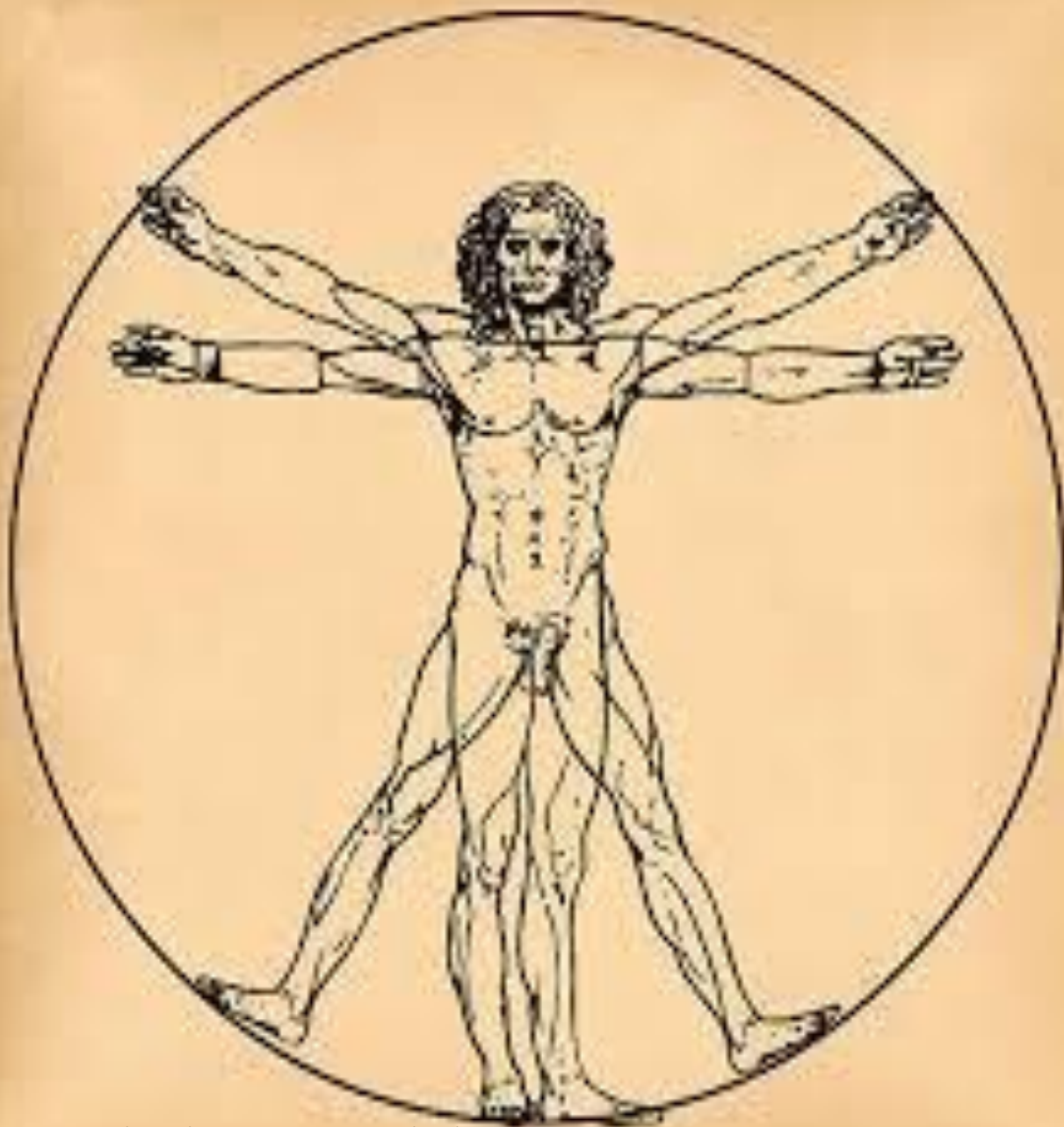
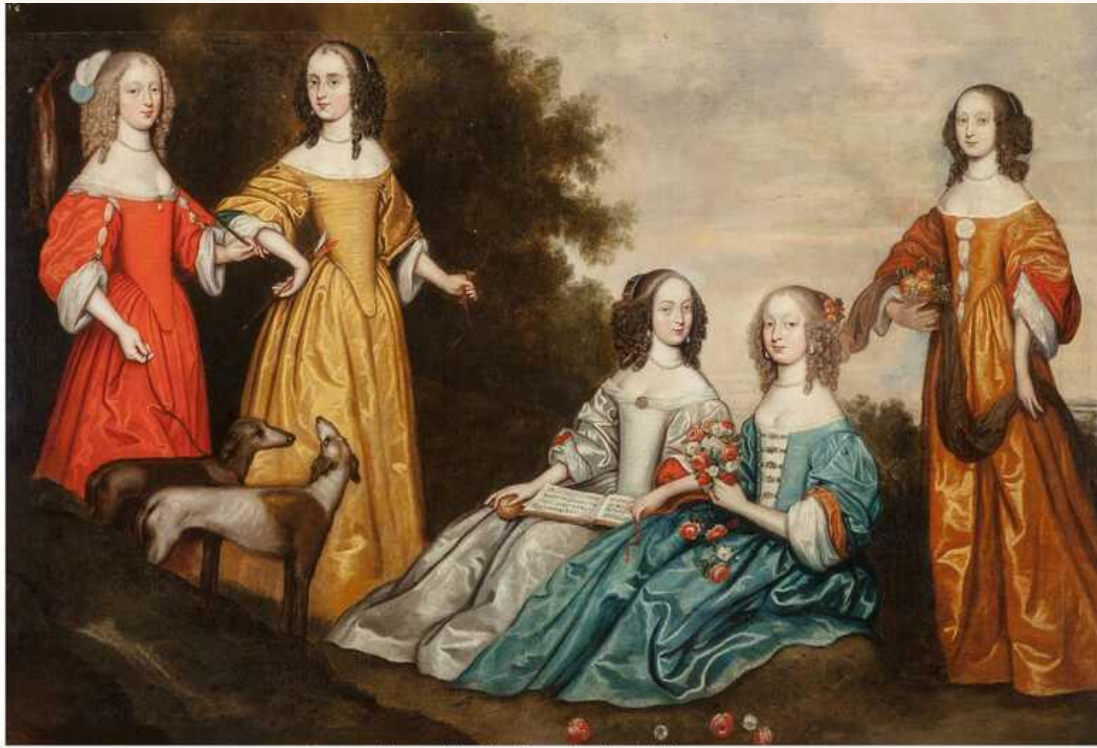


Image: Vitruvian Man by Da Vinci

The Seventeenth Century (1625–1700)



Imaged by Heritage Auctions, HA.com

- Context: Civil War, Puritanism, Restoration
- Features: Metaphysical poetry, religious writings, satire, Restoration comedy
- Authors: Donne, Milton, Marvell, Dryden
- Transformation: Negotiating faith, politics, and reason

The Eighteenth Century (1700–1798)

- Context: Enlightenment, rise of middle class, print culture
- Features: satire, essays, birth of the novel, neoclassical ideals
- Authors: Pope, Swift, Johnson, Defoe, Fielding
- Transformation: Rational, moral, public discourse in literature



Reading Voltaire's tragedy *L'Orphelin de la Chine* at Madame Geoffrin's salon, painted in 1812 by Gabriel Lemonnier (1743-1824). DEA/G. DAGLI ORTI/Getty Images

Romantic Period (1798–1837)

- Context: French Revolution, Industrial Revolution
- Features: imagination, individualism, love of nature, rebellion against reason
- Authors: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats
- Transformation: From order → emotion and individuality



Lord Byron on Shore of the Hellenic Sea, oil on canvas by Giacomo Trécourt, 1850; in Musei Civici del Castello Visconteo, Pavia, Italy

Victorian Age (1837–1901)

- Context: Empire, industry, social reform, morality
- Features: Realism, social problem novels, dramatic monologues
- Authors: Dickens, Brontës, Eliot, Tennyson, Browning
- Transformation: Literature as moral and social commentary



Painting of [Queen Victoria](#) by [Franz Xaver Winterhalter](#) (1859)

Modernism (1901–1945)



Image: *Guernica* by Pablo Picasso

- Context: World Wars, psychoanalysis, modernity
- Features: fragmentation, symbolism, stream of consciousness
- Authors: Joyce, Woolf, Eliot, Yeats
- Transformation: Breaking tradition to reflect a fractured world

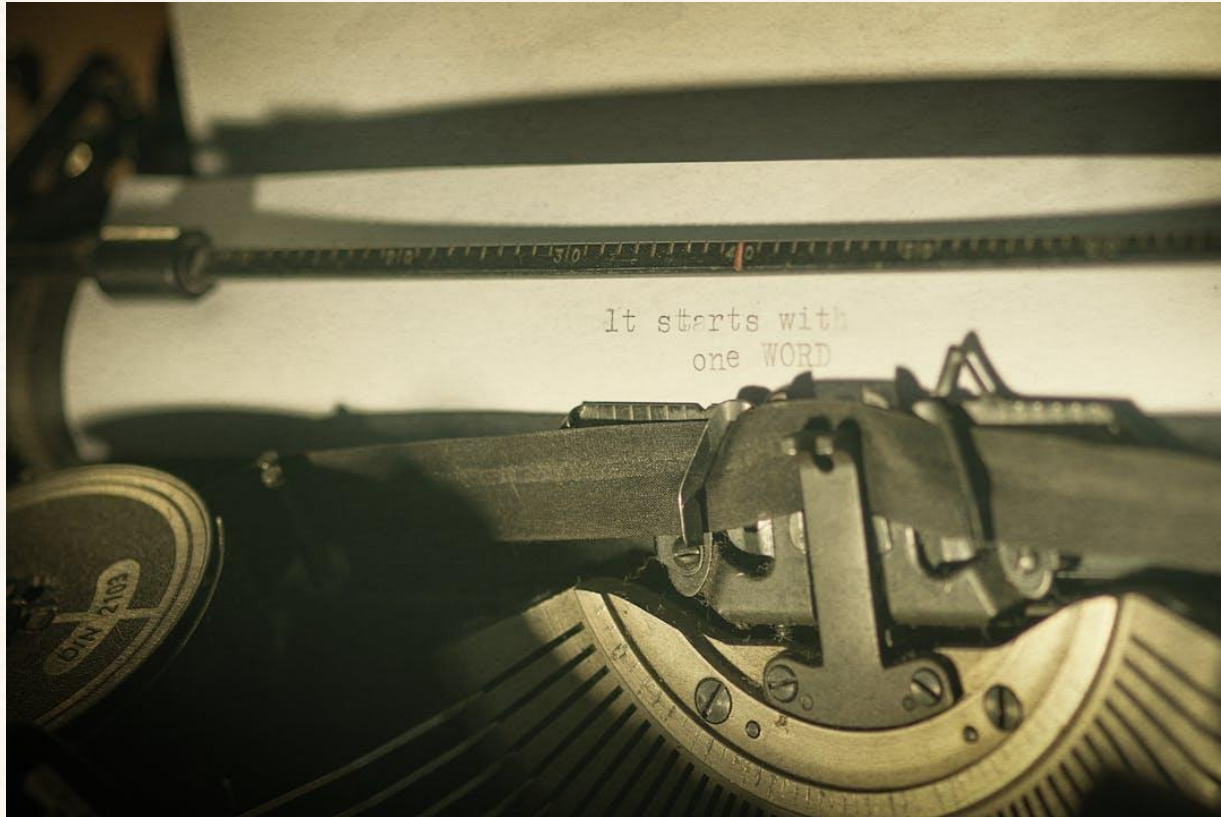
Postmodern & Contemporary (1945–Present)

- Context: Decolonization, globalization, digital revolution
- Features: metafiction, intertextuality, hybridity, postcolonial voices
- Authors: Rushdie, Atwood, Ishiguro, Zadie Smith
- Transformation: Literature as plural, diverse, and global and read through various lenses like post/modernism, postcolonialism, post-feminism, etc.



Image Source: pexels.com

Conclusion



- English literature = dynamic conversation between history and art
- Each age transforms forms & ideas while retaining continuity