

Living British Literature. From the Anglo-Saxon World to the Early Renaissance

language

teaching

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learning
and

research



UNIVERSIDAD PEDAGÓGICA
NACIONAL
Educadora de educadores

Language Teaching, Learning, and Research

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Prologue

The volume *Living British Literature. From the Anglo-Saxon World to the Early Renaissance* introduces both learners and teachers of the English language to the literary and linguistic context of British literature from its beginnings in the Anglo-Saxon world up to the sixteenth century. The book provides an intriguing base from which students can learn about the history, context and content of early British literature — written in Anglo-Saxon, middle English, old English and modern English — as well as applying that through text-based tasks.

The book is perfect for intermediate and advanced students of English as a foreign language and teachers of English at this level who wish to introduce their students to complex literature, semantics, and a wide variety of literary forms. Indeed, the book's great strength is that it sets out clear and concise tasks for the learner to ensure they have understood the texts, their contexts, and the language used, as well as allowing them to reflect on their experiences with the texts and contexts studied. This allows the students to become more autonomous and motivated learners, while it gives teachers the tools to apply what they have learnt for their teaching. The book includes a range of exercises such as summaries, research-based tasks, comprehension, translation, and creative tasks which allow the reader to take control of their own learning while also creating a portfolio of their work for future use.

The chapters of this book take the reader through the canonic texts of British literature from the period under consideration and begin with the recognised starting point of this genre with the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*. The historical context and significance of this poem are introduced alongside crucial explanations of the language used; the learner-tasks assigned to this section offer students the keys to unlock the meaning of the text itself. The second chapter

moves on to the Middle Ages and focuses on the celebrated text *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer. The origins of the text are given in detailed yet accessible language. The student is encouraged to understand Middle English and create a similar tale of their own.

Chapters three and four present the poetic context of the Renaissance to the reader, and several key authors are considered, notably Edmund Spenser and John Donne. By now the student will be more familiar with older forms of the English language, and these sections demonstrate the link between those more inscrutable forms with contemporary standard British English, taking the reader through the formal structure, syntax, and lexical use in poetry from the period. Students are allowed to provide a close reading of poetry and to develop their critical thinking skills through the task-based learning in these chapters before moving on to chapter five, which focuses on theatre. This final chapter connects back to the first unit of the volume and briefs the reader on the Anglo-Saxon origins of drama in Britain before charting a history of this genre to the early Renaissance, considering the religious and pagan influences on it.

Living British Literature. From the Anglo-Saxon World to the Early Renaissance gives both students and teachers of English and British literature a wonderful set of tools to enhance their target-language and cultural understanding. It provides teachers with suitable tasks and the opportunities for reflection in order to make this a very useful book in the classroom, and crucially it engages students with the critical thinking skills needed when studying languages, literature, and culture. Its focus on reading, analysing, understanding, creating, and reflecting sets the reader up for an engaging and insightful journey through British literature from the periods under study, and I look forward to future volumes in this series which will take us up to the present day.

Dr Liz Harvey-Kattou, PhD

Introduction

All art is at once surface and symbol.

The Picture of Dorian Gray by OSCAR WILDE

This book is intended to provide a first tour of British Literature, with each unit resembling a pilgrim from Chaucer who tells a new story. Although the trip is linear, there will come a time when the reader must return to the Middle Ages, after the origins of the English drama. Reading a history of British literature is like travelling in time, as the reader's experiences every historical moment like Wells' traveller when he explains that our consciousness moves through the three dimensions.

When a book ends, the author caught up in the text, can be like Prospero in *The Tempest*, and think words like these:

Now my charms are all o'erthrown,/And what strength I have's mine own,/ Which
is most faint. Now 'tis true,/I must be here confin'd by you,/ [...] Let me not, [...]
In this bare island by your spell,/But release me from my bands/With the help of
your good hands. (Shakespeare, 1920, p. 159)

Meanwhile, we have many "miles to go before" (Frost, 2019) we sleep, many "miles to go before" we sleep...

Methodology

This book seeks to take the reader on tour and learn about the entire history of British literature. For this reason, we opted for a chronological order to develop it, so that there is an understanding and clarity when studying this literature. The chronological form is not the only one valid in literature, but it is one of the

most recommended didactic strategies for teaching literature. It allows students to infer the changes wrought to literature by developments in history, art, politics, and language.

The text is divided into five units. The first deals with the essentials of the Anglo-Saxon world and its language, predecessor of the English language; here, the reader will come into contact with important epic poems such as *Beowulf*. Unit two presents an author and a key text to understand the Middle Ages, Geoffrey Chaucer and *The Canterbury Tales*. The third and fourth unit reveal to the reader Renaissance poets as Thomas Wyatt, Henry Howard, Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser and John Donne. Readers will agree that given the importance of these writers, their study required two units to address them. Finally, the book ends with unit five; if we address English drama, we will need to remember some aspects from unit 1 related to Middle Ages, where the theatre had its origins.

In the instructional design of this textbook, the Content and Language Integrated Learning was involved, when literature became the content that was approached and learned through the second language, that in this case was English (Lin, 2016). Moreover, Task-based Learning approach was also included because of its encouragement of experiential and meaningful meaning-making as ways to fully acquire a language. By following this approach, learners are guided in the development of purposeful tasks that elicit their use of the target language (Nunan, 1989). For this book, we have integrated the principles of the approaches mentioned above to design the activities in each unit, which are especially evidenced in the creative activities. There, the student is encouraged to build a meaningful literature product through which he demonstrates his comprehension of the unit content while he develops his second language writing skill.

Each unit, in terms of content, carries an epigraph, which relates to the topic or belongs to an author associated with the relevant historical period. Furthermore, regarding methodology, this book has five units, these have a different number of activities, each unit proposes a learning path that includes the following steps: Reading, Analyse, Understand, Create, and Reflect. As Bloom (1956) has stated in his taxonomy, cognition develops through tasks sequenced from simple to more complex so that the learning process is scaffolded for the learner. Each chapter provides a process that begins with two implicit tasks, the first of which asks

learners to remember their exposure to content in the second language. Learners are also provided with an understanding task where they are challenged to solve comprehension questions. Those questions were created to support the learner's process by challenging them to further their knowledge and reading skills, to focus on comprehension. In words of Ritchhart, Church & Morrison (2014), experts on Teaching for Understanding and visible learning, "this kind of question fosters interest in the ideas being explored, helps students build understanding and allows learners to enlighten their own thinking" (p. 69).

Afterwards, learners are explicitly exposed to tasks which call them to analyse content, demonstrate understanding, create, and reflect. Those tasks of analysis, understanding and creation are allowed to provide varied opportunities for learners to consolidate and use their learning. Krechevsky, Mardell, Rivard & Wilson (2013) explain how "creating and sharing multiple representations of learning at multiple points in the process allow students to demonstrate and deepen their learning simultaneously" (p. 58).

In the last creating task, students have the chance to personalize learning, make connections with their knowledge and experiences and foster creative writing. The final task, named *reflect*, was created to promote self-assessment, in a metacognitive way where students could think upon their learning. At the last unit, the structure changes because in this one the student must demonstrate through a final task, the acquired knowledge throughout the book. Also, at the end of the book, the chapter "Self-revision" offers some answers to specific exercises for students to be able to check their performance.

As you can see, this book is the first phase of a history of British Literature, which we hope to continue in a second publication covering the other centuries up to the current day. *Living British Literature. From the Anglo-Saxon World to the Early Renaissance* has been written to serve as a tool and study guide for teachers who direct courses in this area. It is also a practical and clear document for the student who should know the authors and main texts of this literature within a linguistic, historical, political, and artistic context.

Authors

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Is a writer, poet and essayist. He has a Master in Literature from Pontificia Universidad Javeriana and a Bachelor's degree in Law from the Universidad de Nariño. He has been professor of literature at different universities, including Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, and Santo Tomás. He is currently professor at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in the Department of Languages, and director of the local Creative Writing Workshop of Idartes. He is the author of the books: *Poética: Narrativa; Lírica; Dramática, Literatura contemporánea y Estética*. His most recent books are a study of the work of the writer César Aira entitled: *La escritura del procedimiento imaginativo: La creación continua en César Aira* and the two interconnected novels *La trama y el lenguaje secreto*. He has also published in different anthologies and specialized magazines.

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This book offers intermediate learners of English as a Foreign Language an original and stimulating learning experience. It introduces them to the beginnings of British literature, starting from the Anglo-Saxon world and continuing up to the beginning of the Renaissance. The texts chosen cover the development of poetry, narrative and the theatre, and the historical and social context from which they are drawn. No attempt has been made to offer an encyclopaedic survey of all authors and their works. Rather, a representative selection has been made from the various historical periods, including many 'classic' works.

The activities designed in this book are essential for the reader who wishes to access other works of British Literature. The book contains scaffolded exercises that will lead the reader to develop their reading comprehension and to consolidate their knowledge of this literary field. This is in addition to practicing the second language and applying what they have learned through creative activities.

In view of its careful and systematic integration of literature and language, this book will be an indispensable tool for anyone who wishes to get closer to British literature as they improve their English-language skills.

Just as Hamlet concludes that "The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King", the authors hope that this book will catch the readers' conscience so that they can witness in the present what happened in the past which is still alive among us. "The rest is silence" (*Hamlet*, Shakespeare); all literature is made of silences.

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