



STUDY ON THE HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT OF THE MEDIEVAL

ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

In the history of English literature, the transition from Greek to medieval philosophy, which theorized on religion, nature, metaphysics, human beings, and society, was a difficult one. Even though the literature of this period represented stronger religious values, the love-hate connection between medieval philosophy, which was mostly founded on Christianity, with Greek civilization was evident. The ideals of this period are continued in present philosophical ideologies. The paper provides a theatrical overview of the major aspects of medieval English. It is impossible to comprehend present philosophical concerns without first grasping the philosophical issues of this era. During this period, the catholic tradition as well as Protestantism, a religious reform movement against the church, was organized. Philosophy and theoretical views associated with Christianity were well-organized during the Medieval Period, and philosophy, science, and theoretical thoughts all supported religion. Throughout this time period, philosophy took on diverse shapes and perspectives. The Augustinian philosophy, which was strongly in favor of the church with its various practices and styles, was one of these philosophical concepts. It relied on Platonic and Neo-Platonic traditions to demonstrate that faith is the outcome of divine dispensations rather than human willpower and knowledge. On the other hand, Aquinas claims that we are subjected to various forms of impact in the world around us. He felt that we attribute an effective reason to every effect we encounter in our environment. He also thought that the only road to true religion was through thinking. In truth, medieval philosophy endeavored to disprove religious assumptions, and ideologists sought to align their philosophical beliefs with those of Christianity. The dominance of Christianity in Middle English literature aided the establishment of English as a literary language.

KEYWORDS: *Medieval English, Philosophy, Medieval Period, Christianity.*



INTRODUCTION

1. MEDIEVAL ENGLISH

The Middle Ages are a thousand-year period in European history that began in the fifth century. Scholars have dated the beginning and conclusion of this period to the 5th and late 15th centuries AD, respectively, according to their research. The conclusion of this period coincides with the beginning of the renaissance period. Historians refer to this period as the Middle Age because it falls between the two periods of the Greek-Roman and the Modern eras (Baugh & Cable, 2002). According to some historians, the beginning of the Middle Ages should be moved back to the first or second century to represent the influence of Greek philosophers' performances on the philosophy of the Middle Ages. Another school of thought contends that Christian thought and the beginning of the Middle Ages occurred simultaneously and that it is because of this coincidence that the mind and reason of this period are referred to as Christian thought. Historians have defined this period as one marked by the preservation movement and the ongoing exodus of people from various countries to the land. Known as the medieval history of Europe in the new West historiography, this one-thousand-year period is referred to as the medieval period of European history. To put it another way, the Middle Ages are a period in European history that marks the transition from the ancient to the modern era (Wallace, 1999). Most of medieval literature was created by hand. The unwanted arrival of two conquerors marked the beginning and end of the period, including the Norman conquest in 1066 and the invention of the printing press in 1476. The first conquest of England was tough for English literature, and it survived only with a struggle. When the first printed English books arrived, the period of Middle English was all but finished, as was the period of Old English. As a result of the invention of the printing press, the language had evolved into its contemporary form, with the exception of the spelling layer. It was a stylistic hallmark of the time period to see a rapid increase in the number of words that were frequently introduced into the language from Latin and mostly from French (Behtash, 2012). The English literature of the Middle Ages is a broad and comprehensive topic that comprises, without exception, all the written works that were available throughout Europe and abroad during the period of the Middle Ages. European countries in Western and Central Europe, as well as those portions of Europe that were never Romanized, spoke in Latin, which was the official language of the Roman Catholic Church in



those regions. This was due to the fact that the church was practically the only source of education. Furthermore, the Latin language was the most often used language for writing during the Middle Ages. On the other hand, the situation in Eastern Europe was entirely different. When the Eastern Roman Empire and the Eastern Orthodox Church took control of Eastern Europe, they made the languages of the Old Church, namely Slavonic and Greek, the dominant languages in the region, which is still the case today (Horobin& Smith, 2002). In a society where Old Church languages were used, one of the distinguishing characteristics was that the vernaculars of ordinary people were employed even in the creation of literary works. Among the most well-known examples of such works are Beowulf (written between 700 and 1000 AD, with a manuscript dating from 975 to 1010 AD), the Middle High German Nibelungenlied (The Song of the Nibelungs), written between 1180 and 1210 AD by an unknown Austrian, and the Old French Chanson de Roland (written between 1040 and 1115). Although the extant copies of the aforementioned epics are typically believed to be the works of individual poets, the poems written by anonymous poets are based on their peoples' older oral traditions and are therefore not recognized to be the works of individual poets. The religious writings of this period, as well as temporal and non-spiritual works, were included in the works of literature of this period, which are generally classified according to their location of origin, language, and genre (Wallace, 1999). It is the purpose of this study to look at the qualities of language, poems, society, different styles of writing, and literary works from the Middle Ages. Because several variables, such as the Church, the concept of chivalry, philosophical movements, and distinct theologies, played a prominent role in Middle Ages philosophy, a brief examination of these factors and their effects on medieval literature is provided. The Church was the most important institution in medieval life, and the religious observances of the time influenced the development of literary works. Because of this, its pervasive influence on the literature of this period can be plainly seen to have been established. Some poetry and epics, for example, can be used to track the development of popular religious beliefs on ethics. The content of some medieval works in which the Church's influence is evident is examined in this study, which takes into consideration the historical context of the medieval period in which literary works were developed, as well as the historical context of the medieval age in which they were developed. The contemporary English language is the



outcome of several centuries of growth throughout the course of the country's turbulent and turbulent past. For example, in the history of the English language, social, political, and cultural influences have had a significant impact on both the people and the language. The observable contact between English and Latin civilization that occurred in 597 because of the Roman Christianization of Britain resulted in the addition of a considerable number of new words to the language's vocabulary. The invasion of Scandinavian led to the fusion of two cultures and languages as a result of the conquest. Following the Norman conquest of England, the English language was reduced to being the primary language of the lower levels of society for nearly two centuries, while the nobles employed French as the most prestigious language in the society for the same period. It was the English language that, after several centuries, reclaimed its position as the dominant language in English societies, and it was the language that had undergone significant changes in both grammar and vocabulary from what it had been in 1066. Vivian (1996) describes several grammatical structures, including a "core" and a "periphery," that are typically introduced into a language through processes such as historical development or borrowing. For example, several grammatical structures, including a "core" and a "periphery," that are typically introduced into a language through processes such as historical development or borrowing have been commonly used in the English language. As previously stated in a subsequent paragraph, following the invasion of England by the French Normans, Old English was effectively exterminated from the country's society, culture, and literature. So the Norman language was supplanted by English by the French governors in charge of the kingdom, and English was replaced by French as the language of poetry and literature in England (Baugh & Cable, 2002). Latin was one of the languages spoken in the country, and it was the language of science and academic societies at the time of its establishment. Even though the English language has regained its value over time, it has also lost many grammatical elements, which has resulted in phonetic alterations. As a result of the enhancement of the English language at a later time, several French and Latin words and expressions were discovered as loan terms (Horobin& Smith, 2002). English language, on the other hand, remained and was spoken among the vanquished Anglo-Saxons, who were the peasant class of society under the power of French Normans who were spreading out into the countryside to take possession of the lands and estates they had occupied previously. As a result, French



Normans were forced to learn the English language gradually as a matter of necessity. It was not until the 14th century that English emerged as the dominant language in society, but it was a far cry from the Old English language that the Anglo-Saxons had spoken for hundreds of years. Middle English was the term used to describe the coexistence of the French Norman language with the nascent English language (Algeo, 2010). Some causes, such as switching from one language to another, using languages other than English, and considerable changes in the use of the English language during the Medieval period (1150–1500), had a significant impact on the grammar and vocabulary levels of the Medieval English language. In reality, due to the occurrence of a diverse range of these modifications in both the grammar and lexicon of the language, it is difficult to determine which category of change was more significant. Actually, the changes that occurred in the grammatical layer of English resulted in the reduction of the strongly inflected English to a language that was highly analytic in nature. Furthermore, as a result of the changes in the lexical domain of English, numerous Old-English words were eliminated from the language's lexicon. Because of this, several thousand words from the French and Latin languages have been added to it over the years. The extent of the transformations was so great that the English language had to be learnt as if it were a foreign language at the outset of the time. At the end of this period, the language resembled the contemporary English language in terms of structure. Certain experts have demonstrated statistically that there are some modifications in two layers of language and grammar (e.g. Fries, 1940; Malone, 1930; Moore, 1927 & 1928). England's society and literature were primarily oral in nature before to the arrival of the French Normans. As a result of the Norman Conquest, the oral tradition of the English language and society that had endured in the oral habits of mind was transformed into a more written form of expression. However, despite the increasing importance of written texts, oral tradition continued to be an important component of mediaeval society and literature. The inadequate practical reading abilities of those who dealt with official matters contributed to the society's continued reliance on oral communication. Because the oral tradition of mediaeval English was difficult to describe and explain, it has received a great deal of attention from scholars up to this point (Foley, 1985 & 2002). In reality, the Norman Conquest marked the beginning of a period of significant social, political, cultural, and linguistic transformations in the English language that would last for centuries. By



the way, oral poetics, which was one of the components of oral tradition gathering, survived the Conquest and appears to have stayed quite unmodified in certain ways. There are certain similarities between the poems of the Middle Ages and the old English literary traditions. Some of them have phonetic similarities, and there are four pressure verses in the collection. William Langland's "Piers Plowman" is one of the most well-known and outstanding instances of this sort of writing that has been attributed to him (c.1332-c.1400). It is a lengthy, passionate, and objective piece of art that deals with a variety of problems, including poverty, greed of the wealthy, and sin on the part of individuals. While this literary work dealt with a variety of Christian ideas, the most prominent of which were "Earthly life and oneness with God," "Afterlife and oneness with God," or perhaps a combination of these two conceptions, were the central subjects of this literary work. This lengthy poem is comparable to another masterpiece of Christian fiction, Dante's "Divine Comedy," which was also written in the Middle Ages. The point of convergence between these two works is that both placed an emphasis on Divine compassion as well as the compassionate component on earth (Abrams, 1979). The "Pearl" is another poet poem of this type, however, it is slightly shorter than Piers Plowman's poem in length. As opposed to the preceding poetry, this one is more artistic and literal in nature. This elegy mourning the death of a small kid extols the innocence of children in the Divine court and hails their innocence. After finishing this piece, the viewer will be provided with an imposing and impressive image of Paradise and also the sensation of waking from a dream. The most important feature of this poem, as well as other texts from the late Middle Ages, is the integration of human people with the divine (Amodeo, 2000). The manifestation of religious views, on the other hand, is extremely evident in the poetry cited above. It was during the medieval period that the Anglo-Saxon society, which was based on the concept of king retainer, gradually evolved into the feudalism structure.

2. RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

Classical pagan philosophy and Renaissance philosophy are both believed to be the philosophy of Western Europe during the period between two epochs: the demise of classical pagan philosophy and Renaissance philosophy. Because it is not possible to cover such a large topic in detail in a single article, the present study provides an overview of some of the major philosophical and associated movements that emerged during the medieval period. A major



philosophical effect on life and writing during the Middle Ages was the Roman Catholic Church, which was the most powerful philosophical influence of the period. In this section, the researcher of the current study examined the relationship between religion and philosophy, as well as the influences of religion and philosophy on some of the literature material of the medieval period. Following the spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire, popular Greek philosophy was superseded by the more sophisticated medieval philosophy. In truth, Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Plotinus had significant impacts on the history of philosophy in Europe during the period, and the new philosophers were greatly influenced by Greek intellectuals such as these. In response to the biblical text's introduction of Christianity's new ways of thinking about the critical themes of God, kingdom, and intellectual tradition to society through the offering of the Bible, an extremely serious conflict erupted between the religious establishment and cultural and philosophical institutions. In the course of the fight between Christianity and philosophical institutions, schools of philosophy were decimated as a result. What we can see in the philosophy of the Medieval Age, in addition, is a kind of congruence between the Greek way of thinking and the Christian way of life. In the Middle Ages, several critical questions like the link between reason and faith attracted the attention of philosophers from all faiths, including Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Faith-only positions were supported by the church. During the Medieval Age, for example, the Church theologian Tertullian (155-230 CE) was one of the most ardent supporters of the faith-only viewpoint. Augustine (354-430) was a philosopher who was a pioneer in the Middle Ages. It was the emphasis of this school of philosophy that knowledge and moral excellence should be acquired through divine consciousness and loving God, respectively, rather than through human reasoning. As a matter of fact, Augustine's school of philosophy was founded on his Confessions, which were based on his own life's events.

3. CHRISTIANITY AND ENGLISH LITERATURE

Until the end of the 3rd century, the apologetics genre was the most popular and was produced by most the prominent writers, including Minucius Felix, Tertullian, Arnobius, and Lactantius (justifications of Christianity). St. Jerome was responsible for the translation of the Bible into Latin in the 4th century. The Vulgate edition of the Bible was created in order to boost the use of Latin language among the Church Fathers of the 4th century, including Ambrose of Milan



and St. Augustine of Hippo, who both lived during this time period. Arianism and other theological conflicts of the day occupied most of their writing, which is why they were so influential (Abrams, 1979). It also appears that the majority of Old English Literature was composed to be recited and read aloud by storytellers and scopers, particularly during night meetings, rather than written down. The epic storytellers read or sang the literature in certain musical rows, accompanied by a harp, to narrate the story. Poetry and lyrics composed on the futility of life and human powerlessness to fight against fate and destiny were read aloud and sung with great emotion during this time of loss. Beowulf, the well-known epic poem, as well as Cynewulf and Caedmon, the two poets who created poetry based on the Gospel as well as religious traditions and narrations, are among the works that were sung under unique circumstances. The Beowulf epic is a famous and magnificent example of a poem in Old English literature, and it is a must-read for everyone. Known as Beowulf, he is a Scandinavian hero who fought and battled with Grendel and Grendel's mother, as well as the Dragon. People saw him not just as a champion, but also as their Saviour and staunch supporter. When it comes to ancient times, this (the Savior) is what the vast majority of Old English literature is devoted to. In reality, the Beowulf epic represents the heroic actions of a human who is larger than life in size and strength. Beowulf has a prominent place in the national lore of the people who wrote it, and he is a hero of the people who created it (Horobin & Smith, 2002). When one considers the crucial role played by the Church to define, determine, and control the religious beliefs of individuals, as well as the creation of literature by clergies and priests based on those religious beliefs and concepts, it is inevitable that myths and heroes such as the ones found in the epic poem Beowulf would appear in literary works of that time. One of the other characteristics of the Beowulf that is founded on religious ideas is that it reduces the role of fate and increases the role of human strength and free will, among other things. Furthermore, the Christian belief in one's reliance on God appears to be expressed in this epic, according to the author. The fact that most of those works were mandated and produced by Christian monks explains why this trait may be found in many other stories that have survived from that historical period as well. A large proportion of the literary works of that century were authored by religious believers themselves, a development that occurred when the ancient English people abandoned their old religious beliefs. Caedmon, who lived in the 7th century, is



considered to be the first poet to write in the English language. Caedmon was recorded by Saint Bede the Venerable, a member of the Christian clergy from the 8th century, who described him as an uneducated shepherd. He went on to say that one night he was awakened by a voice that instructed him to write the tale of the creation, which he dutifully accomplished. The poetry of Caedmon was written by Saint Bede and included in his book (as prose). In addition to the lengthy religious poems that we discussed previously, certain songs from that era have survived to the present day. And, with the exception of Christian doctrine, the majority of old Anglo-Saxons believed that those kinds of songs were associated with sad and unfortunate conditions. The Wanderer and The Seafarer are two excellent instances of this type of songwriting in action. During this time period, religious works dominated the literary prose that was written. Saint Bede wrote in Latin the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (the Christian history of the English nation), which is one of the best ancient works ever written. In the 8th century, this poem was penned. Following on from what has been said previously, throughout the age of Medieval English literature, German tribes and countries contributed their language as well as their literary traditions to the poetry of Britain, and those traditions were preserved in Britain until the invasion of the French Normans.

CONCLUSION

The current researcher examined the relationship between religion and philosophy, as well as their influences on some Middle Age literature content. The findings revealed that the Catholic Church was the only unifying force in the Roman Empire's realm of Europe. It was the Middle Ages. At the end of the Roman Empire, it remained the most powerful force and institution, as well as the only centre of study. Several good Middle Age literary works have survived, demonstrating the rich culture of the medieval peoples, who made significant breakthroughs in art, literature, science, and medicine. The medieval period's cultural growth created the way for the concepts that would lead to the Renaissance. For example, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is regarded as one of the greatest masterpieces of Middle English literature. In this literary work, Chaucer utilized satire to represent pilgrims in the "General Prologue" to show the Church's widespread corruption. The current study evaluated several literary works and found that most of the themes that Middle Age writers concentrated on were directly tied to God, his existence, or creative activity, similar to Alston's (1998) findings. Although all events in life were



assigned to God's plan, the writers of this period strived to compose lyric poetry and dramas tied to the Church and its position in the society in which the people lived, according to Fichtenau (1992). During the Middle Ages, Mother Julian of Norwich, for example, wrote about God's power and influence (Fichtenau, 1992). Throughout the Middle Ages, some key concerns drew the attention of prominent philosophers from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish faith systems. The first essential issue, in a nutshell, was the interaction between two contentious issues: faith and reason. In this relationship, various philosophical movements were looking for the main cornerstone of key religious and philosophical views, i.e. is it based on faith or reason? To arrive at an answer, some philosophers looked to Athens and the Greek schools of philosophy, which served as symbols of reason and the most popular way of thinking in the world at the time. Furthermore, the representative of faith, namely Jerusalem, was the focus of most philosophers' attention in order to determine whether reason has anything to do with faith. In medieval literature, the most commonly used terms to characterize God were "powerful" and "good."

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