

Lesson 6: Medieval England under the Norman Conquest

Source: Daniel Hannan, *Inventing Freedom: How the English Peoples Made the Modern World* (2013).

The Battle of Hastings (AD 1066)

Edward the Confessor dies as the last king in the line of Alfred the Great, but without a son. Who will be king now?

William, Duke of Normandy (second cousin) (supported by the pope) mailed men on cavalry with infantry and archers	vs.	Harold Godwinson (brother-in-law) (supported by the English Witan) large English army (<i>fyrð</i>) with shield wall
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Problems: Norwegian invasion (north) and storm-damaged fleet (south)—remember Ecclesiastes 9:11.

Result: All three Godwinson brothers (ironic name!) die—William I coronated on Christmas Day, AD 1066.

Who were these Normans? And what resulted from their invasion and conquest of England?

Vikings – the Norsemen who became Normans

The name “viking” is a later term for these pillaging Scandinavian peoples of the longboat (9th-11th centuries). The horned helmet is a later myth popularized by Richard Wagner, *The Ring Cycle* (cf. Patrick hagiography). Contemporaries called them “Danes” or “Norse Men” or “pagans”—why?

Norse Gods – Odin (chief), Thor (thunder), Freyr (goddess of fertility) – cf. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday
Christianity came late, through missionaries (e.g. to Harold Bluetooth of Denmark, AD 960) or settlement.

Ralph Winter – if we will not go to the pagans, God will send the pagans to us (cf. 2 Kings 5:2-4).

Settlements: Orkney, Scotland Ukraine and Russia regions Iceland – pagan until AD 1000
Dublin, Ireland Southern Italy - mercenaries Greenland – Eric the Red
Jorvik (York moved) Vinland – Leif the Lucky (the New World!)

Normandy: To protect himself, Frankish king Charles the Simple gave daughter and land to Rollo of Norway.

Within a century, those pillaging monasteries started building monasteries (e.g. Bec Abbey – AD 1041).

The *Norse Men* became *Normans* speaking the French language and adopting the French culture.

Feudalism – the Continental system of lords and manors was imposed upon freedom-loving England

William the Conqueror – an absolute monarchy with 8000 men ruled a nation of 1,000,000 people

Castles – not to protect England, but to oppress English serfs

200 lords held 92% of the land of England directly from the king (with only two Anglo-Saxon lords)

English serfs worked the lord’s estates and were forbidden to leave without his permission.

Only 8% of the population dwelt in settlements of 450 or more people.

However, over a century later, the immigrant lords were cut off from Normandy and adopted English identity:

Magna Carta (AD 1215)

The pope excommunicated foul King John and placed his land under interdict (no sacraments).

To save his soul, the king gave England to the pope and then leased it for a yearly sum from taxes.

The lords held him to due process, such as trial by jury under “the law of the land” (Article 29).

King John chafed – Civil War – dies – Henry III is you, so Parliament resumes (House of Lords).

King Henry III chafed – Civil War – Simon de Montfort calls elected men (House of Commons).

Peasants Revolt (AD 1381) – not truly peasants—Englishmen demand rights of trade, hunting, and fishing

Can you see the ideal of liberty in King Arthur and his knights of the round table?

Class Division – language marks the division between upper French society and lower English society

Norman Last Names – still richer on average (Balliol, Baskerville, Darcy, Glanville, Lacy, Somerville)

Norman First Names – adopted by the English for their children (Roger, Richard, Robert)

Enriched vocabulary with same denotation but different connotation:

<u>beef, pork, mutton</u>	← when it is on the plate of the French rich
cow, pig, sheep	← when it is in the field under the care of the English poor

Many poets, writers, and speakers have found rhetorical power returning to Anglo-Saxon based English:

“Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country” (John F. Kennedy).

The handout has Anglo-Saxon based poetry and a discussion on the English ballad of Robin Hood.

Poetry and Story Based on Anglo-Saxon Ideals of Language and Liberty

The English language has a Germanic base (Anglo-Saxon) with a Latin-enriched vocabulary (French). In this American poetry, find whatever words you can that are from the Latin-based French of the Normans:

The Last Word of a Bluebird

Robert Frost (1874-1963)

As I went out a Crow
In a low voice said, "Oh,
I was looking for you.
How do you do?
I just came to tell you
To tell Lesley (will you?)
That her little Bluebird
Wanted me to bring word
That the north wind last night
That made the stars bright
And made ice on the trough
Almost made him cough
His tail feathers off.
He just had to fly!
But he sent her Good-by,
And said to be good,
And wear her red hood,
And look for skunk tracks
In the snow with an ax—
And do everything!
And perhaps in the spring
He would come back and sing."

The Birthplace

Robert Frost (1874-1963)

Here further up the mountain slope
Than there was every any hope,
My father built, enclosed a spring,
Strung chains of wall round everything,
Subdued the growth of earth to grass,
And brought our various lives to pass.
A dozen girls and boys we were.
The mountain seemed to like the stir,
And made of us a little while--
With always something in her smile.
Today she wouldn't know our name.
(No girl's, of course, has stayed the same.)
The mountain pushed us off her knees.
And now her lap is full of trees.

Discussion Question for *King Arthur and Robin Hood*.

Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain* (AD 1136)

This Welsh clergyman wrote about King Arthur in the genre of real history, but it really a national myth.

What do you think about the truthfulness of using the genre of history for story?

What do you think about the inclusion of wizards and magic in storytelling?

Discuss the implications of Philippians 4:8 as broad parameters or simply an ideal.

Why are young people often captivated by chivalry, swashbuckling, and Camelot?

Wynkyn de Worde (printer), *A Lytell Geste of Robyn Hood* (AD 1495)

This first detailed "biography" of Robin Hood brings together stories of this "creation of the ballad-muse."

The Bible is clear that we should submit to our government (Romans 13:1-7, Titus 3:1-2, 1 Peter 2:13-17).

When would it be right to rob from the rich and give to the poor?

What if he gave back to the poor only what had been stolen from them?

What if he kept nothing for himself?

Is he really stealing, when he really intends to do good?

Is this really paying evil back for evil? Revenge?

Would the end justify the means?

And if it is good, or even a necessary evil, should it become a form of entertainment?

Think about a soldier who did his duty and then boasts about the violence and gore.

Think about a soldier who did his duty but reluctantly tells quiet memories.

Source: *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*, ed. Maria Leach, 2 vols. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1950), pp. 949-50.