

1. Anglo-Norman Literature 1. Introduction Norman Conquest The Normans was originally a hardy race of sea rovers living in Scandinavia. In the 10th century, they conquered a part of northern France, which has been called Normandy, and settled down there. They adopted French as their language and embraced Christianity. They became renowned for their learning, their military prowess and their organizing ability. The Duke of Normandy William the Great was an able military leader and statesman. In the year 1066, he led the Norman army to attack England. The two armies met and fought at Hastings. Finally the English army was defeated. William and his men marched speedily into London and William became the King of England. After the conquest, feudal system was established in English society. The new king ruled England with a high hand. He made a thorough job of taking over the country, and had everything inventoried. William saw himself as the owner of the country. He owned the land and everything in it. The feudal social structure in England was just like the pyramid in Egypt. At its top was the King William and below him were his noblemen such as barons and knights. Social Conditions in the Feudal England In the feudal society, class division was very obvious, and class contradictions became very sharp. The peasants, who had become serfs, toiled all the year round for the feudal landlords. The church and court were united to control and oppress the people. Those who dared to say anything against the feudal order would be put to death. Moreover, continuous wars with other countries and diseases added miseries to the English people. The government had no sympathy with the people. Instead, they enforced heavy taxes upon the people. The poor peasants could not endure any longer, and they rose up to fight against the ruling class. The year 1381 witnessed a famous peasant uprising led by Wat Tyler and John Ball. Though it failed and its leaders were killed, it gave the ruling class a heavy blow. The Influence of the Norman Conquest upon English Language and Literature After the conquest, the Normans introduced the body of customs and ideals known as chivalry into England. The knightly code, the romantic interest in women, tenderness and reverence paid to Virgin Mary were reflected in literature.