

# FIFTEENTH CENTURY PROSE

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" Unlike the poetry of the time , prose suffered from no retrogression. There was perceptible increase in skill. Due to increased practices there was a growing perception of the beauties of rhythm and cadence and in the purely formal sense, there was the appearance of the prose paragraph. Above all the chief prose styles--- the ornate, the middle and the plain-- are appearing faintly but perceptibly. With their arrival rapid development of prose is assured. "

-- E. Albert

English prose was cultivated and promoted by the following writers of the age.

## REGINALD PECOCK (1390-1490)

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The leamed Pecock wrote two prose works (1) The Repressor of Overmuch Blaming of the Clergy, and (2) The Book of Faith. His prose is often rugged and obscure, and is marked by his preference for English words in place of Latin diction .His vocabulary was even excessive and bordered on land of tautology and redundance. His habit of inversion, of the use of synonym, of finishing his sentence with a verb, does not make it easier to know exactly where we are in any of his arguments and, although there is almost invariably a clear logical thread running throughout all that he writes, it is always apparent on a reading.

## FORTESQUE ( 1394-1476)

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In contrast to Pecoock stands Fortesque who expresses his ideas with point and clarity. He avoids Pecoock's pattern of a long , complicated sentence. In common with other fifteenth century writers, Fortesque is not capable of writing a highly complex prose, but what straightforwardness, simplicity, and clear thinking could accomplish may be seen in almost any page of the Governance of England.

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## WILLIAM CAXTON (1422-91)

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William Caxton, the first English printer , was also a prose writer. It could be difficult to overestimate the debt English Literature to Caxton. He printed almost every work of real quality known in his day , including those of Chaucer and Malory. In addition, he made and printed twenty- four translations from French, Dutch and Latin texts, of which the most remarkable were the two earliest, the Reeuyell of the Histories of Troye (1471) and The Game and Playe of the Chess (1475). At first Caxton wanted to employ the elegant and ornate literary style, but soon he found that he was unfitted for the job . Hence he swtched on to a much simpler style and preferred to homely prose for translation. To make himself more certain of being understood he sometimes placed the French word beside

the English word as chase and hunt . The practice of using pairs of synonymous was cultivated by Caxton. The best of his prose can be found in his explanatory prefaces. He aimed at clarity and ease in prose style, but inspite of his best intention " his style is marred, and a tendency to introduce foreign words and phrases which he neglected to translate " (E. Albert).

### JOHN FISHER (1459-1535)

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Fisher was a religious figure who was beheaded by the orders of Henry VIII. He wrote much in Latin, and in English he is represented by a small collection of a high quality, they have their importance in the history of prose development. They are the first of the rhetorical--- religious books that for several centuries were to be an outstanding feature of English prose. In addition, they mark a distinctive step ahead in the evolution of English prose style of the orator and are, therefore, rhetorical and rhythmical in tone. In brief, in the style of Fisher we can observe the beginning of an ornate style. Fisher was the direct ancestor of the prose style of Jeremy Taylor and other divines of the seventeen century.

### HUGH LATIMER (1485-1555)

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Latimer's English prose works consist of two volumes of sermons published in 1549. They are remarkable for their plain and dogmatic exposition, their graphical

power, and their homely appeal .He is first of the writers of plain style.

### SIR THOMAS MORE (1478-1535)

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He is well- known for his "Utopia" which presents the picture of an imaginative ideal state on the socialistic pattern. His English prose works include " The Life of John Picus ", The History of Richard III", and a number of tracts and letters . His was the first writer of middle style, neither soaring to rhythmic felicities of Fisher , nor scaling down to the simplicity of Caxton.

### SIR THOMAS MALORY ( DIED 1471)

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Malory is well-known for his " Morte D' Arthur ". This work, like the travels of Mandeville, is a compilation. The French Arthurian romances are drawn upon to create a prose romance of great length and detail .The book is written with a uniform dignity and fervour. It is skilful blend of dialogue and narrative and is full of colour and life . His style is clear, smooth and transparent though it breathes a soft archaic odour. The charm of his prose lies its poetic reminiscences.

### THE PASTON LETTERS

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" The Paston Letters ", published during the fifteenth century, give us considerable insight into the domestic life of the times. They reveal the social and political

conditions of the age. There are passages in the letters which suggest the barbarism of the period but the picture as a whole is of a very modern middle-class society, much engrossed in money matters , leases and the letting of land , management of property and handling of law -suits. There is nothing literary in these letters. The general style of these letters is straightforward and vivid .Their writers reveal the ability of many to write unaffected prose. These letter writers deal with every kind of topic : description of riots, forays, executions, requests for money, books , cooking, wedding, illness in a style that is free from the age .The letter writers established a tradition of writing good prose before the end of the century.

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