

CHAUCER'S *THE* *CANTERBURY TALES*

English II Pre-AP

I. Geoffrey Chaucer

(Finally – an author whose name we know!)



- Often called the “Father of English Poetry”
- Born sometime around 1343; died sometime around 1400
- Well connected
- A public servant
 - Comptroller of customs
 - Justice of the peace
 - Member of Parliament
 - Trade/diplomatic missions

Death – ca. 1400 – Poets' Corner



II. *Canterbury Tales* Manuscripts

- Many manuscripts survive
- None are in Chaucer's hand



III. *The Canterbury Tales* – The Basics



- Incomplete
 - only 24 of an intended 100 tales written
 - no set order
- Frame Narrative
 - Frame tale of a pilgrimage to Canterbury
 - Pilgrims tell tales (2 on way there, 2 on way back) to pass the time

IV. Pilgrimages and Their Purpose

- **Pilgrimage**: a journey to a sacred, holy place or shrine
- **Pilgrim**: a person who makes a pilgrimage
- Common Reasons:
 - Improve chances of salvation
 - Be healed
 - Atone for sins



V. Canterbury and Thomas Becket



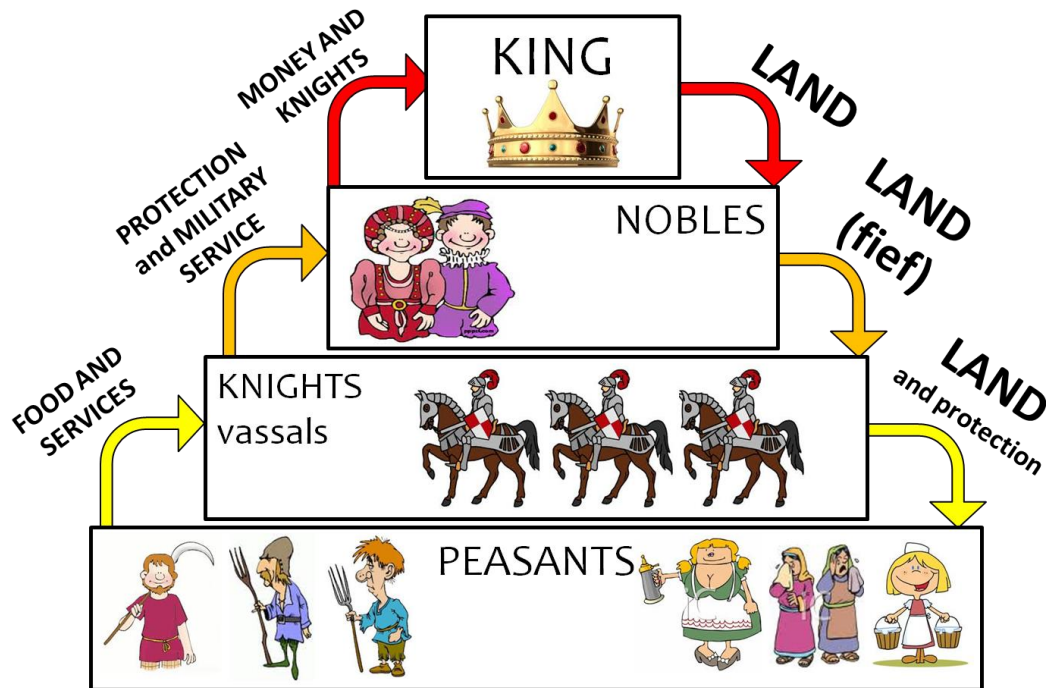
V. Canterbury and Thomas Becket



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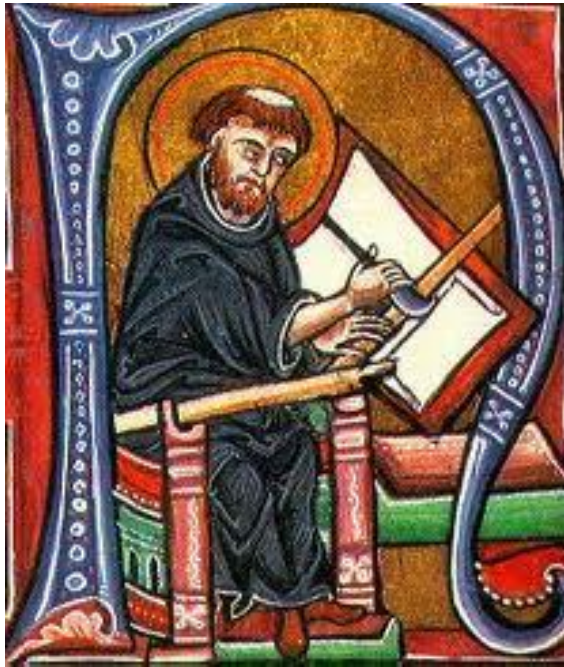
VI. Social Class Structure



Feudal Pyramid of Power

- Feudalism
 - King grants land to lords
 - Lords give fiefs to knights and squires
 - Serfs
- Urban Society
 - Includes characters like
 - Merchant
 - Sergeant-at-arms
 - Oxford Cleric
 - Wife of Bath

VI. Social Class Structure

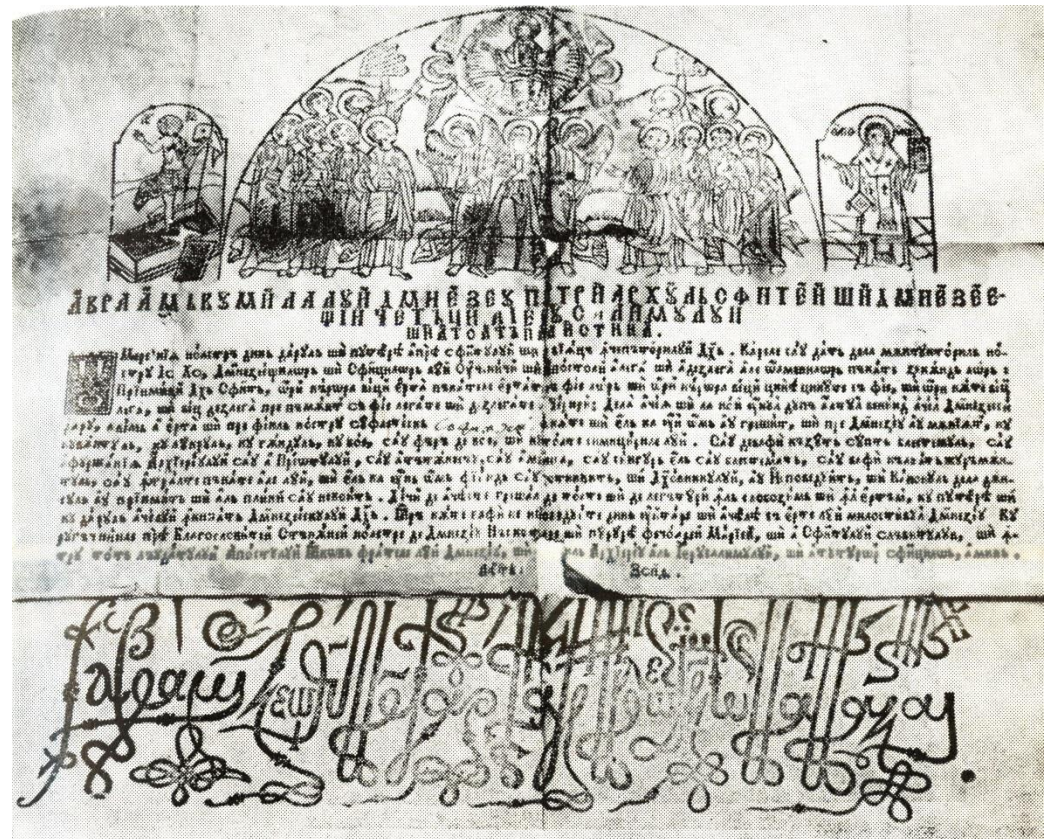


- Social Classes
 - Clergy – “those who pray”
 - Regular clergy
 - Secular clergy
 - Other
 - Summoners
 - Pardoners
 - Nobility – “those who fight”
 - Commoners – “those who work”
 - Freeman
 - Serfs



VII. Role of the Church

- Power of the Church
- Problems/Corruption within the Church
 - Simony
 - Indulgences
- Great Schism



VIII. Medieval Literature and Beliefs

A. Literary Genres

A. **Romance**

B. **Breton Lay** – a short, rhymed tale of love or chivalry that often includes Celtic or supernatural influences

C. **Beast Fable** – a short allegory in which animals with human qualities teach a moral lesson

D. **Mock-heroic** – a tale which treats a trivial subject in a “grand” or “epic” style

E. **Exemplum** – a moralized tale; a sermon that illustrates a known moral lesson

F. **Fabliaux** – bawdy stories that center on a trick or ruse

VIII. Medieval Literature and Beliefs

PHYSICAL FEATURE	CHARACTER
Red headed	Quick-tempered
Buxom	Jolly
Very Thin	Stingy, bad tempered
Neat	Pride
Wear red	Aggressive
Wear black	Melancholy
Blue	Constantly in love
Green	Lightness in love, envy
Gapped teeth	Bold, aggressive, traveler, amorous
White neck	Sign of licentiousness
High brow	Nobility; intelligence
Low brow	Dullness; low breeding; sometimes even criminality

VIII. Medieval Literature and Beliefs

Element	Temperament	Body Fluid controlled by	Season & Quality	Personality	Weaknesses
Air	Sanguine	Blood	Spring Hot, moist	Talkers, lively, promoters, impulsive, vivacious, optimistic	Nervous, outgoing, interrupts
Fire	Choleric	Yellow bile	Summer Hot, dry	Confident, leaders, inventive, self-reliant	Tactless, workaholics, impatient, stubborn
Earth	Melancholic	Black bile	Autumn cold, dry	Pensive, profound, faithful, analytical, orderly	Depression, resentful, negative
Water	Phlegmatic	Phlegm	Winter Cold, moist	Serene, listeners, dry-humored, negotiators	Anxious, indecisive, slow, shy

IX. Literary Terms To Remember

- Exaggeration/Hyperbole
- Stereotype
- Understatement/Litotes
- Irony – Situation, Dramatic, and Verbal (SARCASM)
- Satire
 - **Horatian Satire** – lighthearted and playful; witty and wise (ex. *The Simpsons*)
 - **Juvenalian Satire** – darker and more caustic; less emphasis on humor; can become hurtful or offensive to the subject of the satire (ex. *Lord of the Flies*, *Fahrenheit 451*)

X. What to Look For

Generally

- Each pilgrim – a type of character, or a unique individual?
 - Are the pilgrim's shortcomings and positive qualities attributed to him or her alone, or can they be generalized to that profession?
- Does the profile of each pilgrim reveal any overt complaints about the Church, the nobility, or commoners in the Medieval Period?
- How does the pilgrim reveal his or her character in the story he/she tells?
- Why is it significant that this particular pilgrim tells this specific tale? What kind of tale is told? What does that reveal?
- What points is Chaucer making about medieval society? How does he show without preaching?

X. What to Look For

The Knight's Tale– CUT ☹️

- Use of descriptions of war to characterize Knight
- Evidence of *pathos* and its use
- General statements made about the human condition
- The concept of fate vs. free will
- Courtly love, chivalry, and connections to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (YAY!) 😊

Canterbury Tales: “Wife of Bath”

- What metaphors does she use? Why?
- What is the purpose of the Biblical allusions?
- What is the purpose of literary allusions?
- How is she a feminist?
- How is she an anti-feminist?
- Under what genres could we define Wife of Bath?

- What purpose does the Wife serve for Chaucer?