English Literature I

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Tutorías: L-X: 10.30-13.30h
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### SEPTEMBER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mon 29</td>
<td>Introduction to the Anglo-Saxon period and Old English culture and literature (cont.)</td>
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</tbody>
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### OCTOBER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wed 1</td>
<td>In-class analysis of religious poetry: The Venerable Bede and “Caedmon’s Hymn”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In-class analysis of The Dream of the Rood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon 6</td>
<td>In-class analysis of Old English Elegies: The Wanderer and The Wife’s Lament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 8</td>
<td>The German heroic tradition and introduction to epic poetry: The Battle of Maldon and Beowulf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 15</td>
<td>In-class analysis of Beowulf (first 661 lines)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon 20</td>
<td>In-class analysis of Beowulf (up to line 1250)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 22</td>
<td>In-class analysis of Beowulf (up to line 1798)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon 27</td>
<td>In-class analysis of Beowulf (up to line 2199)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 29</td>
<td>In-class analysis of Beowulf (up to end)</td>
</tr>
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### NOVEMBER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mon 3</td>
<td>Introduction to the Middle-English period and Middle-English culture and literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 5</td>
<td>In-class analysis of William Langland’s “Prologue” To The Vision of Piers Plowman [The Field of Folk]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon 10</td>
<td>Introduction to Geoffrey Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 12</td>
<td>In-class analysis of “The General Prologue” to The Canterbury Tales (lines 1-42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon 17</td>
<td>In-class analysis of “The General Prologue”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 19</td>
<td>In-class analysis of “The General Prologue”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon 24</td>
<td>In-class analysis of “The General Prologue”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 26</td>
<td>In-class analysis of “The General Prologue”</td>
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### DECEMBER

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wed 3</td>
<td>In-class analysis of Wife of Bath’s Prologue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 10</td>
<td>In-class analysis of Wife of Bath’s Tale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon 15</td>
<td>Introduction to Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 17</td>
<td>Continuous assessment examination (5%)</td>
</tr>
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CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wed 7</td>
<td>In-class analysis of <em>Hamlet</em> (Act I)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon 12</td>
<td>In-class analysis of <em>Hamlet</em> (Acts II–III)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 14</td>
<td>In-class analysis of <em>Hamlet</em> (Acts III–IV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon 19</td>
<td>In-class analysis of <em>Hamlet</em> (Act IV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 21</td>
<td>In-class analysis of <em>Hamlet</em> (Act V)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri 23</td>
<td><strong>Continuous assessment examination (5%)</strong></td>
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Introduction to the Middle Ages

Read the Introduction in the Norton Anthology and answer the questions below:

1. What dates are given as the beginning and end of the Middle Ages?
   Caedmon’s Hymn (end of 7th c) to 1485 (accession of Henry VII, beginning of Tudor dynasty).

2. When and where did the Anglo-Saxons invade Britain? Which language did they speak?
   450, south-west. A form similar to what we call Old English, similar to other Germanic languages.

3. When did the Normans invade Britain and why did they rescue the legend of king Arthur? Which was the language of the nobility in this period?
   Because it was previous to the Anglo-Saxon culture they wanted to replace, and they aimed at connecting with a previous root that justified their presence in Britain. The language of the nobility in this period was French.

4. Which military event began to restitute the prestige of English at the British court?
   Edward III’s loss of his French territories in 1336.

5. Why did Chaucer choose English for the composition of The Canterbury Tales in 1400?
   Because the nobility began to be bilingual and literary patronage could be obtained for texts in English.

6. What centuries does the Middle English period comprise?
   14th and 15th.

Anglo-Saxon Literature

7. How did Christianity affect Anglo-Saxon literature?
   There was not writing in Britain before Christianity, only the oral tradition.

8. Which British king stopped the second wave of Germanic invasions and why is he relevant for Anglo-Saxon literature?
   King Alfred of the West Saxons from 871 to 899, who converted to Christianity and translated works from Latin into Old English.

9. How are the heroic and the Christian literary traditions mixed in Anglo-Saxon poetry?
   The Anglo-Saxons were fascinated by the distant culture of their pagan ancestors; much of the Christian poetry is cast in heroic mode (Dream of the Rood and Caedmon’s Hymn), while Christian values and references pervade heroic compositions (Beowulf).

10. Describe the poetic language of Anglo-Saxon poetry.
   1) Versification: poetic diction (four accents per line), formulaic phrases, repetition of parallel syntactic structures, 2) contains a multiplicity of terms for lord, warrior, spear, shield, and so on. 3) Synecdoque and metonym are common figures of speech, as well as 4) kennings and poetic riddles. Also, 5) variation (parallel appositive expressions), 6) irony and litotes (ironic understatement), 7) formal and dignified speech that was distant from everyday language.

Anglo-Norman Literature

11. When did the Normans invade Britain?
   Battle of Hastings 1066.

12. Which two Norman poets are thought to have written for the court of Henry II and which were their main themes?
   Marie de France (Breton lays; short romances originally told by Bretons), and Chrétien de Troyes (romance of chivalry; knightly adventures are the means of exploring psychological and ethical dilemmas that the knights must solve as they save ladies from monasteries, giants and wicked nights.)
13. Which are the sources of the legend of King Arthur

History of the Kings of Britain written in Latin by Geoffrey of Monmouth (1136-38), who claimed his sources were a book in Welsh, but drew on a few earlier Latin chronicles, and much of the Celtic oral tradition mixed with his fertile imagination.

Anglo-Norman poet Wace, composed a French rhymed version of Monmouth's work in 1155 and English priest Layamon turned it into English alliterative verse and sporadic rhyme around 1200.
Early Religions in England

In the sixth century C.E., missionaries from Ireland and the Continent introduced Christianity to the Anglo-Saxons—actually, reintroduced it, since it had briefly flourished in the southern parts of the British Isles during the Roman occupation, and even after the Roman withdrawal had persisted in the Celtic regions of Scotland and Wales. By the time the earliest poems were composed, therefore, the English people had been Christians for hundreds of years; such Anglo-Saxon poems as "The Dream of the Rood" bear witness to their faith. Our knowledge of the religion of pre-Christian Britain is sketchy, but it is likely that vestiges of paganism assimilated into, or coexisted with, the practice of Christianity: fertility rites were incorporated into the celebration of Easter resurrection, rituals commemorating the dead into All-Hallows Eve and All Saints Day, and elements of winter solstice festivals into the celebration of Christmas.

Medieval Christianity was fairly uniform across Western Europe—hence called "catholic," or universally shared—and its rituals and expectations, common to the whole community, permeated everyday life. The Catholic Church was also an international power structure. In its hierarchy of pope, cardinals, archbishops, and bishops, it resembled the feudal state, but the church power structure coexisted alongside a separate hierarchy of lay authorities with a theoretically different sphere of social responsibilities. The sharing out of lay and ecclesiastical authority in medieval England was sometimes a source of conflict. Chaucer's pilgrims are on their way to visit the memorial shrine to one victim of such struggle: Thomas a Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, who opposed the policies of King Henry III, was assassinated on the king's orders in 1120 and later made a saint. As an international organization, the church conducted its business in the universal language of Latin, and thus although statistically in the period the largest segment of literate persons were monks and priests, the clerical contribution to great writing in English was relatively modest. Yet the lay writers of the period reflect the importance of the church as an institution and the pervasiveness of religion in everyday life.

Adapted from The Norton Anthology of English Literature

Kennings

A kenning is a metaphorical circumlocution, signifying a person or thing by a characteristic or quality. It is used quite often in Anglo Saxon poetry and is used at great length in Beowulf. The language of Beowulf has use of four-beat alliterative line and this allows the use of a variety of kennings.

The use of kennings had such an effect on poetry that many phrases often became cliches. For example, there are many kennings that are used over and over in the story Beowulf. Some examples are: “mail-shirt” for armor, “dwelling place” for residence and “mail armor” for helmet. On the other hand, when the kenning was used with originality, it served the purpose of a metaphor and often had great variety and complexity. Many of these words appear in other readings of Anglo Saxon poetry.
Venerable Bede lived in Northumbria [Northumberland]

The Venerable Bede And “Caedmon’s Hymn” Pages 29-32

Read the introduction to Bede in the Norton Anthology and try to answer the questions below.

1. Why does the Venerable Bede identify Caedmon’s language (English) as “his own”, and not “mine/our own” (p. 25)?
   Because Bede could speak the language of the holy scripture (Latin), but Caedmon could not, and Bede is writing for those who identify Latin as “their” language.

2. How is the conflict between Paganism and Christianity reflected in the text? In other words, how is the social tension or distance between the clergy and the peasant laity reflected in the text?
   Bede
3. Do we learn details of life among the Anglo-Saxon-speaking peasants who live outside the monastery walls? If so, which are they?

4. Do you think Caedmon lied to his literate interrogators when he told them he never had learned any songs from the secular tradition? If so, why?

5. Identify the various poetic devices (i.e. royal epithets, kennings, alliteration, caesura, style, etc.) which appear in Caedmon’s Hymn.

6. Bede comments on the “beauty and dignity” of Caedmon’s composition. What is so strange about such commentary and so ironic about the text you just read?

7. Consider the “repertoire” of Caedmon’s song topics as Bede lists them. Is there a pre-existing pattern for this whole sequence of topics?

The Dream Of The Rood

“The Dream of the Rood” is one of the finest of a large number of religious poems in Anglo-Saxon. Neither the author nor its date of composition is known. It appears in a late tenth-century manuscript made up of old Old English religious poems found in Vercelli, in northern Italy. The poem must antedate its manuscript, because some passages from the Rood’s speech were carved with some variations in runes on the stone of Ruthwell Cross (Southern Scotland) at some time after its construction early in the 8th century. The experience of the Rood; its humiliation at the hands who cut it down and made it into an instrument of punishment for criminals and its humility when the young hero Christ mounts it, has a suggestive relevance to the condition of the dreamer. His isolation and melancholy is typical of exile figures in Anglo-Saxon poetry. Christ and the Rood both act in keeping with, and yet diametrically opposed to, a code of heroic action: Christ is
both heroic in mounting and passive in suffering on the Rood, while the Rood is loyal to its lord, yet must participate in his death.

1) *The Dream of the Rood* is heavily laden with references to pagan culture. How is the heroic code manifested in the poem? In other words, how does the author treat Christian subject matter in terms of heroic themes? In order to answer this question, look closely at how these characters or events are represented in the text:

a) The talking tree/cross (prosopopoeia):

The talking tree/cross is called “the best of all wood” (27) as if it had been “the best of all men.” The rood describes its experience as if it was a living soldier in battle: “There powerful enemies took me” (30), “more than enough foes made me stand fast” (33), which makes Christ description as its lord. The talking tree/cross is a beacon (estandarte de guerra), a token (señal, prenda, given in exchange); references to deeds (hazañas); thanes, warriors, hope of protection.

Besides this image of Christ as a warrior king, the very idea of a talking tree is incredibly animistic, referring to the way in which pagan elements incorporate spirits and other fantastical elements of nature. Paganism puts a great emphasis on the spiritual elements that embody various things in Mother Nature. Specifically in the poem, this belief that natural objects possess a spirit or spiritual elements urges the reader to recognize the tree as an object of worship. Furthermore, the tree’s triumph over death is celebrated by adorning the cross with gold and jewels, in a way worshiping the tree as if it were an idol, remembering the days of pagan’s faith in idolatry.

b) Christ (34, 40-45):

Christ (34, 40-45): rides the Rood in great haste, as if it were a horse, and he anxious to go into battle. Christ’s virtues are those of the warrior’s.

The poem presents Christ as a “heroic warrior, eagerly leaping on the Cross to do a battle with death; the Cross is a loyal retainer who is painfully and paradoxically forced to participate in his lord’s execution (Black, 23.)” Christ can also be seen as “an Anglo-Saxon warrior lord, who is served by his thanes, especially on the cross and who rewards them at the feast of glory in Heaven” (Dockray-Miller, 3.) Thus, the crucifixion of Christ is a victory because Christ could have fought his enemies, but he chose to die on the cross. Christ is identified as stout-hearted (valiente); as a young hero; he is tired after the great struggle; the others are enemies and foes.

c) The crucifixion (55-56):

“Tall creation wept, mourning the king’s fall: Christ was on the cross”

Christ’s death is described as the death of a king (also in Bible, but more as God’s son, with emphasis on his prophetic role, redeeming role)

The dreamer (most likely a pagan at the beginning of the dream) recalls the cross telling him about the crucifixion as if it were a battle.

d) The funeral rite after Christ’s death (68-70):

Not sure where all those warriors come from, it could have been Apostles, but according to Holy Scripture, it was women and not many friends/relatives. They constructed an ‘earth-house’ and started to sing him “a song of sorrow”. As funeral rites in *Beowulf*:

e) The dreamer’s attitude at the end of the poem (110-114, 123-124, 131-143):

It reads like a soldier whose lord is dead and whose fellow soldiers are also dead; he has survived and longs to join them in the afterlife, a heaven of warriors. Loss of patrons; hope of protection. He is like an exiled retainer. Breach in the comitatus.

f) God’s feast in Heaven (148-152):

Footnote 2 in p. 36 is not clarifying. I am not very sure about this; the Bible is also very warrior-like in these descriptions; God’s kingdom, Christ as warrior is already in *Revelations*…

Everybody seated at the feast, in the hall. As in *Beowulf*.

2) Why do you think that the author uses such heroic language and metaphors in order to transmit his Christian message?

3) Let’s now look closely at language and poetic style. Read again the text and identify:

a) The various royal epithets used to identify God/ Jesus Christ:

b) The kennings employed:
c) Litote/Ironic understatement:

I think they are literal.

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**Introduction To Epic Poetry:**

**The Battle Of Maldon & Beowulf**

- Read handout on *The Battle of Maldon*
- Read handout on Seamus Heaney’s translation of *Beowulf*
- Read Introduction to *Beowulf* in the *Norton Anthology*
- Read Niles’ “Ring Composition and the Structure of *Beowulf***

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**The Battle of Maldon – General Background**

1) **Which historical event does it describe?** A significant fight between King Athelstan and Viking raiders led by Olaf Tryggvason, later King of Norway, which took place in August of 991.

2) **Who is the hero of this heroic narrative?** Byrhtnoth, leader of the Essex men, who led most of his followers to face impossible odds in the old heroic spirit.

3) **Which are the main differences and similarities with *Beowulf***?

Similarities: ideals of the old Germanic noble warrior, elegiac tone, at the point of death, the hero gives thanks for the goodness of his life, speech after the lord’s death, reminding comrades of the loyal promises they made at feastings.

Differences: in *Maldon*, greater historical detail, since it was composed shortly after events, simpler and more austere style in its use of ancient poetic diction, more relaxed technical rules, freer in metre, even colloquial, fewer kennings and conventional poetic epithets.

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**Beowulf – General Background**

1) **When was *Beowulf* probably composed?**

2) **Why is it deficient?**

3) **If *Beowulf* is NOT about Englishmen, who is it about?**

4) **Where did they live?**
5) Which historical period does it seem to describe?

6) What is the one historical fact mentioned in the poem we can put a date to?

7) Was the poet who wrote down the version that we have a pagan or a Christian?

8) How do we know?

9) In the warrior society, which was the most important value?
Read *Beowulf* (lines 1-661) and answer the questions below:

1. According to the poet, Shield Sheafson was “one good king”. Why? What are the virtues the poet praises?

2. When he started out in life, what did he have?

3. Explain the implications of verses 20-25.

4. What sort of funeral is Shield Sheafson given? Pay attention to the pagan rituals. Why do you think the poet pays so much attention to describing the funeral boat in detail? (lines 30-52)

5. What is the name of Shield Sheafson’s son?

6. Why is Beow’s son called “Halfdene”?

7. Explain the reasons why Hrothgar decides to build a castle.

8. Why was it called “Hart”?

9. Comment on the importance of fate and anticipation. What type of narrator do we have?

10. What is the function of this prologue? Summarise its content.

11. Pay attention to the way Grendel is characterised (epithets, actions…). What reason is given for his attacking Heorot?

12. Who is Grendel supposedly descended from?

13. How many men did Grendel kill the first time he attacked Heorot (line 122)?

14. How could the warriors save their lives? By sleeping outside the hall, 138-143.

15. What is wergild? Man-price = revenge, footnote 5

16. Why does the poet refer to Grendel’s attacks as “lonely war”? (l. 164)

17. What does Grendel not dare do?

18. Note the poet’s digressions from the events he is narrating and comment (lines 175-188). Religious considerations might explain Hrothgar’s disgrace or might be a residue from original composition.
19. Where was Beowulf when he heard about Grendel’s attack? (line. 195)

20. How many men did he take with him to Denmark? (l. 207)

21. Who speaks to Beowulf and his men on their arrival? (l. 229)

22. How does he speak? (ls. 237-257) (See also lines 359 & 391-8)

23. What is Beowulf’s father name? (l. 263)

24. List names for Beowulf on pp. 45-47.

25. Did Hrothgar, king of the West-Danes/the Bright-Danes or Shieldings, know Beowulf? (L. 371-2)

26. How does Beowulf intend to fight Grendel? (ls. 426-440)

27. What does Beowulf believe about the outcome of the fight with Grendel? (l. 441 & 455)

28. Comment on the festive mood in this passage and the techniques used by the poet to attain it.

29. What is the role of Unferth? Comment on the function of the “Breca episode” (one of the many digressions in the narrative). Lines 504-581.

30. Find references to the role of fate and the importance of courage.
31. Wealthheow, Hrothgar’s wife, makes her first appearance in this part (ls. 612-641). What is her role? Does it appear to you as a mere ornament or can you find any hints of a more important role played by Hrothgar’s wife?

32. Why does Beowulf boast? (l. 639 & 676-678) (also ls. 700-702)

33. Pay attention to the Pagan rituals of aristocratic Anglo-Saxon life (651-661).

**General For The Whole Part**

34. Give an image of the composite hero emanating from the different characters that appear in this part.

35. Pay attention to the mixture of Christian and pagan elements in this fragment. Which features of the Christian tradition do you identity?

**The Fight With Grendel & Feast At Heorot (Pp. 55-69)**

1. Dramatic tension before the fight. Comment on the way the narrator changes his focus from Grendel (outside) to Beowulf (inside). (ls. 703-748). Analyse the shifting narrative point of view in this passage.

2. **How does Beowulf attack Grendel?** (l. 750)

3. **Why does Grendel wail or scream?** (ls. 781-789) 786-

4. Why cannot Beowulf’s warriors help him fight against Grendel? (ls. 794-804) 801-802
5. As Grendel goes home to die, what proof does Beowulf have that he has won? (ls. 832-835)

Celebration at Heorot

6. Why is it relevant that Sigemund’s story is told at this point in the narrative? (ls. 883-914)

7. Why should the king walk “in majesty from the women’s quarters...with a numerous train”?


9. Summarise the content of the “Finnsburg episode”. What topics does it deal with? How is it related to the rest of the poem? (ls. 1069-1158)

10. How does the Queen reward Beowulf? (ls. 1191-1196)

11. What is the difference between the Queen’s first appearance and now? (ls. 1214-1231)


13. How is mystery/dramatic tension achieved in the last stanza? (ls. 1232-1250).

14. Comment on the festive mood in the passage and contrast it with the one previously analysed. There are riches delivered to Beowulf and his men, there is also a poem told about the Danish murdering of Finn and

General For The Whole Part

15. Find examples of intrusions on the part of the poet and comment on their function.
16. Analyse women’s role as “peace-weavers” in this warrior society.

The Fight With Grendel’s Mother (Lines 1251-1798, Pp. 69-80)

1. Pay attention to the poet’s characterization of Grendel’s mother. Which are her reasons behind her attack of Heorot?

2. Comment on the role of the natural setting.

3. Who does Grendel’s mother kill first? (Is. 1294; 1323-1329)

4. What trophy does she take as well from Heorot? (Is. 1302-1303)

5. What happens to people and animals when they get closer to where Grendel and his mother live? (lines 1368-1372)

6. What do the warriors find when looking for Grendel’s mother? (l. 1421)

7. As Beowulf gets ready for battle with mother in the lake (Is. 1442-1491), Unferth (who had enviously criticized him before) give him?

8. How long does it take Beowulf to dive to the bottom of the lake? (l. 1495)

9. Page 66 is full of kennings to describe Grendel’s mother (Is. 1518-1519), helmet (l. 1515) and his sword (Is. 1523, 1532). Identify these kennings and explain their word formation.

10. What protected Beowulf from Grendel’s mother’s grip? (l. 1503)

11. Is the sword “Hrunting” successful against Grendel’s mother? (Is. 1524; 1531)

12. What does Beowulf kill Grendel’s mother with? (Is. 1557-1569)
13. What treasure does Beowulf take from the bottom of the lake? (ls. 1590; 1612-1617)

14. Where do they take Grendel’s head? (ls. 1647-1660)

[Another celebration at Heorot]

15. The festive mood reappears once more. Establish the similarities and differences with previous passages of the same kind.

16. Hrothgar’s speech: a new digression in the narrative. What function does it play?

17. How does Hrothgar advice Beowulf when he arrives triumphantly to the hall? (ls. 1758-1768)

General For The Whole Part


19. Compare the fight against Grendel with the one against his mother and comment on the way both events are reported: narrative point of view, dramatic tension, change in rhythm, mood, etc.
1. How is Beowulf's kind heart demonstrated in the first stanza of this section? (ls. 1808-1812)

2. How does Hrothgar reward Beowulf before he leaves Denmark? (ls. 1866-69)


4. Pay attention to characterisation through language; exchanges between Hrothgar and Beowulf. Perlocutionary effect of their illocutionary speech acts.

5. Pay attention to the changes in the narrative pattern (lineal narrative, breaches in the lineal narrative: any type of digression or anticipations).

6. Identify 2 kennings in the 3rd paragraph of page 74 (lines 1903-13), which describe Beowulf’s boat as he sails back to Geatland?.

7. What is the name of Hygelac’s wife? How is she described? (lines 1925-31).

8. Why is the story of Queen Modthryth introduced at this point in the narrative? (lines 1932-33) What does it tell us about the role of women in Anglo-Saxon society?

9. According to the poet, what must be the role of a good queen? (lines 1942-43; 2016-19).

10. What is Hygd’s role when Beowulf and his men arrive at Hygelac’s palace? (lines 1980-83).

11. Pay attention to the characterisation of Hygelac and Hygd and their relationship with Beowulf.

12. Pay attention to Beowulf as narrator. How do his several narratives contribute to the building up of the story?

13. What is the purpose of Freawaru’s marriage with Ingeld? (lines 2026-28)

15. Comment on the narrative technique used in verses 2163-2176.

16. What do we learn about Beowulf at the end of this section? How was he regarded in his homeland before returning from Denmark? (lines 2183-89, 2195-2196)


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**Beowulf And The Dragon (Pp. 88-101, Lines 2200-2820)**

1. Which is the function of lines 2200-2216?

2. How long is Beowulf king before the dragon attacks? (l. 2210)

3. Why does the dragon wake up? (l. 2214) What motivated his attack? Comment on the chain of events leading up to it.

4. Contrast the characterization of the dragon with those made of Grendel and his mother.

5. For how long had the dragon been guarding the treasure? (l. 2278)

6. Digression about the dragon’s hoard. Comment on the elegiac mood of this part (2231-2270)

7. At what time of day or night does the dragon attack? (ls. 2307 & 2320)

8. What does the dragon burn down? (l. 2325)

9. Why does Beowulf order the construction of an iron shield? (ls. 2337-41)

10. How is old Beowulf presented to the reader? (2324)

Comment on the narrator’s point of view in lines 2345-2353.

11. Why do you think the narrator includes such a long digression at this point in the narrative (lines 2354-2400 and 2426-2509). 2354-2400:

12. How many people go with Beowulf when he goes in search of the dragon? (ls. 2397-2413)

13. Find examples to illustrate the way the *comitatus* works. Why, for example, does Beowulf say “That offense was beyond redress” (lines 2439-2443)?
14. Which story does Beowulf narrate about his grandfather, King Hrethel, before entering the cave to fight with the dragon? (ls. 2425-71).

15. Does the reader at any point have any idea about the outcome of Beowulf’s encounter with the dragon?

16. Why does Beowulf decide to use a weapon this time, in contrast to his previous hand-to-hand fight with Grendel? (ls. 2518-24)

17. Contrast Beowulf’s final boast (lines 2510-2537) with all the previous ones and comment on the similarities and differences. Why does he want to fight alone?

18. Why does Beowulf not kill the dragon immediately? (l. 2584-86).

19. Who is Wiglaf? What techniques does the narrator use to portray this character?

20. As you read, notice the insistence on the importance of fame, immortal glory and the fear of a bad reputation.


22. How do Beowulf and Wiglaf kill the dragon? (ls. 2700-05)

23. Comment on the character of Beowulf as he is portrayed in his final speech (lines 2729-2751). What does Beowulf regret? (l. 2729). He only regrets not having a son to bestow his armor.

24. What does Beowulf tell Wiglaf before dying? (l. 2799-2809)
36. Identify in the first paragraph of this section (lines 2821-42), three kennings used to refer to the dragon.
37. How does the poet identify Beowulf’s thanes, except Wiglaf? (l. 2847)
38. Analyse Wiglaf’s speeches, both before (ls. 2631-2660) and after (ls. 2862-2890) Beowulf’s death, paying attention to all the aspects of the Anglo-Saxon aristocratic code of behaviour (comitatus).

39. How does Wiglaf punish Beowulf’s warriors for their cowardice? (ls. 2884-91)

40. Why is Beowulf’s death described as “marvellous” by the poet? (l. 3037)

41. What do they do with the dragon’s corpse? (ls 3131-33)
   They threw it to the sea over the cliff-top.
42. Describe Beowulf’s funeral (ls. 3137-68)
   They built a pyre and hung war gear on it, put Beowulf on it and burnt the remains of the pyre and the dragon’s treasure with him.

43. Comment on the elegiac tone of the last part of the poem and pay attention to the representation of pagan rituals of Anglo-Saxon lifestyle.
   Twelve warriors rode around his mound chanting in dirges, cherishing his memory. I’m not sure about number 12 in Germanic tradition; this could be of Christian origin. The very existence of this ritual, which takes place at least 8 days after the hero’s death/incineration, indicates time enough to cut-paste on epic tradition and embed previous chants. In case they had witnessed Beowulf’s funeral, the poetry would not have been composed, nor the rituals completed.

44. What is the prediction for the future of Geatland? (ls. 3018; 3028 & 3152)
   exile; their corpses would be eaten by the beasts of the battle & foreign invasion, massacre, slavery, abasement.

Finishing Remarks: After reading the whole poem, make sure you have the necessary information about the following topics dealt with in class to write an essay or identify a series of quotations (extra-credit)
1. Type of narrator, narrative point of view and narrative patterns.
2. Characterisation of the epic hero.
   • How is the hero described by the omniscient narrator?
   • How is the hero described by other characters?
   • How does the hero present himself? Instances of boasting
   • How do his actions contribute to his characterisation? Look especially at the instances when his honour is at stake (i.e. fighting).
   • How do other characters contrast with the main hero?
3. Characterisation of the monsters.
4. Combination of Christian and pagan elements: a Christian poet talking about his pagan ancestors.
5. The rules of the comitatus (issues of honour and shame; feuds, revenge and political marriages...)
6. Pagan rituals of Anglo-Saxon aristocratic life (boasting, funerals and mourning, ring-giving...)

7. The role of women in Anglo-Saxon aristocratic society (Wealhtheow, Hygd, Freawaru, Hildeburh, Modthryth).

8. The role of the setting: natural and domestic.

9. Digressions: their role in the story.

10. Variations in tone: festive, dramatic, elegiac...

11. Identification and explanation of *kennings*. 
Elegiac Poetry:
The Wanderer And The Wife’s Lament

1. Make sure you can summarise the content of each poem.

2. Identify the elements which make each poem likely to be ascribed to the elegiac genre (subject matter and tone).

   •
   •
   •

3. How many voices (“narrators”) can you perceive in each text? How does each contribute to our perception of the story they tell?

4. Look for the references to “fate” in each poem. How is it perceived?

5. Explain the formation and possible meaning of the following kennings:
   • gold-friend =
   • liege-lord =
   • gift-giving =
   • warrior-band =
   • mead-hall =
   • middle-earth =
   • wall-stead =
   • dwelling-place =
   • earth-hall / earthen-pit =
   • winter-weary / dreary-spirited / storm - beaten =

6. Find examples of reminiscences of the original alliterative rhyme in the translation.

7. What does the speaker of The Wanderer praise in a man? What, according to the speaker, makes a man “wise”? Are the same virtues praised in a woman according to The Wife’s Lament?
8. What can you infer of the position of women in Anglo-Saxon society from reading *The Wife’s Lament*?

9. How is nature portrayed in both poems? Do they share common characteristics? Comment on that.

10. Can you see Pagan and Christian elements coexisting in the poems? Comment on that, making sure that you deal with the way each poem reflects the main important aspects of Anglo-Saxon society.

11. What other similarities can you find
Middle English Literature (Norton 13-25)

1. Which was the role of French in the 13th and 14th centuries?

2. Name the main fourteenth-century authors and most important works.

3. Which was the main political event of the 15th century in Britain?

4. Which was Sir Thomas Malory’s contribution to the legend of King Arthur?

5. Which are the main features of Old and Middle English prosody?
   - Old English:
   - Middle English:

William Langland (1330-1387)  
The Vision Of Piers Plowman

Read the Norton’s introduction to William Langland and answer the questions below:
   1. Where is Langland from?
   2. How did he get his education?
   3. Find out what an allegory is.
   4. What do dreams and allegories have in common?

5. What is Langland’s main theme?
6. What do Langland and Chaucer’s works have in common?
7. What is the best treasure in the poem?
8. What was the social, political and religious relevance of this work at the time of its composition?

Read “The Field of Folk” from *The Prologue to The Vision of Piers Plowman* and the introduction to the poem itself. As you read follow the following instructions and answer these questions:

1. Consider the literary conventions of the Dream Vision genre. How are these manifested in the poem? In which way is this poem similar or different to “Caedmon’s Dream” and “The Dream of the Rood”? *Caedmon’s Dream* and the *Dream of the Rood* were inspired by God, but Piers Ploughman is not; there was no social satire in them, the allegorical symbolic dimension is not present in Caedmon’s dream, which is a retelling of the Bible, but it is present in The Rood, since the battle context is used as an allegory of the salvation of the soul (weird, because it can be a blending of religious references, turning Walhalla into Heaven). Despite its spiritual, or moral dimension, Piers Ploughman is not a religious, but a socio-political text. Alliteration is common to all of them. The voice is always male, but less dignified in Piers. Bede and the author of the Rood are literate authors (even if retired by prayer/exile), but Caedmon and Piers belong to the people.

2. Which is the setting of the dream? What might it symbolize?

3. Find instances of the Alliterative Revival in the poem.

4. Read the article “Medieval Estates and Orders” at Norton Literature Online (in particular, the ‘Overview’ in http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english-nael-middleages/topic_1/welcome.htm and the text entitled ‘Estates Satire’ in the section ‘Texts and Contexts’: http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english-nael-middleages/topic_1/satire.htm). Explain how the genre of the Medieval Estates Satire applies to *The Vision of Piers Plowman*. In which way does ‘The Field of Folk’ satirise different trades and professions? Which ones are described positively and which ones are described negatively? Find examples to support your answers.
1. How would Chaucer’s life be representative of the social changes occurring during the 14th c?

2. How many Dream visions inspired Chaucer’s poems? Make a list and briefly describe their content.

3. Which of his works were inspired by French poets or Italian ones?

4. Which is the intended audience of The Canterbury Tales?

Read the Norton’s introduction to the Canterbury Tales and answer the questions below.

1. The Canterbury Tales (1387-1400)

2. What is Chaucer’s innovation with respect to Gower and Boccaccio?

3. Which two fictions are simultaneously conducted in the Canterbury Tales?
The General Prologue

Good online introduction:
http://books.google.es/books?id=8Ib4jS8EfCUC&pg=PA28&lpg=PA28&dq=the%20cook%27s%20ulcer%20canterbury%20tales&source=bl&ots=bpCfcCEQLj&sig=me-XGZxZnRNh35kF_CwR4qXBl&hl=es&sa=X&ei=IFnwU-CvGIrb0QWjpIDYBw&ved=0CFEQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=the%20cook%20s%20ulcer%20canterbury%20tales&f=false

Introduces the 30 pilgrims in general terms

What distinguishes Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales from previous works such as Piers Ploughman?

Lines 1-18:
1) Which season do people travel in?

Lines 19-27
2) What is the narrative point of view?
3) Locate the narration: the place
4) How many people are involved

Lines 28-42
5) What does the narrator do?

The Knight & The Squire (lines 43-100)

Lines 43-78 (the knight):
1) What did the knight love?
2) Where has he fought?
3) Which line sums him up?
4) How was he dressed?

Lines 78-100 (the knight’s son):
5) How old is he?
6) What motivates him?
7) What can he do?
8) What colour are his clothes?

General questions:
1. Comment on the role of a knight in society and duties inherent to his estate. See if Chaucer’s with those duties.

2. How does Chaucer describe the Knight in activities, moral qualities and physical appearance? Notice the amount of lines devoted to delineate aspects of his personality.

3. The Knight’s campaigns took place mostly in Turkey, Morocco, Algeria, Spain and the Baltic states. What does Chaucer tell us about the Knight’s reasons for fighting?

4. What was a Squire? How is this one portrayed? What activities is he involved in, apart from warfare? Should we admire his elegant clothing or is any type of criticism intended?

5. What do you think the contrast between father and son means?

**The Yeoman (lines 101-117)**

1. What was a yeoman? There was no tradition of finding them included in medieval estates satires. Why do you think Chaucer includes him in “The General Prologue”? How is he portrayed?

2. What does he carry?
3. How does Chaucer describe the Yeoman in terms of his activities, moral qualities and physical appearance? Notice the amount of lines devoted to delineate each of these aspects of his personality.

4. Is there any irony intended in any of these portraits? Justify your answer.

**The Prioress lines 118-162**

1. What was a prioress? Which were her duties?

2. What is her name?
3. What was her French like?

4. What is she like?
5. What are her table manners like?

6. What is her attitude towards animals?
7. Would you say she was physically attractive?
8. What jewellery does she wear?

**General questions:**

1. How does Chaucer describe the Prioress in terms of her activities, moral qualities and physical appearance? Notice the amount of lines devoted to delineate each of these aspects of her personality. Do you think it is significant that he begins by talking about her smile? Why?
4. Chaucer refers to her as “charitable” and “pitous”. Can you identify which proofs he gives of her charity and mercy? Do you think is there any sort of irony? Justify your answer.

5. “Eglentyne” means, literally, “briar rose” and it was a very fashionable name found in romances. Nuns had to choose a new name when they entered a convent. How does the Prioress’s choice contribute to her characterisation?

6. “And pained hire to countrefete cheere / Of court”. Compare the description of the Prioress’s manners at the table and the following extract, taken from Jean de Meun’s Le Roman de la Rose, where La Vieille, an old woman, explains the part played in the art of seduction by table manners. What conclusions can you extract?

Let her care never to dip her fingers deeply (as far as the joint) into the sauce, never to cover her lips in soup, garlic or fat, never to take too large a morsel, or stuff too much in her mouth. When she has to dip a piece of meat in the sauce, of whatever kind, she should hold it with her fingertips and carry it carefully to her mouth, so that no drop of soup, sauce or pepper falls on her breast. Let her drink so carefully that she spills nothing on herself. Anyone seeing her spill her drink might think her ill-educated or greedy. She must not touch her glass while she has food in her mouth. She should wipe her lips clean, especially the upper lip, because if any grease remains there, drops of it will appear in her wine, which is ugly and dirty. (ll. 13408-32)

The Monk lines 165-207

1) What was the Monk’s task?
2) What did he love?
3) Did he follow the monastic orders strictly?
4) Who is “Austin”?
5) How does he dress?
6) Was he fat or thin?
7) What color was his horse?
8) What did he like to eat?

**General questions:**

1. What was a monk? Which were his duties?

2. How does Chaucer describe the Monk in terms of his activities, moral qualities and physical appearance?

3. What are the main things Chaucer the pilgrim admires about the Monk? Do you think is there any irony intended?
4. What are the implications of Chaucer’s consideration that this Monk would be a good abbot (“to been an abbot able”)?

5. What effect does Chaucer achieve by comparing the sound of the bells in his bridle with that of the chapel’s bell?

6. What is Chaucer the pilgrim’s attitude (lines 184-187) to the Monk’s dismissal of monastic rules? Do you think is there any irony intended?

### The Friar lines 208-271

What was a friar? Which were his duties?

What did he have the power to do?
What did he ask for in order to absolve people of their sins in confession?
What is he good at?

5) Does he dedicate himself and his money gained from begging to the poor and the lepers?

6) What places does he visit a lot?
7) Does he dress poorly?
8) How does he speak?
9) What is his name?

**General questions**

1. What elements would you expect to find in a portrait of a friar? What is the effect created when Chaucer first introduces him as “wantoune”, “merye”, and “solempne”?

2. How does Chaucer describe the Friar in terms of his activities, moral qualities and physical appearance?

3. This particular Friar had permission to hear confession and absolve sins. Chaucer tells us that “pleasant was his absolucioun”. How did the Friar exert these powers? Which were the signs that, according to the Friar, showed that a sinner was repentant?

4. What is the possible implication of the Friar’s having “maad full many a mariage / Of yonge wommen at his owene cost”?

5. What circles does the Friar move in and what people does he refuse to mingle with? How does this contribute to his characterisation?
The Merchant, lines 272-286

1) Was he rich?
2) What social estate does this character belong to? Why is he relevant in a late fourteenth-century estate satire?
3) Where does the merchant get most of his money from?
4) What is the Merchant’s particular trade? What outer manifestations of his success does Chaucer emphasise?
5) How does language contribute to the characterisation of the Merchant?
6) Medieval Estates Satire usually accused merchants of avarice and excessive wealth. Do you think Chaucer conforms to this tradition?
7) What was his name?
8) What is the effect of Chaucer’s repetition of the adjective “worthy”?

The Clerck lines 287-310

1) What else is he and why?
2) What has he studied?
3) What is his horse like?
4) Is he fat or thin?
5) How does he dress?
6) Has he got any money?
7) What does he love?

General questions:

1. Do you think it is significant that the Clerk in introduced between the characters of the Merchant and the Sergeant of the Law? Why?
2. Is there any irony intended in this portrait? Justify your answer.

The Sergeant of the Law lines 311-332

1) Is he an important lawyer?
2) What is the “Parvis”?
3) What has he put his money into?
4) What does he know a lot about?

General questions:
1. What do the Merchant and the Sergeant of the Law have in common in terms of social projection? How do they differ?

2. How do you interpret Chaucer’s adding “And yit he seemed bisier than he was”? What does this tell us about the Sergeant of the Law?

3. How much space does Chaucer devote to telling the reader of the Sergeant of the Law’s activities? Compare it with the space devoted to his physical description. Do you think this is significant? Justify your answer.

1) What colour were his face and beard?
2) What did he have for breakfast?
3) What did he dedicate his life to?
4) What did he have a lot in his house?
5) Is he of high or low birth?
6) What job does he sometimes do?

**General questions:**

1. According to the medieval view, the body contained four fluids of humours: blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. The excess of one of these humours could lead to disease, while the relative predominance of one was considered to determine a person’s character. There were four types according to the preponderance of one of these humours: sanguine (blood), phlegmatic (phlegm), choleric (yellow bile) and melancholic (black bile). Investigate about these character-types and see which traits are associated with a sanguine person such as the Franklin.
1) What was a guild? What are the professions of these five guildsmen?

2) How are they dressed?

3) The guildsmen are described as a group, sharing all the same attributes. What is it that Chaucer is interested in highlighting about these characters and their wives? Why do you think he pays so much attention to their outfit?

The Cook

1) What does it tell us about these characters the fact that they took a cook on their pilgrimage?

2) Is he a good cook?

3) The Cook is an exceptional figure in Medieval Estates Satire. What are the qualities that Chaucer admires in the Cook? Do you think there could be a hint of irony in “Wel coude he knowe a draughte of London ale”?

4) Why do you think Chaucer laments the ulcer on the Cook’s shin? What can it be a symptom of?

The Shipman

1) Where is he from?

2) Is he honest?

3) How does he treat his prisoners?

4) What is the name of his ship?

**General questions:**

1. As it happened with the Yeoman and the Cook, the figure of the Shipman is unusual in Medieval Estate Satire. What does the profession of a shipman entail? Why do you think Chaucer decided to include him in the General Prologue?

2. “And certainly he was a good felawe”. Do you think there is irony intended in this assertion? Do you think the Shipman was a good professional? Justify your answer.
1) What does he make use of to cure people?
2) How is he dressed?
3) Has he got a lot of money?
4) When does he get most money?
5) What was the “pestilence”?

**General questions:**
1. “In al this world ne was ther noon him lik / To speken of physik and of surgerye”. Do you think there is irony intended in these two verses? Justify your answer.

2. As with the Shipman, pay attention to the space devoted to describing the Doctor in terms of his physical appearance, his activities and his moral qualities. See which aspect dominates this portrait to determine whether he was a good, honest professional.

1) What is wrong with her?
2) What does she know a lot about?
3) Describe her clothes.

4) Describe her face.

5) How many husbands has she had?
6) Where has she travelled?
7) What is significant about the gap between her teeth?

**General questions:**

a.1. This is the second portrait of a woman that we find in the General Prologue. It is one of the most detailed and individualised descriptions. Contrast it with that of the Prioress.
a.2. How does Chaucer describe the Wife of Bath in terms of her activities, moral qualities and physical appearance?
a.3. What does Chaucer mention about other religious activities, such as offerings in church? How does this contribute to your perception of the Wife of Bath as a religious woman?
a.4. She has been on several important pilgrimages. Do you think she is a devout woman? Can you infer the true reasons behind this activity?
a.5. “Remedies of love” make reference to love potions or aphrodisiacs. How does Chaucer’s comment: “For she coulde of that art the olde daunce” fit as a conclusion to the description of this remarkable woman?
1) Is he a good parson?

2) What was a parson? Which were his duties? Do you think it is relevant that Chaucer uses “poore” as the first adjective to describe this character? Why?

3) Do you think it is significant that these two characters are described together? How does each contribute to the characterisation of the other?

4) How does Chaucer describe the Parson in terms of his activities, moral qualities and physical appearance?

5) By praising this character for the things he does not do, we get an indirect portrait of common religious practices among other parsons. Comment on them.

6) What is the significance of the repetition of the word “sheep”?

7) Explain the following verses: “And this figure he added eek therto: / That if gold ruste, what shal iron do?”

8) What was a plowman (ploughman)? Which were his duties?

9) How many religious references to Christ’s teachings can you find in this part of the text? How do they contribute to the characterisation of these two figures? Do you think there is any irony intended?

1) What examples are given of his strength?

2) Draw a picture of the Miller’s face. Red-haired, with hais out of his nostrils and ears. How does the inclusion of so many references to animals contribute to the characterisation of this figure?

3) Was he an honest miller?

4) What color is his hood?

5) The Miller is playing a bagpipe. Look for information about this instrument and see how it fits with the character’s description. Do you think it is suitable for a pilgrimage?
6) This character tells a fabliau. Do you think it goes well with the portrait Chaucer has offered in the Prologue

The fabliau is a comic, usually anonymous tale written by *jongleurs* in northeast France circa the 13th Century. They are generally bawdy in nature, and several of them were reworked by Geoffrey Chaucer for his *Canterbury Tales*. … Typical fabliaux concern *cuckolded* husbands, rapacious *clergy*, and foolish *peasants*. The status of peasants appears to vary based on the audience for which the fabliau was being written. Poems that were presumably written for the *nobility* portray peasants (French: vilains) as stupid and vile, whereas those written for the lower classes often tell of peasants getting the better of the clergy.


http://books.google.es/books?id=x8QyDAF0V54C&pg=PA3&dq=feme+halwes&source=bl&ots=xtOK4EHHZ&sig=VcBky?7ANJucbsirVyAXSbdPOxO6g&hl=es&sa=X&ei=y9jtU-qt0BajICQOMMr4DYCA&ved=0CCQQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=feme%20halwes&f=false

1) What is his job?

2) Is he clever or not?

3) This Manciple is one of the most obscure figures in the General Prologue. What do we know about his physical appearance, his moral qualities and his activities? Is it ironic that Chaucer calls him “gentil”?

1) What is his job?

2) What is meant by “choleric”?

3) What skill does he possess?

4) Is he rich or poor?

5) Where is he from?

6) Why do you think the Manciple and the Reeve ride together? Do they have anything in common? Do they are good, honest professionals?

1) What is his job?

2) Why are children afraid of him?

3) What is the implied cause of his bad skin?
4) What does he do when he gets drunk?

5) Chaucer describes the Summoner as having a “cherubinnes face”. The angels’ redness was considered to be caused by the flames of divine love. What effect is achieved by linking the Summoner with a cherub?

6) What is the significance of comparing the Summoner to a parrot?

7) “He was a gentil harlot and a kinde; A bettre felawe sholde men nought finde”. Is there any irony intended in these two verses? Justify your answer by listing the activities that Chaucer admires in this character.

8) Do you think it is significant that the Summoner and the Pardoner ride together? Why?

1) What is his job and who does he work for?

2) According to the medieval treatises of physiognomy, yellow hair was said to indicate wild and unruly behaviour, while thin hair indicated guile and covetousness. Is there textual evidence in the portrait of the Pardoner to validate this theory?

3) What does “Chaucer” suggest about his sexual inclinations?

4) Is he a good singer?

5) How does he cheat people with his relics?

6) “Bretful of pardon, come from Rome al hoot”. Do you think there is irony intended in this assertion?

7) Chaucer is more direct than ironic in his portrait of the Pardoner. What opinion does the narrator show about the uses of relics?

Why does Chaucer put so much emphasis on the fact that his words will be accurate?

1) What is he like? 755-758,

2) How does he treat the pilgrims?

3) What does he say about the pilgrims?

4) What does he suggest the pilgrims should do as they journey towards Canterbury? (lines 793-796)

5) What will be the prize for the best story-teller?

6) What does the Host offer to do?
7) Do the pilgrims agree?
8) What is the penalty for anyone who does not agree with the Host’s judgement on the story-telling?

1) How do they decide who is to tell the first tale?
2) Who goes first?

1. Chaucer draws upon tradition of anti-feminist writings partly created by medieval church
2. Conviction that 1) Higher side of human N (rational, spiritual, intellectual) = predominated in men; 2) lower side of human N (irrational, material, earthly) = in women
3. Exaltation of celibacy & virginity over marriage by St Paul & early Church fathers
4. Although they felt also obliged to sanctify marriage
5. 4th c. monk Jovinian ð tract about marriage ÷ (not as evil) ↓ ð St Jerome’s fierce attack. Many anti-feminist & antimatrimonial literature
6. Wife of Bath ð defends her rights & justifies her life as 5-time married woman
7. Although ironically confirms accusations of medieval clerks
8. Also satirizes the superficiality of stereotypes of women & marriage (Chaucer presents her as + complex than stereotype)
9. Interesting to contrast 1) description in General Prologue; 2) portrait in prologue & tale
10. Autobiographical prologue:
    1) Begins with general comments on marriage (she’s an expert on subject). 1st talks about multiple marriages & then on virginity & marriage;
    2) Frank & detailed account of her rel with 5 husbands;
    3) Quarrel btw friar & summoner

1ST DAY

GENERAL COMMENTS ON MARRIAGE:
LINES 1-75

1) What is the power of the first word which opens the prologue, “Experience”? What does it reveal about the character?

2) What passage of the Bible doesn’t the Wife of Bath understand?
3) What biblical figures that she mentions in order to support her statement that it is legitimate to marry more than once?

4) Narrate those instances where the Wife of Bath reinterprets the Bible for her own benefit.

5) Where does the Wife of Bath explicitly talk about sex?
6) Does the protagonist know about the subject?
7) Does she want to remarry?
LINES 75-162

4) Where does the Wife of Bath reinterpret once again the Bible for her own benefit?

5) Is she explicit about sex? If yes, where and how?
6) What is her vision of gender roles within marriage? Is this vision traditional or not?
INTERLUDE: THE PARDONER INTERRUPTS: LINES 162-193

1) What is the Pardoner’s reaction to her words?

WIFE CONTINUES WITH STORY; LINES 193-235

1) Which is the only drawback the Wife of Bath finds in her first 3 husbands?
2) Why does the Wife of Bath identity them as “good”?
3) In these marriages, was the Wife of Bath submissive or the contrary?
4) What should “a wise wife” do according to the Wife of Bath?

2ND DAY

LONG CONVERSATION WITH HER HUSBAND (1 OF HER 3 FIRST HUSBANDS) (lines 235-454)

1) Which are the insults she addresses to her husband?

[ver flecha]
2) What are the traditional stereotypes of women she tries to destroy?

3) Whom is her husband jealous of?

4) In page 7, we learn about the narrator’s name. Which is the Wife of Bath’s name?

5) What does she defend in feminist terms (page 7)?

6) There are many references to animals and birds. Which are those? Why are they mentioned?

7) There are also many references to household items. Which are those? Why are they mentioned?
8) What’s the wife excuse for going out at night (page 9)?

9) Which natural virtues has God given to women, according to the Wife of Bath (lines 400-402)?

10) Even though the Wife of Bath tries to subvert some traditional assumptions on women, she reinforces some stereotypes. Which are those? (lines 400, 414, 440-442)

11) At the end of her diatribe, the Wife of Bath is deeply assertive/ explicit about sex. Find those 2 moments where she explicitly talk about that.

NOW TALKS ABOUT 4TH HUSBAND (ls. 453-503)

1) How is he identified?

3RD DAY

NOW TALKS ABOUT 5TH HUSBAND AND HER LAST YEARS WITH HER 4TH HUSBAND (ls. 503-828)

1) How is her fifth husband described?

2) How does she describe women in general in lines 515-524?

3) How did she meet her 5th husband?

4) How does she embarrass her 4th husband?

5) What did the Wife of Bath do while her 4th husband was away?

6) What does she promise Jerkin?

7) In line 585, the Wife of Bath appears to have lost track of the thread of her argument. What is the effect of this?

8) What is the significance of the Wife of Bath being gap-toothed?

9) How does the Wife of Bath justify the fact that she is sexually unrestrained, and that she constantly follows her “appetite”?

10) Why is the Wife of Bath deaf in one ear?
11) Which are her fifth husband’s threats?

12) The Wife of Bath narrates how her husband read a book at night, which was a compilation of many anti-feminist writings. Which manuscripts are contained in this book?

- Valerius: The Letter of Valerius Concerning not Marrying by Walter Map
- Theofraste: Theophrastus’s Book Concerning Marriage
- St Jerome’s antifeminist Against Jovinian (4th c. monk Jovinian tract about marriage and St Jerome’s fierce attack. Many anti-feminist & antimatromonial literature). His book talks about:
  - Tertullian: author of treatises on sexual modesty
  - Chrysippus: mentioned by Jerome as antifeminist
  - Trotula: a female doctor whose presence here is unexplained
  - Heloise: an abbess (abadesa) whose love affair with the great scholar Abelard was a medieval scandal
- The Proverbs of Solomon: the biblical Book of Proverbs
- Ovid’s Art of Love

13) In line 62, the Wife of Bath alludes to one of Aesop’s fables “Who painted the lion, tell me who?” In this fable, a lion is shown a picture of a man killing a lion, and he surprisingly asks who painted the picture. What is the moral of this story? Why does the Wife of Bath mention it?

14) Enumerate the various “wicked women” who appear in the manuscript her fifth husband reads (lines 713-755) [these stories of wicked women Chaucer drew mainly from St Jerome and Walter Map]
- Eve
- Samson’s lover, who cut his hair and destroyed his power
- Deianira: gave Hercules a poisoned shirt, which hurt him so much that he committed suicide by fire
- Socrates: who had 2 wives (one of them Xantippe) who tortured him
- Pasiphae (the queen of Crete); very lascivious, had intercourse with a bull
- Clytemnesra: with her lover slew her husband
- Eirphyle: betrayed her husband and forced him to go to war against Thebes
- Livia and Lucilla: murdered their husbands

15) How does the Wife of Bath react one night, while her husband is reading “his cursed book”?

16) Which is the agreement they eventually reach?

QUARREL BETWEEN THE FRIAR AND THE SUMMONER (lines 829-856)
AFTER FINISHING THE PROLOGUE READ PHOTOCOPIES (‘The Character of the Wife – teller and Tale’, until the end)

TALE –
- Based on well-known folklore romance of ‘Loathly Lady’ [odiada, detestada] = an old hag [vieja fea, bruja] with magical qualities
- The motif of an ugly hag who will under set conditions transform into a beautiful maiden, or more rarely a beautiful maiden cursed to revert to a hideous or inhuman shape under different conditions. This motif is found in fairy tales, folklore, mythology, and Celtic legend [Sovereignty goddess].
- Adapted by wife to justify her conclusions on role of sexes in marriage ◊ the tale expresses her views about the relations of the sexes and classes.
- Plot = a fairy bride seeks out and tests a mortal lover.
- This tale illustrates Chaucer’s skill in comic writing. Much of humour springs from dialogue btw old hag & knight.
- As with many of the tales, it is written in rhyming iambic couplets. Everything is like this, also the prologue, actually!
- An iambic foot is an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. We can notate this with a 0 mark representing an unstressed syllable and a / mark representing a stressed syllable. In this notation a line of iambic pentameter would look like this: 0/0/0/0/0/
- A heroic couplet is a traditional form for English poetry, commonly used for epic and narrative poetry; it refers to poems constructed from a sequence of rhyming pairs of iambic pentameter lines. Use of the heroic couplet was first pioneered by Chaucer in the Canterbury Tales. Chaucer is also widely credited with first extensive use of iambic pentameter.
- This regular meter has advantage of being very close to natural rhythms of speech (this is vital, for Chaucer was writing for an audience rather than reader!)

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

1) Why are there no more fairies, according to the Wife of Bath?

2) Why was the knight “condemned to be executed”?

3) Which question was the knight supposed to answer in order to save his life?

4) When he is travelling around, which answers did he finds by talking to people?

5) Which story does the Wife of Bath tell about Midas and his wife? What does this story tell about women’s natural condition?

6) What does the knight encounter on his way home?
7) What is the answer the knight gives to the queen?

8) What does the hag ask from the knight, now that she has saved his life?

9) What do you think she promises him if he rests with her in bed?

10) What is the hag’s idea of “nobility”? 

11) Why, according to the hag, is poverty, although “unpleasant”, “good”?

12) Why, according to the hag, is it positive for the knight to have a “foul and old” wife?

13) Which are the two things the hag makes the knight decide over?

14) Which is the knight’s decision?

15) What happens to the old hag at the end of the story?

16) What is the moral of the story?

17) How do you explain the invocations at end of the tale (1264-1270)?