

## English Literature Part 2

### 'Poetry and Prose of England' up to 1400

## The Middle English Period Part 2: c 1250- 1400

(Gawain, Chaucer and 'Everyman')

### Week 1

Read pages 54- 57 'The Metrical Romance', then read Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (you may need to finish this in your own free time). If there are any parts you don't understand, re-read them, or ask for help!

1. Who wrote 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', and why does he have this name?
2. Describe in your own words what the Green Knight looked like (a drawing would be good too!).
3. How was his challenge first received?
4. Explain the nature of the contract between the Green Knight and Sir Gawain

### Week 2

1. What did Sir Gawain do first as he prepared to set out and find the Green Knight? (line 110)
2. The author tells us that Sir Gawain had a pentagram, or five sided figure, on his shield. In our times, pentagrams are associated with the devil, but this author tells us of three sets of 'fives' which show Gawain to be a good Knight and the pentagram to be a fitting symbol for him.

Re -read lines 140-169 again carefully and identify these three 'sets of five' (one to do with Our Lord, one with Our Lady and the other with our fellow-men)

3. What is Gawain worrying about, and praying about, as he seeks the Chapel? (lines 178-192)
4. After arriving at the castle and being treated royally, Gawain says he will do whatever the Lord asks of him. The Lord says that the next day, Gawain must stay in the castle while he goes hunting, and that the lady will stay too. Then he strikes an agreement with Gawain:

*'Whatever I win in the wood shall be yours;  
And what chance you shall meet shall be mine in exchange.  
Sir, let's so strike our bargain and swear to tell truly  
Whate'er fortune brings, whether bad, sir, or better.'* lines 273-277

Can you explain what this means in your own words?

5. How is the agreement kept on the first and second days? On the third day, how does Gawain break the agreement? (Part III, page 65-67)

### Week 3

1. When Gawain finally meets the Green Knight, what does the Knight do which makes Gawain angry? (lines 339-350)

2. Whom does the Green Knight reveal himself to be? How does this explain the two 'feints' with the axe and the one real, if gentle, blow?
3. The Knight is full of praise for Gawain: what jewel does he compare him to? (Line 385). However, he also reminds Gawain that he has been lacking in one virtue: which virtue is this? (line 387). Why does the Green Knight not place too much blame on Gawain? (line 388). Gawain is angry with himself: why does he accept the green sash? (lines 390-394)
4. Who, in reality, was the old lady at the castle who planned all this? What is her relationship to King Arthur?
5. What did all the other knights do to show their fellowship with Gawain? (line 405)

#### **Week 4**

Read 'The Metrical Tale' pages 72-75

Making note of the tips for pronunciation on page 76, have a go at reading part of the Prologue aloud in Middle English! Read the rest of the Prologue to page 83 (*finish in free time if necessary*)

1. What signs of spring does Chaucer mention in the first fifteen lines of the Prologue?
2. Why are the pilgrims going to Canterbury?
3. Where is the author, Chaucer, as the story begins and where is he going? (lines 19-21).
4. How many pilgrims set out together?

#### **Week 5**

1. What makes the knight a good knight? Give a few examples.
2. What is the squire's main motive for being a chivalrous and brave knight? (if you're not sure, see lines 67-68)
3. What was the name of the prioress? What is meant by 'guilelessness'?
2. Give a few examples to show that this Prioress was a very well-bred lady. Explain the words 'amiable' and 'piteous'.

#### **Week 6**

1. What is the attitude of the monk to the ancient rule of Saint Benedict? (see lines 132-136)
2. As a monk, he should be praying in his cell and working, but what is in fact his preferred occupation? What is Chaucer's opinion of this- does he approve or disapprove?
3. Give a few examples to show how the description of the monk shows that he did not lead a typical monk's life.
4. Why is the student of Oxford so poor and shabbily dressed? Give three reasons. What is a 'benefice'? Who was his favourite writer?

5. Explain the words 'sumptuous' and 'grave discourse'.

## **WEEK 7**

1. How does Chaucer show that the Guildsmen were very well-off men? Give three examples. What was the work of a haberdasher? What was wrong with the cook?

2. Does the Wife of Bath strike you as a person of great charity? How many husbands had she married? Explain 'ambling' 'wimpled' and 'swathed'.

3. Chaucer is clearly impressed with the priest. Give three examples of how this priest treated his parishioners. What is meant by '*First he did and afterwards he taught*'?

4. What is meant by '*If the gold rusts, what will the iron do?*'

5. How did the priest live up to the saying,

*'By his own purity a priest should give  
The example to his sheep, how they should live'?*

6. How do you think this priest would have acted in the confessional? (cf lines 2886-291)

## **Week 8**

Read pages 84- 93 (the Nun's priest's tale, in your own time of necessary).

Write a VERY short summary of what actually happens in this story (just an outline, no more than 50 words)

## **Week 9**

1. Partlet tells Chanticleer not to pay any attention to his dream. In Chanticleer's response he gives six examples of famous people whose dreams were very significant. List these six people and be sure you can explain a little bit about who they are (lines 124-163).

2. What is ironic about the fact that Chanticleer mistranslates the Latin phrase in line 178, given what later happens? How might this be seen as a joke on Chaucer's part?

3. The Fox is compared with three famous traitors. List them and be sure you know who they are.

4. Chanticleer is naturally afraid when he sees the Fox for the first time: he wants to flee. How does the Fox persuade him to stay?

5. To what does Chaucer compare the wailing cries of the hens? To what does he compare the shrieks of Partlet? (ll 306-319)

6. Explain in your own words

- how Chanticleer escapes (ll 349-357)
- how the Fox tries to trick him again (ll 359-365)
- the lessons Chanticleer has learned (ll 373 -375)

7. Is this simply a story about animals? (lines 376 -end)

## **Week 10**

Read Drama in medieval England pages 94 -96.

Read 'Everyman' pages 96-104 (finish in your free time if necessary).

## **Week 11**

1. What does God mean when he says people are 'Of ghostly sight..so blind'? (line 22)
2. What does Everyman say when Death tells him he must make a reckoning of his life? (lines 78 and 88)
3. How does Everyman try to persuade Death to give him more time? (197-98) Why does this not help?
4. Everyman looks for company in his journey and finds 'Fellowship'. Why does this seem at first to be a good name for this character? (see lines 153-158)
5. How does Fellowship prove himself to be not so good a friend after all?
6. Who does Everyman speak to next? How does he hope this 'friend' will help? Explain the friend's reply in your own words (line 245)
7. Everyman blames Good(s) for entrapping and deceiving him. In your own words, what does Good(s) reply and what does Everyman suddenly realise? (l 261)

## **Week 12**

1. Why can Everyman's Good-Deed's not help him much? Who helps him instead and what is her first piece of advice? (l 294)
2. What 'precious jewel' does Confession give to Everyman?
3. What happens to Good-Deeds once Everyman has confessed his sins and begged God's pardon?
4. Using your own words, explain how Good-Deeds sums up the moral of this tale (ll 381-385).
5. This play is hundreds of years old: can it still have anything useful to say to us now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?  
If you have time, write a short version of this play. Use more modern English but try to keep the outline the same.

