

### THE ANGLO-SAXONS (450-1100)

#### Background

Begins with the invasion of Celtic England by Germanic tribes

Lasts until the conquest of England by the Norman-French William the Conqueror.

#### Anglo-Saxon poetry

Poetry was listened, not read.

Anglo-Saxon poetry was oral.

A bard (or scop) recited or sang the poetry.

It is believed that it was initially recorded by Christian Monks.

**Scop /shop/** A bard poet; storyteller. Also serves as a narrator to move the story along and reiterate the morals or values of the time.

Often performed in the Mead Hall (gathering place). Preserved the culture in song before writing was common.

#### Literary devices

**Caesura** rhythmic pause to create unity. Punctuation reproduces pause effect of the caesura.

**Alliteration** the repetition of consonant sound in words close together.

**Kenning** a metaphorical phrase or compound word used to name a person, place, thing, or event indirectly.

A kenning enhances the literal meaning of the words. A kenning gives the listener an idea of how the words connect to an idea or concept that is richer and more emotionally complex.

The Anglo-Saxon world was tribal, so the people who are the subjects of the poems had a different way of seeing where they lived; they had different "laws" and ways of life as well.

### BEOWULF

The first great work of English national literature.

The epic story of the hero Beowulf, who fights the demonic monster Grendel (man-eating monster).

Two parts

The epic hero is the central figure in a long narrative that reflects the values and heroic ideals of a particular society.

Beowulf was composed in Old English, which uses a caesura, or rhythmic pause, to create unity.

### THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD 1100-1500

#### Background

1066 - the beginning of a new social and linguistic era

the 1470s - the printing press introduced in England by William Caxton

Language of court became French.

**French** 'High' functions

'high' culture: government, law, religion, education, literature, science, the arts, 'high society' English

**English** 'Low' functions

'common folk': home speech, folk/popular songs, tales, everyday commerce

#### Literature

Became more refined.

Court and peasants both enjoyed new songs from Scotland, Ireland, and England.

Court enjoyed medieval romances from France.

#### Genres

chivalric romances

folk ballads

dramas

morality plays

#### Types of historical material

**Rome** Classical legends

**France** Often tales of Charlemagne and his knights

**Britain** Arthurian stories

Tales dealing with knightly heroes

### SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

Written by the unknown "Pearl poet."

Arthurian Romance in Alliterative Verse

Involves Sir Gawain's quest to confront the Green Knight, who has disrupted Arthur's court.

The Green Knight represents pagan fertility against Gawain's Christian chastity. A church reaction against "courtly love."

There is a movie called after this work, which is actually good.

### THE CANTERBURY TALES

**Geoffrey Chaucer (1342-1400)** Was a civil servant, held several political positions.

Observer of life and people (satirist).

### THE CANTERBURY TALES (cont)

Broke tradition by writing in native English.

#### The Canterbury Tales

The Prologue tells the story of 29 pilgrims who, on their way to Canterbury (to the shrine of St. Thomas a Becket), participate in a tale-telling contest to pass the time

Each tale had to have a moral and be entertaining.

The Tales is a collection of the various pilgrims' stories.

Originally planned to be 120 tales, Chaucer only completed 24.

#### The Wife of Bath's Tale

**The Wife of Bath** A worthy woman from beside Bath city

Attractive, red-faced, gap-toothed, large hipped, and somewhat deaf Loves to laugh and talk.

Traveled a lot (Pilgrimages to Jerusalem 3 times, Rome, etc.)

Married 5 times (expert in love; had many "boyfriends" in her youth)

**The Tale** Tale of a knight who breaks the rules of chivalry and is punished with a challenge that he has a year and a day to complete. WoB's Tale

This tale belongs with the Marriage Group tales of The Canterbury Tales as it deals with philosophies of love and marriage.

Classified as a "medieval romance" due to its setting, characters, and code of chivalry.

