Lec 3

Medieval Poetry

When we talk about Medieval Literature, we're not dealing with the famed British Empire. In fact, Britain didn't even have an Empire at this time, but was instead the victim of many waves of attack and invasion. First came the Romans (relatively civilized people) and then the barbarian invasions of the Germanic tribes. Next were the Vikings. Finally, in 1066, we get to the Normans. England was occupied by France, The French invasion changed Britain's formerly Anglo-Saxon culture and language to one that was much more like mainland Europe. And this invasion shaped the English language forever; the new French pushed Old English down the path toward Middle English, a variety nearer to what people speak today.

Poems during the medieval era were religious in nature and written by clerics. They were used mostly in church and other religious events. Medieval poems were mainly read by minstrels. According to scholars, literature in the Middle Ages was international rather than local. Medieval poetry was divided by lines of class and audience rather than language although, Latin was the language of the church and education. Medieval poetry in itself was very diverse.

Chaucer's "The General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales" has long been recognized as one of the greatest masterpieces of English literature, certainly the finest and most influential work of fiction from the Middle Ages. For most literary historians, English literature begins well before Chaucer's greatest poem, but this particular work marks the start of the tradition which is still readily accessible in the original language to the diligent reader, even though Chaucer's Middle English requires the constant help of a glossary.

Characteristics of The Medieval period

1-A major style of medieval poetry of the time was the epic style, which was most popular during the Revival period (11th-12th century).

2-An important characteristic of the Latin poetry, especially the Christian poems, is that they survived through the fall of the Roman Empire and the attacks by the barbarians. The 11th and 12th centuries where also the time when epics, satires, tales, and other forms of poetry became very popular as a form of entertainment and were sung by bards across the land.

3-Allegory means "extended metaphor." In an allegory, people, places, things, and happenings have two layers of significance. First, there's the literal level: whatever actually happens within the narrative. Second, there's the figurative or symbolic level: what those people, places, things, and happenings stand for outside of the narrative.
The medieval writers were super into allegory. Some of the most popular works of the period were very long and involved allegories, in fact. The French had The Romance of the Rose. The Italians had Dante's Divine Comedy. And the English had William Langland's Piers Plowman.

4- There was antifeminism poetry such as Chaucer's Wife of Bath stands out for many readers as the most memorable character in his Canterbury Tales… and perhaps even in all of medieval English literature.

5- The emerge of the romantic poetry, One of the first poems to take a romantic turn was "the Song of Roland" an epic about the nephew of Charlemagne. Battlefield scenes were transformed into those of ideal love.