

## PAIN AT THE PUMPS

PRICES ARE DRIVING US TO DISTRACTION, BUT NOT ENOUGH TO CHANGE OUR WAYS

CITY, F1



## TIME FOR 'CATHOLIC TRUTH': These women are not 'priests'

Just saying something doesn't make it true

ARGUMENTS, A11



## THE RAPPERS' TALE

USING HIP-HOP TO TURN KIDS ON TO CHAUCER

CANADA, A3



### TAKING POETIC LICENCE



'No one knows Chaucer like the English,' says Baba Brinkman, who performs rap version of the Canterbury Tales. 'But when they see me perform it ... they can tell I know him well.'

## The rapper's tale: Canadian funks up Chaucer

The English weren't so quick to warm to his hip-hop classics, writes **CHRIS LACKNER**.

When Canadian rapper Baba Brinkman first presented his hip-hop adaptation of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* in England, he was given the cold shoulder by Chaucer purists.

Five years later, his rap adaptation is being used to reconnect English children with the poet's work.

Mr. Brinkman, a native of Victoria, recently completed a 24-school English tour performing his modern variations on *The Pardoner's Tale*, *The Wife of Bath's Tale* and *The Miller's Tale*, three stories from the famous 14th-century epic.

The tour, sponsored by Cambridge University, paid Mr. Brinkman about \$433 a seminar.

Mr. Brinkman says a number of schools have invited him back in the fall for more educational performances.

In order to connect with students, Mr. Brinkman said he draws links between the lyrics of modern rap artists to the words of Chaucer.

"I try to approach the kids and say 'here is what Jay-Z or Snoop Dogg said and here is what Chaucer said' and then help them understand the similarities," Mr. Brinkman explained yesterday when reached in London. "They're different styles and different rhythms and rhymes, but they

really need to think of Chaucer as the rapper of his age. It's all cultural context — a person gets into the storytelling and rhyme schemes of their time. Today it's rap and in his day, it was court poetry."

The 26-year-old said he received a warm welcome from students and even won over an audience of skeptical English academics when he performed at Cambridge in January.

"No one knows Chaucer like the English — it's part of their blood here and they feel very protective of it," Mr. Brinkman. "But when people see me perform, it wins them over. They can tell I know him well."

It was a much better reception than he received in 2000 when he attended a Canterbury commemoration of the 600th anniversary of Chaucer's death. Due to miscommunication between organizers, Mr. Brinkman had no venue to perform at and other participants of the celebration proved unwelcoming.

Fittingly, on his recent tour across England, no Canterbury schools participated. "The impression I get is that they're a little protective of their icon — they like Chaucer just the way he is."

Canterbury natives can rest assured Mr. Brinkman does indeed know his sub-

ject matter well.

In 2003 he graduated from the University of Victoria with a master's degree in medieval and Renaissance English literature. But it was during his undergraduate thesis at Simon Fraser University that he first explored the links between hip-hop and Chaucer.

Mr. Brinkman first turned Chaucer's *A Knight's Tale* into a rap for a class assignment, which laid the groundwork for his thesis and current career.

With the help of a glossary of Middle English and a stack of rap albums, he has diligently translated Chaucer's words and themes. Typically, 2,000 words translates into a 20-minute rap.

Offering an example of his translation, Mr. Brinkman quotes a line from *The Miller's Tale*: "Ayyseth yow and put me oute of blame" becomes "check yourself and don't blame me."

Mr. Brinkman has performed his hip-hop Chaucer around the world, including Prague, San Francisco and a hit run at the 2004 Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland. He has also performed his work in front of B.C. high school students since 2003.

"Some people ask me if I'm worried about dumbing Chaucer down and making it too accessible, but I try and stay true to the original spirit of the text," he said. "The goal is to encourage kids to read Chaucer's original work."