UNIT 1 FROM THE EVALUATION OF PORTRAITS TOWARDS THE EXPLICATION OF POEMS.

Structure

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit and the next one,

- You will get oriented for a study of this course.
- You will have a clear idea of your teachers' expectations from you on this course.
- And you will be able to understand the relevance of the three constituent parts of this course i.e., the

(a) historical background of the age;
(b) the biographical account of the poet ; and finally
(c) the enjoyment and explication of the poem.

Your study should finally enable you to provide insightful comments on passages selected from the ten blocks of this course. The orientations in this and the next unit will be helpful to you in planning your study.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

On the first day at the postgraduate department of English your poetry teacher would have given you a few tips on doing well on that course. Every subject is in a few respects different from other subjects. Hence the methodology to be followed to master it also has to be a little different. In this unit I will try to tell you a few general matters that you should keep in mind while doing this course. While going through the blocks certain questions such as given below may crop up in your mind:

(a) What are the functions of the units on the historical background of the age?
(b) What is the relevance of a knowledge of the poet's life and work to the understanding of the prescribed poems?
(c) What should I focus my attention upon ? the poems, the biographies, or the backgrounds to the periods to which the different poets belong?

(d) Are the frontispieces in the various blocks meant to teach me, add a facet to my understanding of the age and its poetic output or are they just to improve the aesthetic appeal of the blocks?

This course is primarily aimed at teaching you the science and art of appreciating poetry.

If you pause a while on the issue of "appreciation" to ask yourself what is it? It is no different from, say, appreciating a person. We can say why we like a person. How did the friends of Sita describe Ram whom they had seen in *pushpa* vatika? To quote a well known couplet from Tulsidas's the Ramcharitrnanas :

देखन बाग कुअँर दुइ आये, वय किशोर सब भाँति सुहाये।
श्याम गौर किमि कहौं बखानी, गिरा अनयन नयन बिनु बानी।।

In the couplet above the sakhis tell sita about the place where they saw Ram and Laxman and that they were in their youth and that they were dark and fair complexioned. Beyond that they fail to communicate anything as they say that the eyes that saw them had no tongue and the tongue which can describe them had no sight. The silences in the two lines are loud.

Appreciating a poem also involves providing reasons for liking a poem, or for that matter, not liking it. However, we begin by 'appreciating' the portraits on the first and third covers. Those portraits must have evoked some feeling in you. I will tell you what I thought about them. There begins our exercise of 'appreciation' or 'reading' as you will see. Finally we end up in the next unit with a brief appreciation of John Keats's 'On First looking into Chapman's Homer.'

The criteria for the appreciation of paintings and poems are different. Hence, after commenting upon two portraits we turn towards two of the most important criteria in evaluating a poem. In the units on this course we try to ask not so much What has been said? but, Why did the poet say so? and How did s/he convey her/his meaning? We try to identify some of the possible answers of the second question in the next unit. Explication of poems in this course will answer the third question. In the next unit, however, we formally discuss prosody which is a distinctive feature of poetic language. The general features of language and literature have been discussed in the courses on Aspects of Language and Literary Criticism. Both these courses, however, will help your own reading of poems on this course. However, you need not wait until you have read those two courses.

1.2 EXAMINING TWO PORTRAITS

In this block there are two cover illustrations : one on the first cover page, another on the third. Both were done by the same artist. Did you notice that they represent two divergent attitudes; two disparate ways of life? Many of my friends thought that the woman with a string instrument 'was Saraswati, the goddess of learning. This lady is not sitting on the back of a swan. She has only two hands whereas the goddess has four hands and apart from the veena in the two she holds a book and a lotus flower in the other two hands. The lady on the first cover is like a common human being in that she has just two hands. Why then did so many of my friends think that the lady on the first cover is Saraswati? Wasn't it because our observations are often loaded or informed by theory, as you might like to say. Through this course we seek to reorient your affective facylties.

12.1 *Exposé*

So many of my friends thought that the lady on the first cover page is Saraswati because they brought to their appreciation of the portrait their prejudices - standards

of evaluation – unawares. This is what we do when we see a picture, or read a poem, a short story or a novel. One of the functions of this course is to prepare you to appreciate British poetry. For, in reading a book or appreciating a piece of art we are like travellers in a distant land. We can find only so much understanding and worth in it as we carry there. 'We must infer much' wrote Emerson, 'and supply chasms in the record. The history of the Universe is symptomatic and life is mnemonical'.

If the course is meant, you may ask, to enhance your ability to appreciate British culture, poetry in particular, why did we not use British portraits for the cover? To make a point. Howsoever deep your understanding of British culture, you as an Indian will eventually evaluate these poems by your taste, your understanding and ability to appreciate art in general. The appeal of the two cover illustrations, no matter how much they may be rooted in certain events or traditions, is ultimately universal.

1.2.2 The shepherd

Let's begin with the portrait of the shepherd on the third cover page. Ketaki told me that the man in her portrait is Goddo Pahan whom she met in Pandra village off Ratu Road, on the outskirts of Ranchi. However, the man in the sketch reminded me of a host of poets.

The first English poet Cædmon (fl. *670* A.D.) was a shepherd. I-Ie lived at the monastery of Abbess Hilda at Whitby. We get an account of his life from Bede's *Ecclesiastical* History *of the English* People which was originally written in Latin. Cædmon has often been called the Anglo-Saxon Milton. The greatest work attributed to him, the so-called Paraphrase, was discovered in the seventeenth century. It is however, a work of many hands. Do you know how Cædmon is believed to have begun writing poetry?

Cædmon, according to Bede, was an unlearned herdsman,

> ....so ignorant of singing was he that sometimes, at feast, where it was a custom that for the pleasure of all each guest should sing in turn, he would rise from the table when he saw the harp coming to him and go home ashamed. Now it happened once that he did this thing at a certain festivity, and went to the stable to care for the horses, this duty being assigned to him for the night. As he slept at the usual time, one stood by him saying: "Cædmon, sing me something." "I cannot sing", he answered, 'and that is why I came hither from the feast.' But he who spoke to him said again, 'Cædmon, sing to me'. And he said , 'What shall I sing?' and he said, 'Sing the beginning of created things'. . .

Cædmon sang and the next day when he told the steward of the abbey about his song he took him to Abbess Hilda who heard from him his episodes. Later more episodes from the Latin Bible were explained to him and he turned them into song.

Goddo Pahan is not a herdsman for any monastery. However, he is a farmer like William Langland's (?1332-?1339) Pier's, the ploughman. However, Goddo Pahan is a man of our times. He receives no visitation from the heavens as Piers does. Piers is confident; Goddo is not; Piers is angry but hopeful; Goddo has a cheerless prospect before him. .

Perhaps Goddo Pahan is more like Robert Bums (1795-96) who in Henry Mackenzie's words was 'a Heaven - taught ploughman'. Burns Wordsworth thought,

> .., walked in glory and in joy
> Following his plough, along the mountain side:

We are not aware of Burns's glory and joy, son of a poor tenant farmer as he was. His father who gave him a good education, for his station, died when he was twentyfive years old. Finding it diffficult to support the large family and to escape the life of a labourer he intended to emigrate to Jamaica. Looking at Goddo Pahan's portrait I was reminded of Bums' old man in 'Man was Made to Mourn, A Dirge' (August 1785).

The sun that overhangs yon moors,
Out-spreading far and wide,
Where hundereds labour to support
A haughty lordling's pride;
I've seen yon weary winter sun
Twice forty times return,
And ev'ry time has added proofs
That man was made to mourn.

The old man in the poem was eighty years old. Burns himself lived not even for forty years. His life of toil and labour taught him the unity of manltind, particularly of the economically depressed sections of the society. He supported the French Revolution, especially in its early phase and wrote:

For a' that, and a' that,
Its comin yet for a' that
That man to man, the world o'er
Shall brothers be for a' that.

Born in a strongly Calvinistic society, even Burns's father William Burnes had rejected it in favour of the humanist virtues of kindness and tolerance. Burns questioned nature's laws that made men high and lowly and ordered their estate. He asked,

If I'm designed yon lordling's slave,
By nature's law designed,
Why was an independent wish
E'er planted in my mind? '
If not, why am I subject to
His cruelty and scoin?
Or why has man the will and pow'r
To make his fellow moum?

No answer; though the question is significant. Burns strove for the fraternity of all mankind and he also wished to see humankind in harmony with nature. When his 'cruel coulter' (coulter: cutting blade of the plough) passed through a inouse's 'cell' hc einphathised with it as with a comrade:

I'am truly sony man's dominion
Has broken nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion
Which makes thee startle
At me, thy poor earth-born companion
An' fellow mortal !

Goddo Pahan surrounded by his sheep while a drop trickles down his cheek enjoys 'nature's social union'. He is one with nature, the mother of our vegetable life.

Goddo Pahan reminded me also of Thoreau (1817-1862) who, though a man of nature was also a revolutionary no matter how passive and a distant guru of Gandhiji. However Thoreau was an intellectual which Goddo is not. Goddo's 'wise

passiveness' is like Emerson's (1803-1882) or Wordsworth's (1770-1850) and reminds us of quite a few of the latter's characters.

Simon Lee who had once been a retainer to an aristocratic family has

> A long blue livery-coat...
> That's fair behind and fair before;

But he is poor and eighty years old. In his youth he was a runner at game for his master of Ivor Hall in the shire of Cardigan. On one of his errands he lost his right eye. Wordsworth tells us that he helped the Lees cut the root of an old tree as they were too weak for any arduous work. Simon returned the poet's help with thanks and praises on his lips and tears in his eyes which inade Wordsworth recall tlie different attitude of "better" men:

> I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
> With coldness yet returning;
> Alas, the gratitude of men
> Has't oft'ner left me mourning.

These words remind us of Bums' 'Man was made to Mourn'

The soldier Wordsworth met one night on the road between Nether Stowey and Alfoxden had been discharged on landing after his return from West Indies where 40,000 of the British troops had died of Yellow fever. This discharged soldier must have been able bodied once.

> His legs were long,
> So long and shapeless that I looked at them
> Forgetful of the body they sustained

He was still in his uniform trying to reach lionie although he had landed ten days ago. However, he could not sleep, harassed by the dogs as he had been. Wordsworth found him a place to spend tlie night.

Able, bodied somewhat like Simon Lee and the discharged soldier in their better days was the man with a sheep Wordsworth met weeping on the road in the village Holford near Alfoxden. Wordswortli narrates his story in 'The Last of the Flock'. Me was not a victim of another's curse such as Harry Gill of Goody Blake but of his own indulgence.

Goddo Pahan, strong as he appears, is rather like Michael than the Leech-gatherer in 'Resolution and Independence'; rather like the pedlar in the poem of that title and the narrator in 'The Ruined Cottage' than like the old Cumberland beggar, who in Wordworth's words is ,

> Bow-bent, his eyes forever on the ground,
> He plies his weary journey; seeing still,
> And seldom knowing that he sees,...

And yet Goddo's is a life in nature somewhat like Michael the shepherd

> neither gay perhaps
> Nor cheerful, yet with objects and with hopes
> Living a life of eager industry.

Goddo appears to be still industrious and leading a life in nature keeping away from tlie city.

1.2.3 Nature, country and artistic inspiration

Of all the western poets it was perhaps Wordsworth alone who retreated from the cit to the country and as he came from the Lake District could formulate a philosophy o nature. Wordsworth looked upon nature as mother and nurse. In *The* ***Prelude*** he tells us that the river Derwent made 'ceaseless music that composed [his] thoughts':

> That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved
> To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song
> And, for his alder shades and rocky falls,
> And from his fords and shallows sent a voice
> That followed along my dreams. *The Prelude*, Book

Goddo Pahan is not another Wordsworth; we are not sure if he is even the Pedlar or Michael; nature creates no duplicate; but we cannot question the view that his humble social status does not grants us some superiority over him as we might imagine in our folly. But we, rather the powerful, are warned by Wordsworth:

> But deem not this man useless. Statesman ye
> Who are so restless in your wisdom, ye
> Who have a broom still ready in your hands
> To rid the world of nuisances; ye proud,
> Heart- swol'n, while in your pride ye contemplate
> Your talents, power, or wisdom, deem him not
> A burthen of the earth !

is how Wordsworth values a beggar. The shepherd, the farmer and the labourer contribute no less to the well being of the society than the scholar, the politician or the civil servant. A true philosopher is also a poet at heart and divorced from good neither science, philosophy, poetry nor even society can survive. 'Tis Nature's law' wrote Wordsworth, 'That none, the meanest of created things...should exist / Divorced from good?' In one of his sonnets Wordsworth admitted that he was, 'oppressed [t]o think that now our life is only dressed [f]or show; mean handiwork, of craftsman, cook [o]r groom!' 'The wealthiest man' Wordsworth went on, 'among us is the best;.., Plain living and high thinking are no more'. Wealth perhaps is not so bad as the idolatory of wealth.

Whatever Ketaki wanted to state through her portrait of Goddo Pahan we know not but looking through her eyes we can see the gloom of the gloom which she saw in the cheerless landscape. The intention behind having Goddo Pahan on the third cover page was to remind every student of poetry of Wordsworth's views:

> One impulse from a vernal wood
> May teach you more of man,
> Of moral evil and of good
> Than all the sages can.

How many of the great men did not live in a crowd, Chanakya, who pulled down the Nanda dyansty of Pataliputra and installed Chandragupta Maurya in his place lived away from the crowd, not to speak of Balmiki and Vyasa and the seers of the Vedas and the Upanishads, Gandhi, of Vardha and Sabarmati who pulled down the British empire, over which it claimed the sun did not set, lived away from the crowd. "In the morning, — solitude" said Pythagoras; that Nature may speak to the imagination, as she does never in company ...,' Wrote emerson,

However, Emerson also cites Hobbes's views in the same essay on culture with approval:

**A young lady beneath a tree
From Dara Shikoh's album, c.1635.**

Jahangir embracing Shah Abbas of Persia
Abu-'l-Hassan, c.1620

> 'In the country, in long time, for want of good conversation, one's understanding and invention contract a moss on them, like an, old paling in an orchard'.
>
> Cities give us collision. 'Tis said, London and New York take the nonsense out of a man.

Emerson went on:

> The best bribe which London offers today to the imagination, is , that, in such a vast variety of people and conditions, one can believe there is room for persons of romantic character to exist, and that the poet, the mystic, and the hero, may hope to confront their counterparts.

The country is a creation of a few human beings; the city of generations of men and women who are willing to match their intelligence to industry and it is there that the finest of human kind congregate to take and to give, to improve others and in turn to be improved by them in all the infinite dimensions of our life.

A lot of praise of the country has come from men and women reacting against some of the unpleasant aspects of the city: crowdedness, noise, dust and smoke, lack of solitude and above all blind ambitions of fellow men and women. In one of his epodes the Latin poet Horace (65-8B.C.) praises the country as against the city. The praise, however, has come from the lips of a money lender who professedly wants to leave the city and go to the village. For this reason, he calls back his loans. However, a few weeks after the loans have come back with interest he decides once again to join the money market. The city and the rich culture it sustains are not to be decried. Anjali or Angelica as we may call the woman with the string-instrument has the composure of a Goddo Pahan but she has something more, cultivation and culture which are products of urban social intercourse.

1.2.4 The Woman holding a string instrument

The symbolic figure of a woman holding a string instrument on the first cover is a copy by Ketaki of a sixteenth century Mughal painting now at Musée Guimet in Paris. You may have noticed that she is not standing on the carpet or in a garden. She mounts a mask of a man with heavy features and sullen appearance. In order to enhance the ferocity of the soldier he has been provided with two sharp canine teeth, or tusks, outgrowing his mouth. The countenance of the male suggests a strong influence of the Gujarat school of art.

The foundations of Mughal school of art, we can say, were laid by Humayun (1530-1556) who unexpectedly had to be a semipermanent guest (1540-1545) of the Shah Tahmasp of Persia . However, the shah was a religious bigot who increasingly got disinterested in the art of painting owing to which Humayun could bring two great masters - Mir Sayyid 'Ali of Tabriz and ' Abdus-samad of Shiraz along with him to India. They in course of time recruited a large number of talented painters and established a flourishing atelier. Two of the early works of this studio were the illustrations in the manuscripts called ***Dastan-i-Amir*** *Hamzan* , better known as the ***Tutinama*** the story of a parrot illustrated for the divergence of the young emperor Akbar (1554-1605) who could not read. The soldiers, depicted in these manuscripts unlike those of the Gujarat school, have small eyes, long face, and flat nose which suggest Mongoloid influence.

If the mask suggests the influence of indigenous traditions, the influence of European art on the lady is unmistakable. This can be appreciated by contrasting Anjali with another but typical portrait of a young lady beneath a tree (page 17). This was done

probably for prince Dara Shikoh (1614-1659) around 1635. A typical Mughal painting would show the body-line of the lady notwithstanding the dress cover.

The folds of Anjali's dress, as well as her pose suggest Western influence. This is not surprising in view of the fact that the West began to influence medieval Indian painting since 1580 when the Jesuit mission from Goa under Rodolph Acquaviva Naples came to the court of Akbar, at his invitation, to Fatehpur Siki Acquaviva brought Akbar a copy of the Royal Polyglot Bible of Philip II of Spain. Each of the eight volumes of this Bible had a frontispiece engraving which Akbar asked his artists to copy. The fathers also presented the emperor European prints and engravings of Chirstian subject matter which were much appreciated in the royal family especially by Prince Salirn.

There is a painting of Jahangir by Payag (c.1650) which shows a motley assortment of European paintings, some secular, some religious, above him. In another portrait of the emperor he shares a window with Jesus Christ with the Cross below and him above holding the globe in his left hand and his necklace of pearl in his right. Jahangir's interest in European paintings is attested by Femao Guerrio, the Portuguese Jesuit priest, who found enormous frescoes, on Christ in majesty, the Madonna, Saint Luke, scenes from the Acts of the Apostles and lives of Saints Anne and Susannah done by Indian artists at the court in Agra. Although there must have been many who learnt from the west Basawan has been considered the most important painter in the royal atelier who studied and incorporated interesting details from European paintings. His study of Majnun with the emaciated horse has become a showcase example of Basawan's understanding of the spirit of European art. Surprisingly of all the European painters the one who influenced Mughal painting the most was the German painter and engraver Albecht Durer (1471-1528).

Dürer's famous engravings, however, fascinated British poets and writers also. These are *Knight, Death* and *Devil* (1513) and *Melencolia* (1514). James Thomson (1834-82) described *Melancolia* in the *City of Dreadful* Night and John Ruskin (1819-1900) compared him in his *Modern Painters* (1834) with Salvator Rosa (1615-73). Thomas Mann (1875-1955) the German novelist draws much of his imagery in *Dr Faustus* from Diirer's works.

Dürer was the son of a Hungarian goldsmith who had settled in Nuremberg. Diirer came under the influence of the great humanist scholar Willibald Pirkheimer who stimulated his interest in the new learning of the Renaissance. Durer made two trips to Italy and introduced the Renaissance ideals of Italy to the north. However, it was through the Italians that Diirer's paintings found entry into the Mughal courts. For we know that along with the traders and missionaries also came goldsmiths, craftsmen and doctors from Milan and Florence. Presumably the Italian presence favoured the Italian works of art which made Sir Thomas Roe the ambassador of James I at Jahangir's court from 1615-1619 to write back home to send works of art 'Like those rich paintings that come from Italy over land and by way of Ormuz'.

The name of the Mughal painter of the *Madonna and Child* from the etching made by Durer in 1513, now in Windsor Castle, is not known. It dates from C.1600. However, we know that Abu-'l-Hassan copied Diirer's *Saint John of the Cross* in the year 1600 when he was 12 years old. Abu-'l-Hassan son of Aqa-Riza was born in the Mughal household and grew in the presence of Prince Salim's shadow. Hassan was undoubtedly a great artist. So was Kesavdas whose copy of St. *Mathew*, now in the Boldleian library, Oxford remains a proof of the Western influence on Mughal painting. ***Anjali,*** is an early painting and still we find the finesse which is lacking for instance in *Madonna and Child* at Windsor castle referred to above.

So much for the Western influence evident in *Anjali.* The symbolism of standing on somebody in order to express the subjugation of that person or what he signifies can be traced back to the Shiva iconography of South India. Shiva, in his famous dance

stands on a dwarf who in turn symbolises meanness, pettiness, jealousy, cowardice, etc. The unknown Mughal artist who did the original of *Anjali* apparently picked up and elaborated upon the motif symbolically.

The same symbolism was made use of by Abul-'l-Hassan who in one of his paintings of C.1620 depicts Jahangir bestriding the globe (page 18). He embraces the Shah Abbas of Persia but incidentally pushes him into the Mediterranean. While the cherubs holding the crescent moon are Islamic and Western, the halo around Jahangir is a typical feature of late Jahangiri portraits when the actual power of the government had shifted from the emperor to the queen. In contrast with this portrait there is economy and artistic expressiveness in *Anjali* typical in their different ways of western art and the illustrations of Akbar's reign.

1.2.5 Resume

'There are critics who think... that the greatness of an artistic creation lies in its richness, ambiguity, and interpretability, and that it is both futile and somehow wrong to search for the correct interpretation, the one which the author intended' wrote E.H. Gombrich in his essay 'The Evidence of Images' and went on to affirm 'I do not hold this view. I do not believe that any interpretation is sure and infallible, any more than any other hypothesis can be. But I do think that we can try as historians to restore the original context in which these words were intended to function and it is always worth-while to venture upon this perilous path...' In his essay Gombrich picks up problems of interpretation of visual images for militiary intelligence, ornithologists, communication scientists and art critics and shows the centrality of interpretation to the business of living. (Professor Gombrich's essay was published in 1969 by Johns I-Iopkins University Press in **a** volume edited by Charles Singleton called *Interpretations: Theory and Practice.)* However, you may think that interpretation is a western fad and a byproduct of scientism. Let's allude to two episodes in Sanskrit literature.

This first one is from Kalidasa's *Śakuntala*. King Dusyanta, as you know, lost his lady love due to a curse. While the Xing was once looking at a painting with three women Vidusaka comes in and the king asks him who according to him is Śakuntala. Vidu*ś*aka replies, 'she who is leaning rather wearily against the mango tree, its leaves glistening with the water she has thrown over it. She extends her arm with infinite grace, her face is slightly flushed with the heat and flowers entwine her streaming hair to fall together over her shoulders. She must be Śakuntala and the others her friends or maidservants'. (We can compare the portrait to a lyric which celebrates a single intense moment, The painter in *Śakuntala* took a single moment in his/her subject's life and immorlalized it with his brush just as a poet does with his pen.) In his comments Vidusaka interpreted the portrait.

More interesting from the point of view of interpretation is a similar although a little scabrous allusion in Dandin's *Daśakumāraçarita* (The Tales of the Ten Princes) written in the seventh century of the Christian era. In the city of Mathura lived a young man who frequented the abodes of courtesans. Once he chanced upon a miniature of a young lady in the hands of an artist. Struck by her beauty the young man told the artist:

> Master I notice some contrasting features here. This soft body is of a lady of quality. Her slim figure and the pallid beauty of her features reveal her rank, but he who possesses such treasures has not enjoyed them as much as he might, for her glance is still haughty. She is not the wife of someone who goes on long journeys abroad for her hair is not tied up in plaits nor are there other signs to indicate an absent husband or widowhood. Here is a sign on her left side: she must be the wife of some old merchant who is not excessively endowed with virile strength. She fully merits a man of great talent to execute her portrait, as may be seen from the quality of the work.

The young man's interpretation of the lady's portraits tells us not only that analysis and interpretation is not a recent Western fad but is of a piece with any civilized society Occidental or Oriental. In other words it is an implement for life; for civilized life. This course aims at enriching this aspect of your mind.

1.3 LET'S SUM UP

We have told you about the ultimate aim of this course in the preceding subsection. However, your orientation is only half-way through. Here we have discussed some of the thoughts that came to my mind on looking at the portraits on the covers. There we formally began our exercise of critical appreciation. However, we also simultaneoulsy examined the nature of artistic inspiration and their role *vis-a vis* artistic technique; the role of the reader and the milieu - mental and social - of the artist as well as the reader in the creation and reception of art. Reader response thoery is relatively new in the West; Indian sages had written on *Kārayitri* and *Bhāvayitri pratibhās* hundreds of years ago. Now you may read the next unit that focuses attention on literary art, especially poetic art.

1.4 NO ADDITIONAL READING SUGGESTED

It is not always necessary that the student may be advised to read books and articles related to the subject. If you cast your net too wide, in view of the time you have, you may not catch any fish.

However, if you have access to a good library you may look at the portraits that you find in books on paintings. You may recall seeing books on Renaissance Art, Mughal Art, Pahari Miniatures, Baroque Art or The Great Mannerists, When you visit a library next time look for some such material again. You will find leads for such studies in the introductions to the various blocks of this course.

I enjoyed reading 'Reynolds and the Art of Characterization' by Robert E. Moore and 'Gainsborough's "Prospect animated Prospect"' by Emilie Buchwald in *Studies in Criticism and Aesthetics* : Essays in honour of Samuel Holt Monk edited by Howard Anderson and John S. Shea (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1967). Jean H. Hagstrum's, *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago, 1958) is a scholarly work by a critic of great reputation. *English Painting : A Concise History* by William Gaunt (London : Thames and Hudson: 1964, 1985) can be a very useful guide and offer a salutary perspective to the study of English poetry. However, it is not necessary for you even to try to look for them. You may waste your time doing so. Instead look at the illustrations in these volumes carefully and read the comments offered in these pages and then let your inclination guide you in your jaunts into the works of art.

UNIT 2 A PRELUDE TO THE STUDY OF POETRY

Structure

2.0 Objectives
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  2.2.1 Writing and Reading as Histrorical Acts
  2.2.2 The Subjectivity of a Work of *Art*
  2.2.3 The Specular Moment of Literature
  2.2.4 From the Writer's Text to the Reader's Work
2.3 Versification: The Grammar of Poetry
  2.3.1 Prosody,Metre, Scansion
    (a) Prosody
    (b) Metre and Metries
    (c) Scansion
2.4 Types of Metres
  2.4.1 Syllable-stress or accented syllabic metres
    i) The iambic metre
    ii) The trochaic metre
    iii) The anapaestic metre
    iv) The dactylic metre
    v) The amphibrachic metre
  2.4.2 Strong-stress metres
  2.4.3 Syllabic metres
  2.4.4 Quantitative metres
2.5 Rhyme and Rhythm in Poetry
  2.5.1 Rhyme and Rhymeschemes
  2.5.2 Rhythm
2.6 Analysis of a poem
2.7 Let's sum up
2.8 A Brief Annotated Bibliography
2.9 Answers to exercises

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to appreciate any work of literary art better, specially a poem. To split it into more concrete terms:

- you will be able to speak about the abstract entity that is a poem – in other words the ontology of a poem;
- speak on the acoustic aspects of a poem such as metre, rhyme, and rhythm. And finally;
- you will complete the task of appreciation by bringing together the capacities developed in the previous and the present unit.

With this theoretical background you will be better.equipped to study'this course.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The function of this unit is, in a way to complete the task we had set for ourselves in the previous unit, i.e. preparing you mentally, equipping you technically and

providing you with a perspective for the study of this M.A. English programme in general and this course on British Poetry in particular.

This course on literature, perhaps like any other course on literature, seeks to educate you affectively, improve your ability for appreciation, give you better insights into the ways literary artists, especially the poets, communicate.

In Unit1 we adopted the method of commenting upon two portraits. They are examples of visual art and perhaps made communication more convenient. In this unit we go a little deeper. In talking about a poem you talk about the images and metaphor ; symbol and icon ; emblem and exemplum that have a visual appeal though in an abstract manner.

There is **a** still more subtle and deep level which is the rhythm. This is a product of metre and rhyme and of many other effects which perhaps even the poets are not always conscious. The entire sound effect or prosody of a poem is a common ground of the society, the individual and the language. We will examine some of the fundamental ideas in prosody in the third, fourth and fifth sections. These sections of this unit would require drilling as you do in mathematics. It will require just a little attention and practice so you may study especially 2.3 and 2.4 independently of other sections if you so wish.

The first section **(2.2)** is a bit abstract and examines the thing called a poem. It would be good if you can get a hang of the poem in abstraction. However, don't bother yourself too much about this section in case you find it vague.

The last major section i.e. 2.6 shows how all your study can be employed in "deciphering" the text of a poem. You have done this type of work during your undergraduate days. You may feel that you did not need this section. However, it is included to bring the discussions in the two introductory units to a conclusion. This is the shortest of the five major sections and you may go through it before reading other sections, if you so desire.

However, don't break off at any of the subsections within a section as that may interrupt the discussion in your mind. Then you may feel muddled.

We have not discussed the poetic forms such as the lyric, epic, allegory or fable or the various aspects of figurative language such as simile, metaphors, irony, hyperbole, or terms of art such as fancy, imagination, gothic, classic, neo-classic, romantic, pastoral, elegy, satire, pathos, bathos, myth, romance, sensibility, wit and humour,etc. We expect you to know them or consult a dictionary to find out more as and when they occur in your study of this course.

Although a little time consuming, this unit will enhance your ability to study literature in general and poetry in particular. You may study this unit for an hour or two daily over a week or two.

2.2 THE READING OF LITERATURE

Such are the changes in critical attitudes that a poem is no longer to be read as an inscription on a rock devoid of its origin, context or locale. The poet seen as an inhabitant of a lonely tower or lost in the music of his thought or an inmate of a castle freed from the responsibilities of life whose servants could do the living for him appears today as an unrealistic and posed picture of the poet. The poet is a human being among other human beings, and speaking to and being spoken to reciprocally. The language s/he uses is a social artefact and also a tool in politics. Let's recall

Shakespeare or Yeats or Blake or Kabir or Tulsi. They were all men spealung to other men and-women like themselves.

We could not agree less with Derrida that 'the institutional or socio-political space of literary production... does not simply surround works, it affects them in their very structure.' As students of literature we wish to feel *that* element of the text on our pulse. Hence we get interested in the Irishness of Yeats, the julahaness of Kabir, the atheism of Shelley and the conservativeness of Eliot and Tulsi.

2.2.1 Writing and reading as historical acts

These issues involve us in the historicity of literary products. Talking about the makeup of the poet, in his 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' Eliot wrote:

> ... that the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.

Without this sense, Eliot opines, no poet can remain a poet beyond his twentyfifth year. However, it is not just the tradition of literature that a good poet embodies, but also that of politics, science, economy and natural events. To turn from poetic creations to criticism, in our time Derrida points out that 'Deconstruction calls for a 'highly "historian's" attitude' and admits that *of Grammatology,"* is a history book through and through.' ' In his or her experience of writing as such' continues Derrida, 'a writer cannot not be concerned, interested, anxious about the past, that of literature, history, or philosophy, of culture in general.' Derrida cites two dissimilar cases of James Joyce and William Faulkner:

> What I have just suggested is as valid for Joyce, that immense allegory of historical memory, as for Faulkner, who doesn't write in such a way that he gathers together at every sentence, and in several languages at once, the whole of Western culture.

Dryden in his poetry comments upon contemporary events more frequently than Wordworth but for that reason Wordworth's poetry is not less historically situated than Dryden's or for that matter Shelley's.

2.2.2 The subjectivity of a work.of art

The poet, we have said, is a person living among other persons. And yet his / her poem is not, for the moment we may say?an objective document such as a theorem of Euclid or the 'General theory of Relativity ' of Einstein. The poet writes about an intensely personal experience not only when a Wordsworth is writing his autobiographical poem such as *The* Prelude or a Tennyson expressing his grief over the death of his friend Arthur I-Iallam in *In* Memoriam but also when an Eliot writes The *Waste* Land or an Aurobindo Ghose *Savitri*. So powerful is the narcissism that it does not forsake even a philosopher such as Jacques Derrida. He told Derek Attridge,

> At the "narcissistic" moment of, "adolescent" identification... this was above all the desire to inscribe merely a memory or two. I say "only", though I already felt it an impossible and endless task. Deep down, there was something like a lyrical movement toward confidences or confessions.

Derrida goes on:

> Still today there remains in me an obsessive desire to save in uninterrupted inscription, in the form of a memory, what happens - or *fails* to *happen*. What I should be tempted to denounce as a lure - i.e., totalization or gathering up -

> isn't this what keeps me going? The idea of an internal polylogue, everything that later, in what I hope was a slightly more refined way, was able to lead me to Rousseau or to Joyce, was first of all the adolescent dream of keeping a trace of all the voices which were traversing me - or were *almost doing* so - and which was to be so precious, unique, both specular and speculative.

Derrida above italicizes ' fails to happen' and ' almost doing so ' which shows that literature is not just a simple record of the events of the artist's life but also of his unfulfilled wishes, his dreams, his desires, that Roland Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text* went even further and called 'neuroses.' 'Thus every writer's motto reads:' wrote Barthes, ' *mad I cannot be, sane I do not deign to be, neurotic I am'*. The belief in the subjectivity or autobiographical character of all art has been felt with ever greater intensity since the Romantics. In our own time, ' I want' writes George Poulet,' 'at all costs to save the subjectivity of literature.'

'Eliot's dictum,' Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation'is directed not upon the poetry.' has been much abused in English Departments in support of a certain kind of idleness that obviates any research into the life and times of the poet. 'Poetry ' we have heard beign echoed so often, ' is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.' What is forgotten, however, is that, while contradicting Wordsworth, Eliot went on to qualify his definition in the following words:

> But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.

In Eliot's theory of poetry as much as in his poetry we observe the impact of his piety which demands the extinction of personality. 'For knowledge' wrote E.H. Gombrich, ' a well stocked mind, is clearly the key to the practice of interpretation.' In order to interpret a poem we cannot overemphasize the importance of a knowledge of the life of the poet and the background of his age. 'Man' wrote Emerson,' is explicble by nothing less than all his history.'

2.2.3 The Specular moment of literature

'He should' however, pointed out Emerson,' see that he can live all history in his own person.' He advises the student to read history actively and not passively. Emerson exhorts him:

> He must sit solidly at home, and not suffer himself to be bullied by Kings or empires, but know that he is greater than all the geography and all the government of the world; he must transfer the point of view from which history is commonly read, from Rome and Athens and London to himself, and not deny his conviction that he is the court, and if England or Egypt have anything to say to him, he will try the case; if not let them for ever be silent.

What is relevant for us in history is the moment or instance in the present - in the poet's life, in the reader's life - that the past can throw its floodlight upon. Otherwise we say, as it has been said, 'Let the dead past bury its dead' or repeat with Gandhi Ji in *Hind Swaraj* that happy is a nation without a history. The necessary history is inscribed in ourselves just as the wings of the young pigeon that hatched yesterday predicted air and the eyes of the human embryo anticipated light. The poet writes about the present, about the living, not what is dead and discarded. 'The poet's text is the text of bliss', as Barthes says, 'the text that discomforts, unsettles the reader's historical, cultural , phychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language'.

Now you may ask what are you to do as a student and critic of literature. How should you treat history or biography in your own analyses of a poem. History and biography

have to be reconciled to the interpretation of a new, a specular moment described in the work of art. Derrida opines that history is contretemps - a series of unlucky, unfortunate or unexpected events - and its virtue lies in its iterability. In his 'Signature Event Context' he pointed out that the verb 'iterate' comes from the Sanskrit root *iter* which means different, (भिन्न). While history is iterable, or repeatable it is not the same event that is repeated. (Anjali, though a copy of a 16th century Mughal paniting is a new act, has a different originary history. It nonetheless underlines the value of the original.) By repetition Derrida points out,

> Not that the text is thereby dehistoricized, but historicity is made of iterability. There is no history without iterability, and this is also what lets the traces continue to function in the absence of the general context or some elements of the context.

It is for these reasons that we have to read a poem simultaneously for what is unique and specular in it and the iteration - in both senses of repetition and difference - of the historical and general.

2.2.4 From the writer's text to the reader's work

Western criticsm in the latter half of the twentieth century can be said to have moved from a poetics of writing to a poetics of reading. The Sanskrit critical theory developed theories of *Karayitri Pratibha* and a *Bhavayitri Pratibha* - the creative and appreciative talents. 'Classic criticism' complained Roland Barthes in *Images Music Text*, ' has never paid any attention to the reader; for it the writer is the only person in literature.' For Barthes points out that ' a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original blend and clash.' Barthes pointed out at the instability of the text, According to him a text is not isotropic (*isos* in Greek means same and *tropos* manner or disposition). The edges and the seams are unpredictable he tells us. 'In the man, could we lay him open' opined Emerson, 'we should see the reason for his last flourish and tendril of his work; as every spine and tint in the sea-shell pre-exist in the secreting organs of the fish'. However reassuring Emerson may sound it appears today as an elusive goal; nonetheless a desirable one.

So after Derrida we talk about archaeological criticism that goes at the writer's text, to the sources of experience both unique and not-unique at the same time. In this sense the text is open. We have just a trace of the author's meaning in his text which can be supplemented by the author's other works both written and unwritten and all other texts of all other authors, the t.v. programmes, newspaper reports etc, to which the author responds,

The reader, however, delimits the open ended text of the author. S/He imposes upon it the status of a work. He interprets, analyses, examines and evaluates and arrives at a definite meaning which we call,eschatological criticism after Derrida. Eschatology from the Greek ' doctrine of last things' is usually applied to death and the last judgement. Thus the reader's work has a stable meaning. This criticism can be called in Barthes' words 'a mere parasite of the story being narrated.'

Self - Check Exercise I

1. Write in about 60 of your own words on the relevance of the reader to a work of art.

_____

_____

_____

2. If your friend tells you that a poem is made of words how would you respond to him / her?

2.3 VERSIFICATION: THE GRAMMAR OF POETRY.

In one his last poems written in 1,938called 'The Statues' the Irish poet W.B. Yeats (1865-1939) marvelled at 'The lineaments of a plummet measured face'. As you know masons work with plummets which is a plumb or ball of lead attached to a string for testing perpendicularity of wall, etc. And yet the 'plummet measured face' has its distinctive features or lineaments. Earlier on in the poem Yeats had written:

> ... for the men
> That with a mallet or a chisel modelled these
> Calculations that look but casual flesh, put down
> All Asiatic vague immensities,
> And not banks of oars that swam upon
> The many-headed foam at Salamis.
> Europe put off that foam when Phidias.
> Gave women dreams and dreams their looking-glass.

Salamis, which you may locate on a map of Greece, was the site of the rout in 480 B.C. of Xerxes (485-465 B.C.)- the son of Darius, the Persian King (521-485 B.C.) - by the Greeks. According to Herodotus (5th B.C.) the Greek historian who had participated in the war and left an account of it, the armies of the Persians were fantastic; their might unchallenged. However they were defeated by the cooperation of Athens and Sparta . Salamis is seen here as a symbol of the victory of

mathematics, calculation, number over 'vague immensities' and the proverbeal Asiatic grandeur. We are reminded of the sea battle at Salamis by the 'many headed foam' in the sixth line of the quotation above. In the same line Yeats cunningly slips in the name of Phidias, who was perhaps the greatest artist of ancient Europe. His colossal statue of Zeus at Olympia in the south-east of Acropolis wrought in ivory and gold over a core of wood was the most famous statue of antiquity. He had also contributed three statues of Athene on Acropolis. One of them was wrought in ivory and gold. He had also probably designed and certainly supervised the construction of the frieze of Parthenon. Yeats perhaps wants to tell us that it was Phidias' artistry, his life-like creations, products of calculation and measurement nonetheless that set high standards for the society of Pericles (492-429 B.C.).

We may, may not or only partially agree with Yeats's observations above on 'Asiatic vague immensities' but we cannot deny that pieces of art, or any work in politics or warfare for that matter, are human contrivances of planning with the help of cold concrete facts - be they words, or colours or rocks and mortar or people and locations.

A student who wishes to learn poetry properly must learn the basics of metre especially if s/he wishes to appreciate the poetry in a foreign language. With reference to the study of ancient Greek and Latin literature by English students Eliot opined:

> We have to learn a dead language by an artificial method, and our methods of teaching have to be applied to pupils most of whom have only a moderate gift for language.

While delivering his W.P. Ker Memorial Lecture (1942) at Glasgow Eliot went even further and emphasised the study of English metre even for the native English speaker:

> Even in approaching the poetry of our own language, we may find the classification of metres, of lines with different numbers of syllables and stresses in different places, useful at a preliminary stage, as a simplified map of a complicated territory: but it is only the study not of poetry but of poems, that can train our ear.

What Eliot says after the colon gives the impression that if you know the technique some day inspiration would descend and give your verse the life that is poetry. The 'soul of rhythm' Sri Aurobindo (whose writings you are going to rend in another course) wrote 'can only be found by listening in to what is behind the music of words and sound and things'. He admitted, that the 'intellectual knowledge of technique helps... provided one does not make of it a mere device or a rigid fetter' Aurobindo appears to be in agreement with Eliot but they appear on the surface to place their emphases a little differently. Aurobindo points out:

> Attention to technique harms only when a writer is so busy with it that lie becomes ihdifferent to substance. But if the substance is adequate, the attention to technique can only give it greater beauty.

'It is in my view' Aurobindo went on,

> a serious error to regard metre or rhyme as artificial elements, mere external and superfluous equipment restraining the movement and sincerity of poetic form. Metre, on the contrary, is the most natural mould of expression for certain states of creative emotion and vision, it is much more natural and spontaneous than a non-metrical form; the emotion expresses itself best and most powerfully in a balanced rather than in a loose and shapeless rhythm. The search for techniques is simply the search for the best and most

appropriate form for expressing what has to be said and once it is found, the inspiration can flow quite naturally and fluently into it.

In different words though, Eliot and Aurobindo appear to be in agreement about the place and utility of the knowledge of versification in the writing and, by extension for us, the study of poetry in English.

2.3.1 Prosody, Metre, Scansion

(a) **Prosody** : That part of grammar which deals with laws governing the structure of verse is called prosody. It encompasses the study of all the elements of language that contribute towards acoustic or rhythmic effects, chiefly in poetry but also in prose. Ezra Pound called Prosody "the articulation of the total sound of a poem". However, we know that alliteration (the rhythmic repetition of consonants) and assonance (repetition of vowel sounds) occur as much in prose as in poetry. Besides assonance and alliteration rhythmic effects are produced in poetry as well as in prose by the repetition of syntactical and grammatical patterns, However, compared with even the simplest verse, the "prosodic" structure of prose would appear haphazard and unconsidered.

(b) **Metre and Metrics :** Metre measures the rhythm of a line of verse. The word inetre derives from the Greek word *metron* which means 'measure'. Traditionally metre refers to the regular, recurrence of feet. According to the Hungarian-American linguist John Lotz (b. 1913), 'In some languages there are texts in whicli the phonetic material within certain syntactic frames, such as sentence, phrase, word, is numerically regulated. Such a text is called verse, and its distinctive characteristics meter. Metrics is the study of meter. A nonmetric text is called prose.' In the words of Seymour Chatman (b.1928) 'Meter might be defined as a systematic convention whereby certain aspects of phonology are organised for aesthetic purposes. In order to find out where the accent falls we scan a line.' 'Like any conventicn' Chatman goes on, 'it is susceptible of individual variation which could be called stylistic, taking "style" in the common meaning of "idiosyncratic way of doing something"'

(c) **Scansion** : In general parlance, to scan is to look intently at all parts successively. Radars cause particular regions to be traversed by a controlled beam. In prosody scansion refers to metrical scanning of verse. When a unit of verse - a foot, a line or a stanza - is scanned with the help of symbol's the metre can be seen as well as heard.

We make use of a few syinbols in order to scan a passage in verse (and sometimes also in the case of prose). The symbols are shown below:

Symbol	Name of the symbol	Purpose
/	The acute accent	Metrically stressed syllable
u	The breve	Metrically weak syllable
|	A single line	Division between feet
||	A double line	Caesura or pause in the line
A	A rest	A syllable metrically expected but not actually present.

2.4 TYPES OF METRES

There are basically four types of metres. They are:

i. Syllable – stress or accented syllabic metres
ii. Strong – stress metres
iii. Syllabic metres
iv. Quantitative metres

We will now discuss each one of them one by one.

2.4.1 Syllable-stress or accented syllabic metres

The smallest unit of meter in poetry is a foot. A **foot** in'prosody is a pattern of phonetically stressed and unstressed syllables. The four principal feet foand in English verse are illustrated below:

(a)	iambic	ăppéar, bĕhóld, ăttáck, sŭpplý
(b)	trochee	tíger, hóly, úppĕr, grándeur
(c)	anapaest	ŭndĕrstánd, cŏllŏnáde, rĕappéar
(d)	dactyl	déspĕrăte, messĕnger, propĕrty, infămŏus

Besides, the four major feet the **spondee** (′′) and the **pyrrhus** (∪ u) also occur as substitutions in a passage of verse. Some theorists also admit the **amphibrach** (∪/∪), **amphimacer** (/ ∪ /) and **tribrach** (u u ∪) into their scansion. However, these are rather uncommon in English poetry.

Syllable stress metres got established in English in the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer (1340?-1400). After him, for about two centuries the syllable-stress metre fell into disuse or was misunderstood. It was only towards the end of the 16th century that the syllable-stress metres got re-established.

Now we will scan a passage of each major metrical type and then leave a few stanzas unscanned for you to scan. After having scanned them with a *pencil* you may compare your scansion with those scanned at the end of the unit.

(i) The Iambic metre :

With rav/ished ears
The mon/arch hears
Assumes / the God
Affects / to nod.
And seems / to shake / the spheres. Dryden.

Comments: The five line stanza above is in iambic dimeter (two feet). However, the concluding line is in iambic trimeter. The rhyme scheme is a b b a,

Self-check Exercise 1

Now you may scan the following passages and comment briefly on the metrical features:

Passage 1: In woods a ranger

To joy a stranger

Comments :

_____

_____

2: Thy way not mine, O Lord

However dark it be;

Lead me with thine own hand

Choose out the path for me.

Comments :

_____

_____

3: The way was long, the wind was cold,

The minstrel was infirm and old;

The harp, his sole remaining joy,

Was carried by an orphan boy,

Comments :

_____

_____

4: Confusion shame remorse despair,

At once his bosom swell

The damps of death bedewed his brow,

He shook, he groaned, he fell.

Comments :

_____

_____

_____

_____

5: I put my hat upon my head

And walked into the Strand,

And there I met another man

Whose hat was in his hand.

Comments

The passages above, you must have noticed, are clumsily regular. They may qualify as passable verse but don't have the power to move us as poetry does.

By far the most cominon measure of English poetry is the **iambic pentameter.** It is generally found in two distinct kinds - the unrhymed variety called **blank verse** and the rhymed variety **heroic couplet.**

As epics concentrated on a typical hero such as Achilles and Aeneas they were generally called heroic poems. Dryden and Pope translated Virgil (70-19 B.C.) and Homer (9th Century B.C) respectively in the rhyming couplet. It became the dominant metre of late seventeenth and eighteenth century poetry. Hence the metre began to get called "heroic". The Restoration playwrights in trying to transfer epic gsandeur to their stiige made their characters speak in heroic couplet. The effect, however, was grandiose rather than grand. The heroic couplet reached perfection in the hands of Alexander Pope. Below we scan four lines from his *Essay* on *Criticism* (1711) :

When A/jax strives/ some rock's/ vast weight/ to throw,
The line/ too lab/ours, and// the words/ move slow;
Not so,// when swift/ camilla scours1 the plain
Flies o'er/ th' unbend/ing corn/ and skims/ along/ the main.

The lines above are in regular iambic pentameter except the sixth which is an hexameter. An iambic hexameter line is also called an **alexandrine.** In the second foot of the fourth line we notice an elision i.e. omission of a syllable in pronunciation. Thomas Norton (1532-84) and Thomas Sackville used *blank verse* for the first time in their play *Gorboduc* (1561). Below is a specimen from the play:

The royal king and eke his sons are slain;
No ruler rests within the regal seat;
The heir, to whom the scepter ' longs, unknown
Lo, Britain's realm is left an open prey,
A present spoil for conquest to ensue.

The regimented uniformity of the iambic pentameter lines above communicates monotony and as poetiy it is lifeless.

Christopher Marlowe (1564-93), about whom you would read in the course on *British Drama* (MEG 02), changed all this by varying the accents, introducing the medial pause (called **caesura**) and allowing the sense to flow into a freer sentence structure. Here is an example from *Doctor Faustus* (1604) :

Was this/ the face/ that launched / a thous/and ships,
And burnt/ the top/less tower/ of Il/ium ?

Sweet Hélen,/ make me/ immórtal/ with a kíss,

Her lips/ súck forth/ my soúl;/ see where/ it flies !

Come; Helen,/ come, give me/ my soúl/ again.

Here will/ I dwell/ for heáven is/ in these lips,

And all/ is dross/ that is/ not Hel/ena.

You would notice that the passage above is dominated by blank verse i.e unrhymed iambic pentameter. However, the third and fifth lines are tetrameter lines. Whereas the first foot of the third line is a spondee, there is an anapaestic variation in the last foot. With the help of an extra unstressed syllable before "Kiss" Marlowe succeeds in communicating, as it were, Faustus's .longing for Helen.

Marlowe intoduces the fifth line with a trochaic inversion. This is succeeded by an amphimacer. However, you would notice that while there are metrical variations in the two lines, the number of accented syllables remain uniformly five in each line of the passage. Marlowe thus achieves a felicity of expression by adopting a unique rhythm apposite for the character and his stuation in the play but without contravening the natural rhythm of the English language.

Even more **flexibility** was introduced into English poetry by Shakespeare. You may scan one of his sonnets or some of the passages you like in his plays you will read on the ***British Drama*** (MEG 02) course.

Self-check Exercise III :

Now you may scan a couple of passages from Shakespeare and Keats and write your comments on them in the space provided:

(a) Two truths are told,

As hap/py pro/logues to / the swell/ing act

Of the imperial theme. I thank you, gentlemen.

This supernatural soliciting

Cannot be ill, cannot be good; if ill,

Why hath it given me earnest of success,

Commencing in a truth ? I am Thane of Cawdor.

If good, why do I yield to that suggestion

Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair.

And make my seated heart knock at my ribs Shakespeare: *Macbeth*

On First Looking into Chapman's Homer'

Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and Kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Appolo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told ,
That 'deep browed Homer ruled as his demesne
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific, and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise
Silent upon a peak in Darien.

John Keats.

In the examples above you noticed that two measurements are involved in metre: we have to speak about the kind of foot and the number of feet. You scanned passages in the iambic metre in two feet or dimeter, three feet or trimeter, four feet or tetrameter, five feet or pentameter, six feet or hexameter and seven feet or septameter. You noticed that the septameter verse often divided into lines of tetrameter alternating with trimeter. It has been estimated that ninety per cent of English poetry is in the iambic pentameter. Now we will examine a few examples of the trochee, anapaest and dactyl also.

(ii) ***The Trochaic Metre*** **:**

Below we scan a stanza in trochaic tetrameter:

May thou/ month of/ rosy/ beauty,
Month when/ pleasure/ is a/ duty,
Month of/ bees and/ month of/ flowers,
Month of/ blossom/ laden/ bowers.

Do the drill below in order to find how well you have understood the trochaic metre.

Self-Check Exercise IV

(a)

Dreadful gleams,

Dismal screams,

Fires that glow,

Shrieks of woe,

Sullen moans,

Hollow groans. A.Pope

(b) Rich the treasure,

Sweet the pleasure. J. Dryden

(c) When the British warrior queen

Bleeding from the Roman rods,

Sought with an indignant mien

Counsel of her country's gods.

(d) Tell me not in mournful numbers

Life is but an empty dream;

For the soul is dead that slumbers,

And things are not what they seem .A.W. Longfellow

(e) All that walk on foot or ride in chariots

All that dwell in palaces or garrets

(f) On a mountain stretched beneath a hoary willow

Lay a shepherd swain and viewed the rolling billow.

Above you **scanned** passages of trochaic mono-, di-, tri-, tetra-, penta-, and hexameters. However, I may remind you that in good poetry you do not find long stretchesin the trochaic metre. The iambus and trochee are bisyllabic feet. Now let us

examine the anapaest and dactyl which are trisyllabic feet i.e.; they are made of three syllables.

(iii) The anapaestic metre.

Below is scanned a passage in anapaestic trimeter:

I am mon/arch of all/ I survey,
My right/ there is none/ to dispute;
From the cen/tre all round/ to the sea
I am lord/ of the bird/ and the brute

You will notice above that the first foot of the second line is an iambus. Verses in the anapaestic metre often have iambic substitution. Now you may do the following self-check exercise.

Self-check Exercise V

(a) How fleet is the glance of the mind
Compared with the speed of its flight !
The tempest itself lags behind
And the swift winged arrows of light

(b) The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

(c) Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note,
As his corpse to the ramparts we hurried;
Not a soldier discharged his farewell shot,
O'er the grave where our hero we buried.

(d) I am out of humanity's reach,

I must finish my journey alone.

The couple of lines are in anapaestic trimeter. However, the first foot is an iambic substitution.

(iv) The dacylic metre

It helps to recall a trochee a the converse of an iambus, and the dactyl as the opposite of an anapaest. Below we scan a passage in dactylic dimeter.

Touch her not scornfully

Think of her mournfully.

Gently and humanly;

Not of the remains of her

Now is pure womanly.

The passage above is in dactylic dimeter. The rhymescheme is a a a b a. Now do the following exercise.

Self-check Exercise VI

Scan the following and then briefly comment on the scansion.

(a) One more unfortunate

Weary of breath

Rashly importunate

Gone to her death!

Take her up tendenly;

Lift her with care;

Fashion'd so slenderly young and so fair!

(b) Merrily merrily shall I live now

Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.

Above you have learnt to scan passages in the four dominant feet of English ie; the iambus, trochee, anapaest and dactyl.

(v) The amphibrachic metre

In a word such as eternal you notice that the emphasis falls on the middle syllable. 'Eternal' thus is in the amphibrachic foot. Let's scan a line in the amphibrachic metre.

Ŏ hush thee,/ my babie/ thy sire was/ a knight.

You may have noticed that the last foot is an iambus.

Self - Check Exercise VII

Scan the following passage and then comment on your scansion:

(a) Most friendship is feigning

Most friendship mere folly.

Compare your scansion with the passage scanned for your under 2.9.

Above you have an outline of the "traditional" English metres. These were established by the Renaissance theorists who tried to subject the vernacular English forms to the rules of classical prosody. Let us now turn to examine three other forms of metres.

2.4.2 Strong–stress metres

Antecedent to the syllable–stress metres was the strong–stress metre of Old and Middle English poetry. The strong-stress metres for that reason are often called the "native" metres and they are indigenous to the Germanic languages (such as German, English, Dutch, Swedish, etc.). In strong-stress verse there are a fixed number of stresses in each line. The unstressed syllables may, however, vary considerably. The use of strong–stress metre can be seen in the Old English epic poem *Beowulf* (C. 1000) and in William Langland's vision poem, ***Piers Plowman.*** Below you have the opening four lines from the latter :

In a sómer sésun // whon sófte, was the sónne

I schóp me in-to a schróud // a scheép as I wére;

In hábite of an hérmite // un-hóly of wérkes

Wende I wýdene in this world // w ndres to here.

You would notice in the four lines above that each line divides into a medial pause (ll) or caesura. On both sides of the caesura there are two stressed syllables. The passage is also marked by alliteration.

With the rise of French literature in England in the 12th and 13th centuries rhyme replaced alliteration and stanzaic forms replaced the four-stress line. However, the strong-stress rhythm was too strong to be abandoned completely and it can be felt in the love lyrics and popular ballads of the 14th and 15th centuries. If you scan ' Lord

Randall ' you will find a mixture of the iambus and the anapaest of the "traditional" metre along with the four stresses divided equally on two sides of the caesura.

O where ha you been // Lord Randall, my son ?

And where ha you been // my handsome young man ?

I ha been at the greenwood ; // mother, mak my bed soon,

For I'am wearied wi h ul htin, // and fain wad lie d o wn.

Today the strong-stress survives in nursery rhymes and songs:

Jack and Jill // went up the hill,

To fetch a pale // of water,

Jack, fell down, and // broke his crown

And Jill // came tumbling after.

Above there is an alternation of four and three stresses in alternate lines. However, there'is more regularity in most of the nursery rhymes:

One, two // buckle my shoe:

Three, four // knock at the door;

Five, six // pick up sticks;

Seven, eight // lay them straight;

The middle of the nineteenth century saw the revival of interest in the strong-stress metres due to the innovations of Walt Whitrnan (1819-92) in America and Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-89) in England. In the 20th century a number of poets, including Ezra Pound (1885-1972), T.S.Eliot (1888-1965) and W.H. Auden (1907-73) revived the strong–stress metre. Pound's *Pisan Cantos* (1948) and Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1943) testify to the energy of the strong–stress metre.

2.4.3 Syllabic Metres

In syllabic metres stresses and pauses vary. The number of syllables in each line, however, remains fixed. Poetry in Romance languages (languages that have grown out of Latin, the language of ancient Rome, such as French, Italian and Spanish) is dominated by the syllabic metres. In English, however, to most ears, the syllable-count alone does not produce any rhythmic interest.

2.4.4 Quantitative metres

Quantity in the present context refers to the *time* we take to pronounce a syllable. It is a product of the duration for which we pronounce the vowel at the nucleus of the syllable. For instance you can pronounce "sweet rose" in various ways shortening and lengthening the vowel sound as you please. This variability, however, would hinder communication between the poet and you as the reader. Now if you compare Sanskrit, or Hindi for that matter, with English you find that you cannot exercise your discretion in lengthening or shortening the vowel sound or the quantity of the syllable in the two Indian languages. They are predetermined by the linguistic system of Sanskrit and Hindi.

The quantitative metres dominated Greek and Latin poetry because they are highly inflected. (To inflect a word is to change its form at the end according to its peculiar, case, mood, tense and number. For instance we can say that "child" and "boy" inflect differently in the plural.) The inflection promoted the construction of long, slow-paced lines because those languages supported the alternation of the long vowels in the roots and the short ones in the inflections. English which lost most of its inflections in the 15th century, unlike German, is less hospitable to the quantitative metres.

2.5 RHYME AND RHYTHM IN POETRY

You know that verse is generally distinguished from prose as a more compressed and regularly rhythmic form of statement. One of the most important constituents of rhythm is **metre** about which you know already. There are, however, other factors such as **alliteration** (the use of several nearby words or stressed syllables beginning with the same consonant **)**, **assonance** (the repetition of the same or similar vowel sounds usually in accented syllables), **consonance** (the repetition of a pattern of consonants with changes in the intervening vowels such as in *linger, longer; languor*) and onamatopoeia (which is direct verbal imitation ofnatural sounds) that also contribute to rhythm. Besides metre on the one hand and alliteration, assonance, consonance and onamatopoeia on the other, rhyme helps to create rhythm and define units of verse in subtle ways. Let's now examine *rhyme* and what it does; however, after you've done a short exercise.

Self -Check Exercise VIII

Don't scan the following passages. However, identify the use of alliteration, assonance, or consonance in them and then supply your comments in the space provided. Having done so compare your answers with those supplied at the end of the unit.

(a) Ruin hath taught we thus to ruminate
That Time will come and take my love away.
Shakespeare : Sonnet 64

(b) In pious times, ere priestcraft did begin,
Before polygamy was made a sin,
Dryden :'Absalom and Achitophel'

(c) For shade to shade will come too drowsily,
And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul.
Keats :'Ode or Melancholy'

(d) Not the twilight of the gods but a precise dawn
if sallow and grey bricks, arid the newsboys crying war.
Louis MacNeice

(e) It seemed that out of battle I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites which titanic wars had groined .
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned.
Wilfned Owen : ' Strange Meeting

2.5.1 Rhyme and Rhymeschemes

Rhyme consists generally of identity of sounds at the end of lines of verse. Now let's read the following lines:

Faith is not built on disquisitions *vain* ;
The things we must believe are few or *plain.*
John Dryden : *Religio Laici*

Above ' vain ' and ' plain ' are rhyming words. You will notice that both are accented monosyllabic words. Such a rhyme is called **masculine.**

When the accented syllable is followed by an unaccented syllable (as in 'hounding' and 'bounding') the rhyme is called **feminine.** An example is given below:

Then to come, in spite of sorrow,
And at my window bid good–morrow.

You notice above that ' son-ow ' and ' morrow ' are bisyllabic words and the accent falls on the first syllables. You will notice also that there is **double rhyme** above.

In English **triple rhyme** is used for comic or satiric purposes, as Byron does in Don Juan:

... oh! , ye lords of ladies intellectual,
Inform us truly, have they not henpecked you all ?

Above the last three syllables that have been underlined rhyme.

Sometimes syllables within the same line may rhyme as in the last stanza of Browning's 'Confessions' :

Alas,
We loved, sir – used to meet ;
How sad and bad and mad it was –
But then how it was sweet !

The words ' sad ' , ' bad ' and ' mad ' in the passage above rhyme though within the same line.This is an example of **internal rhyme.**

When rhymes are only rhymes in appearance and not in sound as in the case of 'alone' and 'done' or 'remove' and 'love' we have **eye rhyme.**

Above (SCE VIII,e) you read a few lines from Wilfred Owen's 'Strange Meeting'. The poem furnishes examples of *assonance.* However, Owen called it **pararhyme.** Such rhymes are now used for special effects but it was earlier understood as a sign

of pressing exigency or lack of skill. It was thus called of ***rhyme*** (orpartial, ***imperfect*** or ***slant rhyme***).

You have read above that Old English and Old Germanic heroic poetry as well as the lyrics in O.E. were written in strong-stress metre. With the ascendancy of the influence of French on English rhymes replaced alliteration and stanzaic forms gave way to four stress lines of the so called "native" or strong–stress metres.

However, blank verse is unrhymed verse and until the advent of *free verse* it alone achieved wide popularity in English. Although used by the Earl of Surrey in translating Virgil's *Aeneid* blank verse was employed primarily in drama. Milton's *Paradise* Lost (1667), however, was one of the first epic poems in English lo use it. In the nineteenth century Wordsworth's *The Prelude (1868-1869),* Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1833)and Browning's *The* ***Ring*** *and the Book (1868-1869)* were written in blank verse.

Sometimes stanzaic forms do not exist in poetry in blank verse as in the case of Milton's 'Lycidas' (1637) and *Paradise Lost.* This is true also of rhymed verse as in Samuel Johnsons 'London' (1738) and 'The Vanity of Human Wishes' (1749). The texts are divided into units of sense as in prose paragraphs and'are thus called **verse paragraph.**

The recurring feature of English poetry is, however, a *stanza* which consists of a fixed number of lines and a well defined rhyme scheme. However, it is not so in the case of Dryden's 'Alexander's Feast' (which you will read in Block 5) which has lines of varying lengths as well as number of lines. Similarly Spenser's *Epithalamion* is in the stanzaic form but the stanzas are constituted of lines of varying lengths and rhymes. In this case stanzaic form is reinforced by a **refrain** i.e. a line repealed at the end of each stanza.

The simplest form of a stanza is the **couplet;** that is two lines rhyming together. A single couplet in isolation is called a **distich.** When a couplet expresses a complete thought and ends in a terminal punctuation sign we call it a **closed couplet.** You have already read about the **heroic couplet.**

A traditional form of the couplet is the **tetrameter,** or **four beat couplet:** Milton's

'L' Allegro' and Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress' are admirable examples of great poetry in the octosyllabic couplet.

A three rhymed pattern is called a **triplet** or **tercet.** Below is an example of it from Dryden's poetry:

> Warm'd with more particles of Heav'nly Flame
> He wing'd his upward flight, and soar'd to fame:
> The rest remained below, a Tribe without a Name.

Three lines with one set of rhyming words can be found also in Tennyson's 'The Eagle'. This is, however, not very common in English and is generally used to give variety to a poem in the rhyming couplet. However, the rhymes are sometimes linked from verse to verse and may run as aba - bcb - cdc - ded - and so on. This form of triplet is called **terza rima.** It is borrowed from Italian and was employed by Dante (1265-1321) in his ***Divine*** *Comedy.* The finest example of it in English is Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" which, however, ends in a couplet.

Quatrains are stanzas of four lines. Above you read about the **ballad stanza** in which tetrameter and trimeter lines alternate. A variety of rhyme schemes have been observed in quatrains: a b a b (in which lines rhyme alternately); a b c b (in which the second and fourth lines only rhyme).

Dryden (in *Annus Mirabilis*) and Gray (*Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*) in the eighteenth century employed five stress iambic lines that rhyme alternately. In the nineteenth century Tennyson used tetrameter quatrains rhyming a b b a in *In Memoriam* and FitzGerald used pentameter quatrains that rhyme a a b a in his translation of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.*

There are, however, stanzas of five, six, seven and eight lines which are too numerous to be differentiated. Here we will discuss some of the "named varieties"

(a) **Rhyme royal** was used by Chaucer for the first time in English in *Troilus and Criseide* (c. 1385188) and then by Shakespeare in The *Rape of Lucrece* (1594). The rhyme scheme of a seven line stanza in rhyme royal is a b a b b c c. It looks as if a quatrain has been dovetailed onto two couplets.

(b) **Ottava rima** was introduced in England by Wyatt in the sixteenth century. The premier example of this verse form is Byron's *Don Juan* . The rhyme scheme of the eight line stanza is a b a b a b c c. You will notice that an extra a rhyme has been intoduced in the rhyme royal scheme. The single couplet at the end of the stanza gives a witty verbal snap to the foregoing section.

(c) The **Spenserian stanza** like the preceding two stanza forms discussed above has iambic pentameter lines. However, the last line is an Alexandrine. Edmund Spenser devised it for *The Faerie Queene.* In the nineteenth century Keats employed it brilliantly for ***Eve** of St. Agnes* and Shelley for *Adonais.* The nine lines rhyme a b a b b c b c c. You notice that the b sound recurs 4 times and c three. The pattern is intricate and poems in this stanza form are slow-moving.

(d) The **Sonnet** was originally a stanza used by the Sicilyan school of court poets in the thirteenth century. From there it went to Tuscany where it reached its highest expression in the poetry of Petrarch (1304 - 74). He wrote 314 sonnets idealizing his beloved Laura.

In England it was Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517-47) and Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503 - 42) who experimented with the sonnet form and gave it the structure that Shakespeare used and made famous. Since then the sonnet has prbved itself to be one of the most versatile of the poetic forms. It was used in recent years by Vikram Seth in his novel *The Golden Gate.* Long pbems composed of a series of sonnets are called **sonnet sequence.** Poets such as Edmund Spenset, Sir Philip Sidney, Michael Drayton, William Shakespeare, Elizabeth Barret Browning, D.G. Rossetti, W.H. Auden; Conrad Aiken and Rainer Maria Rilke have grouped together sonnets dealing with a particular lady or situation. However, the degree in which they are autobiographical or tell a coherent story is a matter on which opinions diverge.

The sonnet today is defined as a lyric of fourteen lines in the iambic pentameter form. However, originally it was a stanza in the Italian. There have been sonnets in the hexameter as for instance the first of Sidney's *Astrophil* and *Stella* and Milton's ' On the New Forces of-Conscience', which is in twenty lines. Most of the sonnets, however, fall into two or three categories - the **Pentrarchan, Shakespearean** and **Spenserian.**

The **Petrarchan sonnet** is divided into two parts of eight and six lines each called the octave and the sestet. Originally the sonneteer set ,forth a problem in the octave and resolved it in the sestet. However, Milton did not follow the convention nor did he use it as a medium for the expression of his amorous inclinations as Petrarch had done before him. Wordsworth and Keats both wrote Petrarchan sonnets. A Petrarchan sonnet follows the rhyme scheme abba abba in the octave. In the sestet two or three rhymes may be employed such as cdc cdc or cde cde.

The **Shakespearean sonnet** is usually divided into three quatrains to be followed by a rhyming couplet. The rhyme scheme of a Shakespearean sonnet: is abab cdcd efef gg.

A Spenserian sonnet is also divided into three quatrains and a rhyming couplet. However, there are fewer rhymes in a Spenserian sonnet than in the Shakesperean The former follows the following rhyme scheme :

abab bcbc cdcd ee.

Above we have discussed rhymes and the various types of rhyme schemes employed by poets writing in English. Now let us examine the function of rhythm in poetry.

2.5.2 Rhythm.

Rhythm is to borrow Plato's words, 'an order of movement' in time. We generally speak of rhythm in connection with poetry or music. I-Iowever, you must have heard people talking of the rhythms of nature or even biological rhythm. Perhaps periodic repetition of a certain pattern is the ***sine*** *qua non* of rhythm. All the arts-painting, sculpture, and architecture - have their rhythm. Here, however, we will talk of rhythm in the context of poetry only. Above you studied about a variety of acoustic effects in poetry such as metre, rhyme, alliteration, onamatopoeia, etc. They contribute to the rhythm of a poem. Prosody which taltes into account the historical period to which a poem belongs, the poetic genre and the specificities of a poet's style goes closer to the rhythmic aspect of a poem.

For instance, quantity (or vowel length) is a rhythmic but not a metrical feature of English poetry. This is because English does not impose any strict regularity in quantity as it does with respect to stress. For example in 'sweet rose' the vowel sounds can be lengthened or shortened at will. This cannot be done in many Indian languages. However, the lengthening and shortening of the vowel sound does affect the rhythm of the poem. Similarly, the rise and fall in the human voice. especially in reading poetry which is called **cadence** is a rhythmic not a metrical feature. Many other factors contribute to the rhythm of a piece of verse or prose. Grammatical features are some of these.

Roinan Jakobson drew our attention to grammatical features in poetry. He compared the role of pure grammatical parallelism in poetry to geometrical features in painting. 'For the figurative arts' he wrote, 'geometrical principles represent a "beautiful necessity"...' and went on to add, 'It is the same necessity that in language marks out the grammatical meanings.' In his 'Yeats' "Sorrow of Love" through the Years' written along with Stephen Rudy they drew attention to Yeats's predilection for "art that is not mere story – telling". They went on:

> According to Yeats, "the arts have already become full of pattern and rhythm. Subject pictures no longer interest us." In this context he refers precisely to Degas, in Yeats' opinion an artist whose excessive and obstinate desire to 'picture' life - "and life at its most vivid and vigorous" - had harmed his work.

Jaltobson and Rudy go further and point out,

> The poet's emphasis on pattern reminds one of Benjamin Lee Whorf. the penetrating lingiust who realized that 'the patternment' aspect of language always overrides and controls the 'lexation' or name–giving aspect," and an inquiry into the role of "pattern" in Yeats' own poetry becomes particularly attractive, especially when one is confronted with his constant and careful modification of his own works.

The two authors go on and draw attention to Yeats' epigraph to his *Collected Works in Verse and Prose* which reads:

The friends that have it I do wrong
When eves I remake a song,
Should know what issue is at stake:
It is myself that I remake.

In the course of his revisions, the patternings, Yeats claimed not just to be improving his poems lexationally but pattern-wise, rhythm-wise which he equated with remaking himself under the influence of some much more deep and subtle truth which we can apprehend if at-all only transiently.

If we scan a couple of sonnets of Shakespeare and compare their rhythm we can appreciate its role in a poet's style. Let's first scan two sonnets of Shakespeare - sonnets 71 and 116. They are given below:

No long/er mourn/ for me/ when I /am dead
Than you/ shall hear/ the sur/ly sul/len bell
Give warn/ing to/ the world/ that I/ am fled
From this/ vile world/ with vil/est worms/ to dwell.
Nay if/ you read/ this line,/ remem/ber not
The hand/ that writ/ it;// for/ I love/ you so,
That I/ in your/ sweet thoughts/ would be/ forgot,
If think/ing on/ me then/ should make/ you woe.
Oh, if/ (I say,)/ you look/ upon/ this verse
When I/ (perhaps)/ compound/ed am/ with clay
Do not/ so much/ as my/ poor name/ rehearse
But let/ your love/ even with/ my life/ decay
Lest the/ wise world/ should look/ into/ your moan
And mock/ you with/ me af/ter I/ am gone.

(Sonnet. 71)

Let me/ not to/ the marr/ iage of/ true minds
Admit/ impe/diments.// Love is/ not love
Which al/ters when/ it al/tera/tion finds,
Or bends/ with the/ remo/ver to/ remove:
O, no,/ it is/ an e/ver fix/ed mark,
That looks/ on tem/pests and/ is ne/ver shaken;
It is/ the star/ to ev/ery wand/ring bark,

Whose worth's unknown, although his higth be taken
Love's not Time's fool though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved. (Sonnet, 116)

You may have noticed above that in sonnet 71 Shakespeare's theme is death, his own death, not death in the abstract as in the case of Donne. Shakespeare is addressing his beloved, the dark lady and asking her to forget all about him. The legacies of time are suffering and despair and Shakespeare conveys his slow progress towards them with the help of the solemn regularity of the iambic pentameter. It is, however, gently disturbed as the narrative progresses. A caesura divides the third foot of the sixth line. There are parantheses in lines 9 and 10. In the last line of the third quatrain Shakespeare asks his beloved to forget him (after having written the sonnet to perpetuate his memory) nay more, let her love decay along with the decay of the lover's body. The irony of this audacious request finds echo in the spondaic third foot of the twelfth line. Shakespeare's resigned irony soon finds voice in the thirteenth line where the pyrrhic first foot is succeeded by a spondee in the next.

Rhythm derives from the Greek *rhythnzos* which in *turn* derives from *rhein* which means to flow. Rhythm is generally understood as an ordered alternation of contrasting elements. However, you noticed above that Shakespeare gave expression to his personal feelings in sonnet 71 by wrenching the metre. Mutability, death and decay were a recurrent theme in the poetry of the Elizabethan age and the ground rhythm of iambic pentameter adequately expresses it. However, if Shakespeare had made periodicity of accent the *sine qua non* of his rhythm it would have been only at the cost of his expressive range.

Unlike sonnet 71, sonnet 116 is, to use Gerard Manley Hopltins's term, metrically "counter-pointed ". Trochaic reversal in the first foot is not unusual in an iambic pentameter line. However, Shakespeare makes use of a trochaic foot even in the second. In fact the only iambic foot is the third foot which is succeeded by a pyrrhic-spondaic combination. The first line is enjambed i.e., it runs over to the second line with its three iambic feet and a caesura and a reversed fourth foot. The sudden violence of the poet's feeling is checked with the help of two pyrrhic feet alternating with the iambic ones in the last line of the first quatrain. The iambic ground rhythm is fully established only in the second quatrain.

The third quatrain, however, begins with a reversal and a spondaic substitution. In the last line of the quatrain the rhetorical emphasis on the third foot is supported acoustically with the help of a spondee. These deviations help the poet in lifting the theme above mundane realities and communicating his "meaning" better.

We had a glimpse of Shakespeare's manipulation of metre in two of his sonnets. Even with the help of just two samples we can say that Shakespeare has a powerful and distinctive style. The prosody of every poet of genius is unique and his rhythm is perhaps the most personal of the expressive equipments. However, we cannot forget that a language has a metrical pattern peculiar to itself. There is also a historical determinant of the choice of metre. Complex factors contribute towards the

determination of rhythm. Nature herself said Aristotle, 'teaches the choice of the proper measure'. However, it is the poet's task to hear her voice with sincerity and humility if s/he is to discover her/himself.

Self-check -Exercise IX

1. Briefly distinguish between rhyme and rhythm.

2. What according to you is rhythm ? Write in about 30 of your own words.

3. Do you think that rhythm can be an indicator of a poet's style ? Give reasons for your answer. Does a poet's style tell us about the person that s/he is?

2.6 ANALYSIS OF A POEM

In the foregoing sections you read about the various elements of poeby. A knowledge of some of the theoretical aspects of poetry would help you in reading poems. Below you will read an analysis of Keats's 'On First Looking into Chapman's I-Iomer.' Did you scan the poem and write your observations in SCG III (b) ? If you did not you should now do so in order to benefit from in section. Let's now analyse the poem.

'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer'

John Keats (1795-1821) was the youngest of the Romantic poets. He was the son of a manager of a livery stables in Moorfields. He died when Keats was eight. His mother remarried but died of tuberculosis when he was fourteen. John the eldest child, had two brothers - George and Tom - and a sister, Fanny. Keats was apprenticed to an apothecary-surgeon at the age of fifteen. Before the apprenticeship he had received his early education at Clarke's school an Enfield .

One evening in October 1816 Keats read the works of Homer in the translation of the Elizabethan poet George Chapman. He did this in the company of Charles Cowden Clarke, son of his former master and his life long friend. That Keats had a monumental experience is clear from "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer"

Somewhat lilte a true Petrarchan sonnet this poem also clearly divides the treatment of the theme between the octave and the sestet. In the octave Keats sets the background while the sestet describes the effect on him of his experience.

In the first half of the octave Keats speaks of his wide study of Western literature - Which he characterizes as "realms of gold". Keats's metaphor gives us an insight into his attitude towards literature. The 'goodly states' and 'Kingdoms' are the poet's territories they have marked out as their own in the infinite area of the English or Western languages..However, these territories are held by poets not insolently as Kingdoins are held but as a sign of their loyalty towards Apollo, the ancient classical god of poetry. This is a sign of Keat's literary piety for we know that Keats like Shelley was not a Christian poet.

The second half of the octave extends the metaphor of the kingdom of poetry to tell us that Keats had heard about Homer's epics although he had never read them. Homer is traditionally recognised as the first epic poet of Europe just like Valmiki and Vyasa were of India. They can be considered pure and original because they did not borrow their images from other poets. Hoiner knew and understood human nature dispassionately. His understanding was clear and unclouded by doubts, distractions and fears. Besides, Homer was the monarch of poets deservmg the exalted title of 'serene'. It is at the end of the octave that Keats tells us about the cause of his

exaltation i.e. his reading (with Charles Cowden Clarke) of Homer in Chapman's translation. The octave structurally is not divided from the sestet as it ends in a colon.

Having told us about the background of his poem in the octave Keats turns to communicate his enjoyment of Homer to us in the sestet. This is done through two unforgettable images. The first of these is that of a professional astronomer into whose sight a new planet has moved in. The second is that of a discoverer such as Hernan Cortez who conquered Mexico for Spain and became the first western adventurer to enter Mexico city. HIstorically, however, it was Vasco Nunez de Balbao who was the first European in 1513 to stand upon the peak of Darien in Panama. It is significant that Keats does not name any astronomer such as Galileo who had discovered new satellites of the planet Jupiter. It would be in keeping with Keats's piety to infer that in referring to 'some watcher of the skies' he is making use of the primitive figure of speech of periphrasis. If the images help Keats in communicating his peculiar feeling or flavour of the sense or meaning the rhythm of his verse gives further density by suggesting the right tone and unfolding the ,intention while reemphasizing his meaning or sense, and feeling.

As pointed out earlier, 'On First Looking' is a Petrarchan sonnet that makes use of four rhymes in the following scheme: abba abba cdcdcd. Perhaps it would be apposite to point out that because of such few rhymes, i.e. 4, the intensity of feeling is communicated better than it could have been done with the help of a Shakespearean sonnet with its seven rhymes and relatively loose structure more suitable for a meditative and philosophical tone.

Although European in appeal thematically, Keats's sonnet is typically English with its ground rhythm of iambic pentameter. There are only two variations in the first quatrain. There is a pyrrhic foot in the first and another in the fourth line. The second quatrain begins with a trochaic reversal and it announces the turn in the subject matter. From literature in general, Keats narrows down to Homer in the second half of the octave.

The sestet which describes Keats's state of exaltation conveys it at the acoustic level through variations from the blank verse ground rhythm. Lines 10,11,12 and 13 have pyrrhic substitutions. In case we elided the unstressed first foot to include the article 'a' in the first foot of the tenth line we could read it as an anapaestic foot. However, in that case the line would have only four feet, It would become brief and fast suggesting theswimming of a planet into the range of vision of the astronomer with astronomical speed. There is another anapaestic substitution in the fourth foot of the twelfth line. However, the line retains the five feet notwithstanding the trisyllabic foot, The last four lines are given to the explorers in the new world and the crescendo comes in the last line which begins with a trochaic reversal. 'Thc importance of the theme for the poet is suggested by the spondaic second foot of the eleventh line which begins the new comparison.

Keats has been called a poet of the senses. The abstract idea of the discoveiy of a new planet gives joy that is cerebral but the sight of the seascape from the peak in Darien is more sensualand akin to Keats's character. The choice of Keats's imagery in this sonnet and marrying it to the approriate rhythm clinches the success of the poem. 'On First Loolcing into Chapman's Homer' has, no wonder, become a felicitous record of one of Keats's unforgettable personal experiences of an encounter with the father of European poetry that was Homer.

Above we have tried to show how the various aspects of a poem can be knit together into an account of your appreciation of it especially with respect to your observations on rhythm. If you were in a class with your friends we might have analysed a few poems and seen how our responses varied. If possible try it out from time to time, at the Study Cenlre or at a privately formed Study Group.

2.7 LET'S SUM UP

This unit brings the orientation for the study of M.A. English in general and this course on 'British Poetry' in particular to an end. With the help of these two units we have tried to tell you how you can say something about a work of art in general and a poem in particular;

We began the orientation by reacting basically to two portraits on the first and third covers of this course. This was because the visual arts malce an immediate appeal. They are appreciated both individually and socially, communally and in small groups. A piece of literature, especially nondramatic literature, has to be enjoyed privately. Hence we began the orientation by commenting on two pox-traits.

Criticism has often been described as the soul's adventure among masterpieces - and this course which for you is an adventure of critical appreciation began with an appreciation of two portraits that also symbolically meant to tell you about this course. Besides, each block will have one or two copies of paintings that are meant to serve as frontispieces and also visually tell you about the age. Just a few comments are offered on them in the introduction to the blocks. You may explore further on your own because it has been recognized since time immemorial that proficiency in several arts is necessary for specialization in any one. Did you read the epigraph of this course? It can as well be a desideratum for you.

In this unit we examined in the first place the thing called literature, especially poetry in somewhat abstract terms. In the second place we examined the prosodic aspect of poetry. Finally we showed how the various aspects can be put together in our critical appreciation of a poem. In the last major section we have done for poetry what in the previous unit we did for portraits - we critically appreciated a poem. This is what we expect you to be able to do on this course. Critics say that the evolution of the rhythm of a language tells us about the cultural evolution of the people, their changing and evolving consciousness. If this is a tall claim I leave you to decide for yourself.

Hereafter the units will tell you either about an age or a poet or about some poems. We will expect you to be able to respond to all the three - the man, the milieu and the moment that gave birth to the poem - in your comments on passages set from poems prescribed for detailed study and printed in these blocks.

This is a long unit. You must not have expected it to be longer. At the M.A. level. we did not consider it necessary to describe the genres such as lyric, epic, ode, etc. or figures of speech such as simile, metaphor, synechdoche, metonymy etc. You should consult a dictionary of literature in order to discover the terms of art as and when you feel the need to do so.

2.8 A BRIEF ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

This unit does not tell you about literary terms, figures of speech, etc. However, as a student of literature you will be required to understand and use them in various contexts including your essays and answers, Below are recommended a few dictionaries and encyclopaedias for your use.

The new edition of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature (1985)* edited by Margaret Drabble is intended to serve, as its predecessgr Sir Paul Harvey's (1932), as a 'useful companion to ordinary everyday readers of English literature'. It gives brief notes on authors of books, literary trends such as Neo-classicism and

Romanticism, (Postmodernism is alas missing), figures of speech such as oxymoron and litotes, literary movements such as the Oxford, or Pre - Raphaelite and Aesthetic movements and many other facts that a student of English literature would wish to know from time to time. It is possible that the new edi'tion has not reached the shelves of the library you have access to. That should not disturb you. I found Sir Paul's work very delightful and in the beginning Drabble's work with its shorter notes was a bit of a disappointment to me. Besides the *Companion* you may consult , *Dictionary of Literary Terms* by Harry Shaw published by McGraw Hill Book Co. (New Delhi, 1972) and *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* by Chris Baldick (Delhi, 1990). *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-century Poetry* edited by Ian Hamilton (Delhi, 1994) has a much broader coverage on poetry in English.

Literary criticism today more than ever before has been under the influence of disciplines such as rhetoric and Linguistics. You would find A.B.Sharma's *The Growth and Evolution of Classical Rhetoric* (Ajanta: New Delhi, 1991,'92) at the Study and Regional Centre ; it is meant to introduce classical rhetoric to distant learners in India like yourself. For a quick reference to terms such as **felicity conditions** or **lexie** consult A *Dictionary of Stylistics* by Katie Wales published by Logman (London, 1989). *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism* edited by Martin Coyle et. al. (Routledge: London, 1990) has long articles written by experts on various aspects of literature including an article on 'Postmodernism' by Robert B. Ray (pp. 131 - 147).

In case you wish to study some thought provolting essays on poetry and its 'meaning' I should recommend just two: the first one is by Roman Jakobson called 'What is Poetry?' (pp. 368 - 378) in *Language and Literature* edited by Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Ma, 1987) and the other one called 'The Third Meaning' (pp. 52 - 68) by Roland Barthes in *Image, Music, Text* (Flamingo: London, 1982). We may allude to those essays a few times in this course. The character of critical appreciation of literature in general and poetry in particular has changed radically over the last couple of decades and its influence has been felt in the English departments in India as well. It would be a good idea to read Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory* with its chapters on reception theory, phenomenology, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, structuralism, semiotics, etc. It will also be a good general introduction for your M.A. (English) programme.

2.9 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise I :

1. The reader adds to the meaning of a poetic text. The poem is of course the cause of the meaning. I-Iowever, that is not the only cause. It has to be understood in terms of our background knowledge of the poem. However, we cannot understand it unless we do so in the light of our own experience of life. The reader re-creates meaning.
2. A poem is made or words just as a portrait is made of colours or a piece of music is an arrangement of sounds. There, however, the matter does not end. A real poem (as opposed to mere verse) elnobodies a poet's life's experience, an intense moment ofrevelation of life's truths, joys and sorrows. Just as a formula in mathematics or a *sootra* in Sanskrit grammar embodies more than meets the eye a poem appears to reveal truths as we go on living.

Note : The answers above are subjective and your responses may not be in full agreement with mine. However, think over the matter . You should discuss your own answers, if you can, in your peer group.

Exercise II:

1. In woods/ a ran/ger
   To joy/ a stran/ger

The two lines above are in iambic dimeter. However, they are ***Izypermetrical*** which means that an unaccented rhyming syllable is at the end of each line.

2. Thy way/ not mine, /O Lord,
   How ev/er dark/ it be;
   Lead me/ with thine/ own hand,
   Choose out/ the path/ for me.

The quatrain above is in regular iambic trimeter.

3. The way/ was long/ the wind/ was cold,
   The min/strel was/ infirm/ and old;
   The harp,/ his sole/ remain/ing joy,
   Was car/ried by/ an or/phan boy.

Above there are two couplets in regular iambic tetrameter,

4. Confu/sion, shame,/ remorse/ despair,
   At once/ his bos/om swell
   The damps/ of death/ bedewed/ his brow;
   He shook,/ he groaned,/ he fell.

In the stanza above iambic trimeter lines alternate with iambic tetrameter lines. We also notice that 'swell' and 'fell' rhyme but the first and third lines don't. We thus get the impression that the stanza could also be written as iambic heptameter couplets.

5. I put/ my hat/ upon/ my head
   And walked/ into/ the strand
   And there/ I met/ another man
   Whose hat/ was in/ his hand.

The poem above is iambic in rhythm alternating tetrameter and trimeter in verse length.

Self-Check Exercise III

Now you may scan a couple of passages from Shakespeare and Keats and write your comments on them in the space provided:

(a) Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme. I thank you, gentlemen.
This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill, cannot be good; if ill,
Why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair.
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs...

Shakespeare: *Macbeth*

If you read Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in *Understanding Drama* (EEG07) you must have recognised the words of the eponymous hero, in the play. Macbeth met the three witches on his way back from the battlefield who had addressed him sucessively as Duke of Glarnis, Thane of Cawdor and finally as King of Scotland. Impressed by his display of courage Duncan has honoured him by giving him the dukedom of Glamis and Thaneship of Cawdor. However, Macbeth is not yet King of Scotland which he cannot be, unless, he thinks, he murders Duncan, his king and benefactor. The idea of regicide and ingratitude has shaken him and lie admits of having his 'functions' being 'smothered in surmise'. The given extract is the opening part of his introspection (for us) and soliloquy for the audience in the theatre.

The ground rhythm of the the extract is iambic pentameter. However, he does not follow it slavishly. There are interesting variations. They are as below:

- the first line is iambic dimeter;
  the first foot is a spondee;
- there are at least three pyrrhuses in a passage of ten lines i.e. in the 3rd, 6th and 7th;
- seventh and eighth lines are hypermetrical;
- there are two caesuras – in the third and seventh lines;
- the third foot of the sixth and the fourth foot of the seventh line have an elision.

With the help of these variations Shakespeare imparts colloquial case and informality to the soliloquy. We notice here, to use Coleridge's words, as we did not in the case of Sackville and Norton, metre being used as a pattern of expectation, fulfilment and surprise. As Macbeth makes his progess from coni'usion to clarity in the course of the soliloqy we notice the ground rhythm becoming more and more natural. According to Harvey Gross, the function of prosody is 'to image life in a rich and complex way'. We notice here for ourselves how prosody has succeeded in articulating the movement of the mind of Macbeth.

(b) **On First Looking into Chapman's Homer**

Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and Kingdoms seen;

Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told,
That deep browed Homer ruled as his demesne
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific, and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise
Silent upon a peak in Darien.

For comments on the prosodic features of this sonnet read section 2.6.

Self-check Exercise IV

(a)

Dreadful gleams,
Dismal screams,
Fires that glow,
Shrieks of woe,
Sullen moans,
Hollow groans. A.Pope

You could say that above there are three couplets in trochaic monometer. However it would be more appropriate to call it a passage in trochaic dimeter with the second foot being catalectic in each case. Perhaps the best idea would be to **call** it a passage in the amphimacer foot. The passage can be scanned in any of the three **ways.**

(b)

Rich the treasure,
Sweet the pleasure. J. Dryden

The two lines are in trochaic dimeter.

(c)

When the British warrior queen
Bleeding from the Roman rods,
Sought with an indignant mien
Counsel of her country's gods.

The stanza is in trochaic tetrameter. However, the last foot of every line is catalectic. We call a foot catalectic that has just an accented syllable.

(d)

Tell me not in mournful numbers
Life is but an empty dream;
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem. A.W. Longfellow

The stanza is in trochaic tetrameter. However, the last foot of the second and fourth lines are catalectic. The rhymescheme of the passage above is: a b a b.

(e)

All that walk on foot or ride in chariots
All that dwell in palaces or garrets

The stanza is in trochaic pentameter.

(f)

On a mountain stretched beneath a hoary willow
Lay a shepherd swain and viewed the rolling billow.

The couplet is in trochaic hexameter.

Self-check Exercise V

(b)

How fleet is the glance of the mind
Compared with the speed of its flight !
The tempest itself lags behind
And the swift winged arrows of light

The ground rthythm of the passage above is anapaestic trimeter. However, the first foot of each of the first three lines is an iambus. Iambic substitutions in lines in the anapasestic meter is quite common.

(b)

The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

The passage is in anapaestic tetrameter without any variation.

(c)

Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note,
As his corpse to the ramparts we hurried;
Not a soldier discharged his farewell shot,
O'er the grave where our hero we buried.

If repetition of a pattern is the *sine* qua *non* of rthythm, the passage is uniformly in tetrameter. However, out of sixteen feet only ten are in the anapaest. The remaining feet are in the iambic.

(d)

I am out of humanity's reach,
I must finish my journey alone.

The couple of lines are in anapaestic trimeter. However, the first foot is an iambic substitution.

Self-Check Exercise VI

Scan the following and then briefly comment on the scansion.

(b)

One more unfortunate
Weary of breath
Rashly importunate
Gone to her death!
Take her up tenderly;
Lift her with care;
Fashion'd so slenderly young and so fair!

The two stanzas above are in dactylic dimeter. They rhyme alternately i.e. a b a b c d c d . The second, fourth, sixth and eighth lines are catalectic.

(b)

Merrily merrily shall I live now
Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.

The couplet/distich above is in dactylic trimeter.

Self-check Exercise VII

(a)

Most friendship is feigning,
Most friendship mere folly.

Both the lines are in amphibrachic dimeter.

Self-check Exercise VIII

(a) There is alliteration in 'ruin' and 'ruminate' on the one hand and 'taught', 'time' and 'take' on the other.

(b) Dryden by employing 'pious', 'priesteraft' and 'polygamy' on the one hand and 'begin' and 'before' on the other in his distich makes use of the figure of sound of alliteration.

(c) The repetition of the sibilants i.e 'shade' and 'soul' on the one hand and 'drowsily' and 'drown' on the other create an acoustic effect that is daily experience. This particular type of effect is called alliteration.

(d) In the two lines the consonants in 'dawn' and 'war' are different. However, there is an identity of vowel sounds. This is an example of assonance.

(e)

It seemed that out of battle I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites which titanic wars had groined .
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned.
Wilfred Owen : ' Strange Meeting '

In the passage above we have underlined four words. 'Escaped' and 'scooped' have an identity of consonants while the vowels differ just as in 'groin' and 'groan' also. These are two examples of consonance.

Self-check Exercise IX

1. Rhyme refers to the agreement in terminal sounds of two or more words or lines in verse such as rich and which ; increase and peace ; descend and extend. Rhythm indicates measured flow of words and phrases in prose or verse or movement suggested by the succession of strong or weak elements or of different conditions in a given time span.
2. Rhythm is one of the factors of style. It indicates flow or progression in time. Certain units get repeated in rhythm --a foot in English poetry when repeated contributes to the rhythm of that poem. Poets often achieve effects not by regularity but through breaks in the order, the established ground rhythm of the poem.
3. Every poet, for that matter any artist, has a distinctive style and his / her rhythm contributes towords it. We talk about Milton's grand style and contrast it with the gentle art of Shakespeare. Milton writes about Heaven and Hell, God and satan; Shakespeare about ordinary men and women involved in their common love and hate, ambition and defeat, pride and humility such as we experience ourselves. Their choice of words, rhythm of their language are thus poles apart just as are their,themes. All these tell us something about the persons that Milton and Shakespeare must have been in their inner lives.

Geoffrey Chaucer (1340 ?-1400)

William Blake : *The Canterbury Pilgrims*

UNIT 3 THE AGE OF CCHAUCER

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
3.2 Historical Background
3.3 Cultural Background
3.4 Intellectual Background
3.5 Literaiy Background
3.6 The Arts

3.0 OBJECTIVES

Our aim in this unit is to provide an overview of the age in which Geoffrey Chaucer lived and wrote. He was the outstanding English poet of the late Middle Ages. Since literature and society are closely related, this background will help you understand Chaucer's poetry. Background or context is particularly important here since the medieval world was very different from our own.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The unit will introduce you to the different aspects of the world of the late Middle Ages. It was an age of transition from declining feudalism to an emerging money-economy. The Norman Conquest in 1066 had brought in French words, literary cot- venti ions and artistic tastes. Historical events in the fourteenth century undermined the older chivalric, aristocratic culture. The growth of trade and commerce led to the growth of London. Apart from the conventions of romance and realism, Chaucer's times also saw the revival of alliterative verse, the vehicle of social and moral protest.

3.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The poetry of Chaucer and his contemporaries is best understood in the context of the transition in European society from declining feudalism to an emerging money-economy characterised by the rise of the middle classes. Although the English people still largely lived in small, self-sufficient villages, the very fact that Chaucer was an urban poet already suggests a change. Here we need to remember that unlike France, England had broken out of the feudal system rather early.

We could begin by taking a preliminary look at the growing importance and wealth of towns because of trade and commerce. Because of the lucrative wool trade, agricultural land was being converted at many places into pasture for rearing sheep. This required fewer farm-hands, giving rise to a gradual exodus of labour from country to town, from farming to the craft-gilds. Of course, such processes of social transformation do not take place abruptly: in the reign of Henry VIII, Thomas More continues to attack the 'enclosure' system, that is, the conversion of arable land into pasture. But at least three historical events can be identified which accelerated change: the Hundred Years' War, the Black Death and the Peasants' Revolt.

In a sense the Hundred Years' War between England and France (beginning in 1337) is rooted in the feudal structure of European society. The modern nation-state comes into being in the transition from medieval to Renaissance Europe. Before that, through matrimonial alliances Kings were feudal lords of land and property in foreign countries and often laid claim to their thrones. The basic cause of dispute between England and France was thus the English possessions on French soil. War with France and Scotland brought honour to the English monarchy but drained the resources of the Crown. making the barons more powerful. In the changing situation, the barons often included the magnates and comparatively recent merchant princes. After the deposition and murder of the weak and wilful king, Edward 11, Edward III decided to recover prestige through foreign campaigns, and for some time, succeeded in catching the popular imagination. Flanders, the biggest customer for English wool, appealed for aid to Edward in their conflict with the King of France. Edward's alliances against France in the Netherlands and the Rhineland (Germany) were matched by the counter-alliances of Philip VI, the French monarch. The immediate pretext of the protracted Hundred Years' War was Edward's claim to the .French throne through his mother, Isabella, challenging that of Philip VI. It is ironic that the same Philip had been crowned in 1327 and Edward had done homage to him for Gascony in 1329.

A series of victories bolstered English pride in the mid-fourteenth century. The victory at Crécy (1346), where English yeomen archers and Welsh knifemen routed French chivalry, was immediately followed by the crushing defeat of the Scots at Neville's Cross. Military glory. and patriotic fanaticism that accompanied these successes reached a peak in the triumph of the Black Prince, son of Edward, over the French near Poitiers (1356), where the French king was taken prisoner. The peace of Bretigny in 1360 made Edward ruler of one-third of France, but the financial burden of the war began to tell on England. The intervention in Spain proved to be unwise, since despite the Black Prince's last victory against Spain at Nájera (1367), the war dragged on, and reverses mounted upon reverses until finally England was left with only a foothold around Calais and a weakened navy.

Ultimately what the I-Iundred Years' War did was to change the old code of chivalry: Shakespeare brings this out ironically in his history plays (the second tetralogy from Richard *II* to *Henry* V j. Edward I and Edward III in a sense created the modern infantry. The yeoman archer, the development of a local militia at home and something akin to modern conscription gave the English soldiers a definite edge over the French, The situation on the battlefield contributed to the emergence of democratic forces in England. The sense of a people's will, representing thc rise of the English people with all their proud defiance, presents a sharp contrast to the French peasants' situation, and adds new life to the poetry of Chaucer. More immediately, the looting and pillage of France by English soldiers, that Chaucer must have witnessed in his French campaigns, may well have resulted in his sympathy for the helpless.

The war, which had brought prosperity to various classes in England because of the rich booty and high wages for soldiers, suffered a severe check from the Black Death (1348-49), a deadly form of the highly infectious bubonic plague carried across Europe by black rats. Because of insanitary conditions, it affected towns more than villages, and the poor died everywhere like flies. Probably one-thi d of England's population perished in the plague. Abating towards the end of 1349, the epidemic revived in 1361, 1362 and 1369, continuing to break out sporadically until the late seventeenth century, when medical science improved and the blaclc rat was driven out by the brown rat, which did not carry the disease.

The high mortality at once increased the demand for labour on the farm and weakened the obligations of feudal tenure. This situation found a parallel among the clergy. Many livings (ecclesiastical posts) fell vacant, and the clergy often supported the labourers' demand for higher wages. It is thus not surprising that Chaucer's

Franklin was a freeholder and that even his Plowman had acquired a new freedom enabling him to offer his services to others. The devastation, however, failed to dampen the martial ardour of the king and his barons. Even as the Black Death was raging, Edward III developed his Order of the Garter which became the model for all later chivalric orders.

It was thus a time of political unrest and uncertainty: we must not forget that two kings, Edward III and Richard II, were deposed and murdered in the fourteenth century. The Peasants' Revolt of 1381 has to be seen in this background. But first let us have some idea of the condition of the poor in England. In 1381, more than half the people did not possess the privileges that had been guaranteed to every 'freeman' by the Magna Carta (1215) in the reign of King John. The serf and the villein had the status of livestock in the master's household, although the above-mentioned factors had started to push them out of bondage to the comparative freedom of crafts in towns. In theory the labourers had an elected representative, the Reeve, supposedly to counterbalance the Steward or Bailiff. But as the wealth of the towns often drew away an absentee landlord, the Reeve as substitute became a feared enemy of the people, as in the portraits of Chaucer and Langland. The poor had to pay fines for marriage or sending a son to school, and the inhuman *heriot* or mortuary tax exacted at death-bed was responsible for much resentment.

The immediate provocation for the revolt was the Poll Tax or head tax. The financial burden of the wars forced the government to ask Parliament to allow heavy taxes. But since such taxes usually affected the propertied classes which dominated Parliament, in 1380, taxes were levied on even the poorest. The sudden outbreak of rebellion under the leadership of Wat Tyler resulted in the peasants, accustomed to levies for French campaigns, attacking London, destroying property and putting the Archbishop of Canterbury to death. The uprising collapsed equally suddenly, partly because of the shrewdness and courage of King Richard II, who promptly went back on his promises as soon as the rebels had dispersed. Although the movement failed, it was for the first time that the poor peasant had fought for his basic right of freedom; there was very little looting in the Revolt. Despite a brief reference to it in The *Nun's* Priest's Tale, Chaucer concerns himself with the sufferings of individual poor men and not the poor in bulk. For the portrayal of the rural proletariat as opposed to the prosperous farmer class which also grew at that time, we have to go to Langland.

What was the situation in the towns? Apart from London, all English towns were smaller than those of industrialized Flanders and northern Italy. A medium-sized English town would have only 3,000 or 4,000 inhabitants, and town and country flowed into one another. They were fortified by walls since there were no policemen in the modern sense. Their social and economic life was dominated by the merchants and the gilds. The merchant gilds were the most powerful and important; the craft gilds took second place.. Parish gilds were also organised for charitable work. Often engaged in rivalry and competition—in the thirteen-eighties there was virtually a war between the older food-trade gilds and the newer cloth gilds—the gilds were easily identified by their distinctive liveries. They also competed with each other to put up on Feast days the colourful pageantry of Miracles and Moralities, drama based on the Bible and saints' lives.

While working at the Custom-House and living over the Aldgate Tower, Chaucer came to know and love this colourful London life. ,He would have noticed churches as well as taverns around him: we may note in passing that the pilgrimage to the Canterbury Cathedral (in *The Canterbury* Tales) begins at the Tabard Inn. London was a busy town of about 40,000 people with a certain openness about its markets and shops. Apart from churches and splendid houses of noblemen, the ordinary citizens' and artisans' dwellings had an equally arresting variety. Most of them were of timber and plaster with only side-gables of masonry to prevent the spreading of fires. The ground floor was generally open to the street and outside stairs seem to have been common: There was little comfort or privacy', and instead of glass, the

windows had wooden shutters. Since such shutters and weak walls made eavesdropping and housebreaking easy, and streets were unlit, wanderers at night were severely punished. Furniture was kept at the barest minimum. There was generally only one bedroom; for most of the household, the house meant simply the hall. But the common life of the hall was declining among the upper classes with increasing wealth and material comfort. The energy and excitement of London was primarily outdoors, in the street, which was the scene of royal processions and tournaments, the Mayor's annual ride as well as crime and riot.

3.3 . CULTURAL BACKGROUND

As it is well known, Chaucer divides society into the three conventional estates–the knight (nobility), the working man (the third estate) and the ecclesiastic (the church). The fact that he leaves out the two extremes of aristocracy and serfdom suggests a deliberate choice of a bourgeois perspective: he observes society mainly through the eyes of the rising middle classes. At the same time, his irony is also directed at them. This technique enables him to capture the old and the new in his time with rare subtlety. He begins in *The Canterbury* Tales fairly high in the ecclesiastical hierarchy with the Prioress and the Monk, then come the Friar and the Nun's Priest or Chaplain, then the Parson and the Clerk, then the Summoner and the Pardoner.

Perhaps no other element in Chaucer's world brings out the gap between the ideal and the actual as the code of chivalry and the conventions of courtly love. Harking back to pagan morality, chivalry anticipates the concept of the modem gentleman. The true and perfect knight was distinguished by fearless strength, charity and faith. Actually the knights had been only mounted soldiers and not much more. In 1095, Pope Urban II in Rome exhorted the knights of the First Crusade on their way to the Holy Land to give up cruelty and greed in favour of Christian values of charity, sacrifice and faith. The Cross is joined with the Sword. With the reduction of war as the twelfth century advanced, leisure gave rise to war games like jousts and tournaments and the allied concept of courtly love. Although as a cultural ideal, courtly love had a refining and civilizing influence, it remained primarily a literary convention and hence will be dealt with later.

What was the actual state of affairs? From the earliest age of chivalry, chroniclers and observers have pointed out so many inconsistencies and corruptions that one is left to question the entire social code. Despite the values of moderation, magnanimity and protection of the weak, the chivalric ideal presupposed a society where serfs outnumbered freemen. The code did reach a high point in the first half of the thirteenth century. But even here the decay began soon enough, caused by the decline in crusading zeal and by the rising wealth of the merchant classes. Instead of fighting the infidel for the possession of the Holy Land, Christians either fought among themselves or led a life of pleasure. The rich citizens brought much material comfort but their wealth weakened the feudal aristocracy: they began to buy for themselves the ranks of knighthood. In fact, Edward I perhaps wanted to accelerate this process by compelling all freeholders possessing an estate of £20 a year to become knights. At the same time, honest commerce acquired a dignity in every field of life; although the knights were forbidden by civil law to become traders or merchants, they could hardly resist the forces of history. The Cistercians, possibly the richest religious body in England, derived their wealth mainly from success in the wool trade. Of course, in the Hundred Years' War, the knights made themselves suddenly rich by looting efficiently; certainly, the custom of ransoming prisoners brought a commercial element into knightly life. The real trouble between Shakespeare's Henry IV and Hotspur begins, we may briefly note, with the ransoming of prisoners.

Courtly love conventions are not a reliable guide to the actual conditions of love and marriage in Chaucer's time. Marriages were negotiated with great haste on purely commercial motives; this was also the reason for the many child-marriages. A woman could inherit property but in order to defend it she needed a husband. Divorce was easy, though only for rich people who were scheming for larger inheritance. The idealised woman of courtly love who was put on a pedestal to be worshipped by the knight contrasts violently with the widespread practice of beating wives, sisters and daughters.

Perhaps the idealisation was the natural outcome of the unbearable harshness of actuality. There being little privacy in the medieval castle, and women being debarred from the masculine recreations of physical exercise, drinking and war, they were confined to an intolerable boredom that often encouraged furtive debauchery. Since marriage was inimical to romantic loxe, illicit love was idealised in the courtly convention. The power of the code is evident in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde. Although Criseyde can marry as a young widow, her love with Troilus begins and ends in secret. Even when Troilus comes to know that Criseyde is to be handed over to the Greek camp in exchange for the Trojan prince Antenor, he does not make public their love. That would have at once made them man and wife.

3.4 INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

The intellectual milieu of Chaucer was ultimately controlled by a religious vision common to medieval culture. It is of course to be found in the Retractation at the end of The *Canterbury* Tales, where the poet prays that his sin of writing secular and courtly literature may be forgiven. Similarly, gentilesse or nobility and courtly love acquire a deep spiritual content. This is hardly surprising since the Christian church played a central role in the life of the people, and the parish priest, even more than the passing friar, was the chief instructor. Its dedication to Christ's teachings led it or, at least, sections of the clergy to denounce the social evils of the day. The Lollards dominated the literature of satire and complaint. Followers of the heretical Wyclif, they were aided in their criticism by mystical writers like Dame Juliana of Norwich, Richard Rolle and the anonymous author of The Cloud of Unknowing. These mystics undermined institutional religion by their emphasis on a personal relationship with God. The Lollards are also remembered for the first English translation of the Bible under the guidance of Wyclif.

The cosmos of the Middle Ages was providentially ordered and harmonious. The earth was the point-sized centre of a system of crystalline concentric spheres for the planets to go around. This Ptolemaic, geocentric model was displaced in the Renaissance by the Copernican heliocentric (sun at the centre) universe. But in the Middle Ages it was held together by Gods' love, which controlled all the cycles of seasons, tides, birth and death. According to medieval belief, the stars as agents of Destiny combined with Fortune as powerful influences on human life. Of course, God's providence worked in everything, although men could not grasp its ways.

Astrology and medicine were closely related in Chaucer's world. Each of the twelve signs of the zodiac was thought to control a different part of the human body; moreover, the physical characteristics and nature of each person were determined by his horoscope at birth. This gave rise to the four medieval 'humours.' Physicians treating a patient would first cast his horoscope; then combining this with the positions of the stars when the illness began and when the doctor paid his visit, they would attempt to heal.

Related to astrology was the pseudo-science of alchemy. Chaucer's yeoman in *The* Canon's Yeoman's Tale knowledgeably refers to the four spirits and seven bodies.

The spirits are quicksilver, arsenic, crystalline salt and brimstone and the bodies are the medieval planets (including the sun and the moon). Thus gold belongs to the sun, silver to the moon, iron to Mars, quiclcsilver to Mercury, lead to Saturn, tin to Jupiter and copper to Venus. Chaucer's contemporary, John Gower, wrote nearly two hundred lines in the *Confessio Amantis* on alchemy.

Chaucer's doctor refers to many learned authorities on medicine. Among the classical sources are Hippocrates and Galen; among the Moslem physicians we find Avicenna and Aven-oes. Finally we have English physicians of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries: Gilbertus, Anglicus, Bernard, Gaddesden. The human body was believed to have four fluids or 'humours' of which one would always predominate. If blood was predominant, we would have a 'sanguine' person; if phlegm, a 'phlegmatic' person, if choler, a choleric person and if black bile, a 'melancholic' person. Chaucer's Reeve is choleric, Franklin melancholic., Humours determined temperament and physical make-up, and the latter was also shaped by the stars. According to Galen, the doctor had to consider the four elements of earth, water, air, fire and the four qualities of hot, cold, dry, moist in treating the body. Each of the twelve zodiac signs was related to the clements, qualities and humours. Not only are the human mind and body thus closely related but man himself is further related to the larger order in the universe.

Another medieval science in which Chaucer had an interest was the science of dreams. Here, his source, Macrobius' cominentaiy on *The Dream of Scipio*, lists five types of dream: the Somnium, the visio, the oraculum, the insomnium, the phantasma or visium. The somnium is a dream requiring symbolic interpretation by an expert. The visio reveals a coining event exactly as it will be. In the oraculum a spirit or relative or an important person appears to the dreamer and announces what is to happen. By contrast to these prophetic dreams, the insomnium and the phantasma indicate nothing apart from the dreamer's physical state. The former may be produced by fear or worry or digestive disturbances; the latter is a kind of delusion.

3,5 LITERARY BACKGROUND

The Middle Ages are usually held to begin in Europe with the sack of Rome, but in England it begins conventionally with the Norman Conquest (1066-87) and ends with the Reformation (1533-59). In terms of the literary output, this lime-span could be divided into three periods. In the first period, up to 1250, religious writings predominate, in the second (1250-1350), romances. In the third period we have Chaucer, Langland, Gower, the Pearl poet and so on.

In 1066 William, the Duke of Nonnandy, invaded England claiming the English throne as the next of kin to Edward the Confessor and defeated his rival, Harold, at the Battle of Hastings. In the next four years, the English nobility was virtually wiped out, and the new king's French supporters constituted the new aristocracy in England. Before the Norman Conquest, Latin was the language of divine worship and learning while English (that is, Old English) was widely used in other spheres. The Normans introduced the French language into England as the language of the ruling classes. But the English language continued to be spoken by the uncultivated masses. Thus the initial effect of the Conquest was no doubt damaging to the vernacular literature. But it never died out because while Anglo-Norman French increasingly becaine a special and fashionable accomplishment (as in the case of Chaucer's Prioress), the oral nature of English kept it alive among the largely illiterate people. Understood by all, it had a clear metrical shape and held the listener's attention by clever appeals to him and summarising the content from time to time. This non-private character of Middle English literature fitted neatly into or grew out of crowded communal life in households and religious communities. Above all, the language survived as the popular medium of preaching.

After England lost Normandy in 1204 and the nobility was no longer allowed, in 1244, to possess lands in both England and France, the tide turned in favour of English. After 1250, there is a substantial increase in the number of French words in English, indicating clearly that a people or class, used to French, was switching over to English. In fifty years, from 1250 to 1300, the language of the governing classes changes back to English. Thus ultimately the Norman influence was not wholly negative. The Normans imported the French literature and literary standards of the twelfth-century Renaissance: these provided the models for a new native literature of politeness and urbanity. English vocabulary was enriched with many French words which made the language more cosmopolitan and literary. Further, the old Teutonic alliterative measure was largelyreplaced by French syllabic verse, standard in Europe. Actually the Conquest resulted in a fusion of Teutonic (northern) and Romance (southern) traditions. Subsequently, literature in England was written in three languages: Latin, French and English. The imitation of French works like the *Songs of Roland* gradually produced an upper-class English literature. Even the British legend of King Arthur reached English romance not directly from Celtic traditions but through the French romances of Chretien de Troyes and his successors.

All medieval literature offers a sharp contrast to modem literature in its impersonality, religious feeling and didactic content. Much of this literature is in fact anonymous, and the conditions of publishing and boolc reproduction (before the printing press) give it a communal character. The medieval author also did not place value on originality as we now understand it: an old and authoritative source only heightened the appeal of literature. As narrative poetry moved out of the mead-hall into the castle, the presence of women in the audience produced an important stylistic change: instead of the heroic (*Beowulf*), we have the courtly *(Sir Gawain* and *the Green Knight).* Even where the writing was not religious, a deep moral concern located the secular in a sacred framework.

The fertility and variety of literature around Chaucer's time–romance, lyric, drama, mystical meditation–are evident also in the alliterative revival of the fourteenth century. This meant primarily the revival of the old four-beat alliterative measure of Old English poetry, of *Beowulf,* for instance. The twenty odd poems written in this older metre in Middle English mostly came from the north and the north-west of England, although *Piers Plowman* originated in the west Midlands. From the west also came four poems in the north-western dialect contained in a single manuscript. Originally untitled, they are now identified in the order in which they .appear, as *Pear, Purify, Patience,* and *Sir Gawain* and *the Green Knight.*

The similarities among them suggest some common ground, perhaps even a common author. *Pearl* is the important religious poem in the collection, describing in elevated mystical language the vision of a father whose child has died. Even if the poem is not taken in autobiographical terms, the allegory of the pearl reveals an ethical concern for purity. The poem handles the theme of salvation in the framework of a personal elegy, using time-honoured medieval conventions of dream and debate. What strikes the modem reader is the deep personal feeling and sensuous description controlled with artistic restraint by considerable metrical skill. *Purity* shows similar ethical preoccupations with uncleanness and grace, and *Patience* tells the story of Jonah and the whale in realistic detail.

Sir Gawain is perhaps the most complex verse romance in Middle English literature. Courtly in tone, it is the finest Arthurian romance in English dealing without didactic considerations the theme of knightly courage and truth. It combines two stories found separately either in Celtic or Old French romances: a) Gawain's encounter with the Green Knight and the three blows exchanged with the latter, b) the three temptations held out by the host's wife at Bercilalc's castle. The three blows match the three temptations, and the plot is well-knit. But the modem reader is moved by the colour, energy and vivid detail that make it a veritable tapestry. The freshness of observation is reflected in dialogue (between Gawain and the lady of the castle) and

above all we are given a sense of multiple actions moving simultaneously. The Gawain poet belongs to the north-west Midlands, probably south Lancashire as indicated by the landscape and local allusions. He has a good knowledge of moral and theological problems and his vocabulary contains a large French element.

The alliterative revival is marked by poems of social and moral protest: they respond actively to the unrest of the period. The anti-establishment satire is appropriately presented in alliterative verse and not in the conventional courtly measure. The outstanding poem in this respect is *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman.* The multiple extant manuscripts show that it was a popular work, and the author's keen interest in the text is revealed in his three versions. The earliest version or A-text is short (2579 lines) and consists of a prologue and eleven passus (or cantos). The B-text is a revision with a prologue and twenty passus (7241 lines). The C-text revises further (7353 lines) and is divided into twenty-three passus. Beginning with a vision on the Malvern Hills in the west of England of a 'field full of folk,' it develops into a comprehensive portrait of fourteenth-century life. Although the multiple visions include familiar allegories like the Seven Deadly Sins, the poem's strength does not lie in the narrative. Lacking in orderliness and logical plan, digressive in impulse, the poem, especially in its A and B texts, offers a powerful contrast to the ironic detachment of Chaucer. Its realistic and biting satire often reaches the visionary intensity of Dante. Its religious and political message is inseparable fiom its sanctification of hcnest labour.

Among the other contemporaries of Chaucer, Gower's earnestness is conventional and unrelieved by humour; he also lacks Langland's intensity. But in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Gower was considered equal to Chaucer. His Speculum *Meditantis* is in French, *Vox Clamantis*, which has a vivid account of the Peasant's Revolt, is in Latin, and *Confessio Amantis* is in English. In the last poem Gower goes beyond mere didactic content to write of love as an unrewarded servant of Venus. But even here the fiamework of the stories is the seven deadly sins since he confesses to a priest (Genius, the priest of Venus).

Chaucer had many imitators in his time or a little after. Among these, Thomas Hoccleve and John Lydgate, despite the latter's *Fall of Princes* (which anticipates the sixteenth-century *Mirror for Magistrates)* are not half as successful as the Scottish Chaucerians: the Scottish king, James I, Robert Henryson, William Dunbar and Gavin Douglas. *The Kingis Quhair* of James celebrates love and its fulfilment through trials and adversities. Dunbar's *Twa Mariit Wemen and the Wedo* was influenced by Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Prologue,* while Douglas's *The Palice of Honour* shows a debt to Chaucer's *Hous of Fame.* Henryson came closest to Chaucer, first in his *Fables,* but he added a moral. Later he borrowed again from Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* in *The Testament of Cresseid.* His Cresseid, deserted by Diomede, curses the gods and is punished with leprosy. Deeply ashamed, she withdraws into confinement. Here one day Troilus gives her alms without recognising her. She recognises Troilus, however, and condemns her own infidelity. Henryson's vision is grim and sombre in comparison to Chaucer's forgiving humanity.

As a mature poet Chaucer was able to combine the courtly and bourgeois conventions of literature. The aristocratic, secularised literature, imported from twelfth-century France, is built around the themes of courtly love, courtesy and chivalry. Marvellous adventure becomes the hall-mark of romance, which is written in a new verse form, the octosyllabic couplet. The heroine is traditionally desirable and difficult, and the knight-errant moves through trial to the happiness of requited love. Apart from the refining and chastening test of love, the knight often has to fight dragons and demons. The elements of adventure is soon minimised or rather turned inward as in *Roman de la Rose* of Guilladme de Lorris: here the allegory takes over and captures the movements of the soul. The setting is often exotic and unworldly. Allegory makes the springtime garden in *Roman de la Rose,* a conventional setting for courtly love, an earthly paradise.

Allegory is of course a distinctive technique of medieval literature common to courtly romance, alliterative satire and the Miracles and Moralities. A human figure may stand for a vice (Gluttony, Lechery, Idleness and so on in the Seven Deadly Sins) or for an institution like the Church, a thing like a pearl can mean purity and so on. In Chaucer's *Nuns' Priest's Tale* or *Parliament of Fowls,* animals represent in secular allegories human beings or social classes. The allegorical habit began perhaps from interpreting the Bible for a wide variety of people: this produced the many levels of meaning. Gradually, the literal meaning became a kind of disguise which had to be removed in order to reveal the higher meaning.

In the idealised courtly romances, background, character, speech and action are all static and formal. The ideal courtly lady, for example, has blond hair, white smooth forehead, soft skin, arched eyebrows, grey eyes, a small, round, full mouth, dimpled chin and so on. These devices are an aid to idealisation, to the movement away from the specifically individual to the abstract idea. Love for a woman is exalted to divine love. No wonder that Dante had been able to combine courtly eroticism with religious ecstasy. What Dante's Beatrice achieves is paralleled in the Arthurian romance where the comparatively secular search for personal perfection becomes the quest for the Holy Grail.

Gradually the courtly style learnt to include within it its opposite, the realistic style: Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Canterbury Tales* represent this amalgam. The realistic style can be related to the emergence of the new middle classes. Its commonest genre is the fabliau, the short, humorous verse tale often marked by coarseness; others include the mime, the beast epic, the fable and so on. The fabliau is characterised by a certain animal vitality and grotesque exaggeration: it is impolite, irreverent, often vulgar and obscene. The fabliau setting is econoinical and precise. Its world contains peasants and bourgeois, clerks, priests, nuns, jugglers, some knights and ladies. There are some stock formulae, as for example the triangle of the unimaginative, jealous husband, sensual wife and lecherous priest or clever clerk. There is a pattern even to their portraits, although the typical portrait is suddenly brought alive through individual detail of speech, dress and physiognomy, as in *The Canterbury* Tales.

3.6 THE ARTS

As in literature, so in architecture, England gradually tried to work out a native version of the complex and glorious French Gothic style. The Gothic was a characteristic mode of the Middle Ages bringing together the flippant and the serious, the grotesque and the sublime, copiousness and ascetic control. Such a heterogeneous and hospitable mode not only accommodated an attention to minute and elaborate detail but subordinated the abundance to the angular simplicity of the spire. One of the most important buildings of the thirteenth century–I-Ienry III's Westminster Abbey–was directly inspired by French work. By the second half of the fourteenth century, however, the so-called 'perpendicular' style spread over England, because it was cheaper and less extravagant. The Hundred Years' War introduced French brickwork and a French type of castle built on a simple quadrangular plan.

While medieval houses were overcrowded and their furniture scanty, the hangings, covers and cushions provided all the splendour. Tapestry and embroidery were aided by the English cloth industry, Embroidery designs were closely linked to 'illuminated'. books and manuscripts. 'Illumination' was the technique of decorating the letters of a text (often the initial letter) with gold, silver and bright colours. Common people who could not afford illuminated manuscripts had to be satisfied with wall-painting and sculpture inside churches, The taste for portraiture, as in the picture of Richard II, indicates a growing interest in the individual away from the

idealised types of religious painting in the thirteenth century. The vast improvement in craftsmanship resulted in a more refined, polite and decorative style but the older monumental and somewhat heroic stateliness was lost.

3.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have learnt about the age of Chaucer, a transitional one. Although the focus has been historical, ultimately you have learnt about the growth of towns, decline of chivalry, gender relations, people's beliefs, the condition of the poor and varying literary ideals. In other words, you have acquired some idea of the life and values of the people at that time

3.8 EXERCISES

1. Describe the effect on fourteenth-century life and literature of the following: I) the Hundred Years' War, ii) the Peasants' Revolt, iii) the Black Death. (You will find your answer mainly in 1.2. The war destroyed chivalry and depleted the government's resources. The Revolt and the condition of the poor. The rise of the English people and its effect on literature. The Black Death and the weakening of feudal tenure. Farm-hands in great demand. Many vacancies for the clergy who support the poor.)

2. Write short notes on:

   Courtly love, chivalry, women and marriage. (See **1.3)**

3. What is the relationship between astrology and medicine in Chaucer's time? (See 1.4)

4. Write short notes on:

   The courtly romances, the **Norman** Conquest, allegory, the alliterative revival.(See 1.5)

UNIT 4 CHAUCER'S POETRY: A GENERAL SURVEY

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
4.2 The Life of Chaucer
4.3 Chaucer's Poetry 1370-80
4.4 Chaucer's Poetry 1380-86
4.5 Chaucer's Poetry 1387-1400
4.6 Chaucer's Comic Vision
4.7 Chaucer's Language and Metre
4.8 Let Us Sum Up
4.9 Exercises
4.10 Suggested Reading

4.0 OBJECTIVES

Since in the previous unit you have been given a general introduction to the age of Chaucer, this unit will focus on Chaucer as a poet. The discussion would include Chaucer's biography and poetic development with a brief survey of his entire literary output, his reading and his language and metre. The aim will be to prepare you to read *The **Canterbury** Tales.*

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit will take you through the life and work of Chaucer to the composition of his most popular work ***The** Canterbury Tales.* We will *try* to come to some kind of an assessment of Chaucer's poetic contribution and his place in the history of English literature. The focus will be on his style and comic vision.

4.2 THE LIFE OF CHAUCER

Although not much is known of Chaucer's life, official records give us a good idea of his public career. He was born about 1343-44 to John and Agnes Chaucer in London. The name Chaucer (French 'Chaussier') suggests that they were a shoe-making family, but his immediate ancestors were prosperous wine-merchants with some standing at court. Beginning as a page in the household of Prince Lionel and Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster, Chaucer went to France in the English army, was taken prisoner near Reims and ransomed. He seems to have risen to the service of the king, undertaking a series of diplomatic missions for ten years which exposed him to Continental culture. He was married probably in 1366 to Philippa, daughter of Sir Payne Roet and sister of Katherine Swynford, afterwards the third wife of John of Gaunt. From 1 December 1372 till 23 May 1373, he was once more on the Continent, his first Italian journey. This visit which took him from Genoa to Florence had a decisive influence on him. Florence was already a centre of art, architecture and literature; it brought him into contact with the writing of Dante,

Petrarch and Boccaccio. In other words, the Italian journey took him from the Middle Ages to the threshold of the Renaissance.

Shortly before going to Italy, Chaucer wrote *The Book of the Duchess,* an elegy on the death of Blanche, the wife of John of Gaunt. His important connections made him in 1374 Controller of the Customs and Subsidy on Wool, Skins, and Hides in the port of London. After some fluctuation of fortune, in 1389, when Richard II asserted his position, Chaucer was appointed Clerk of the King's Works, in charge of the upkeep of the royal buildings. When he lost his Clerkship he again went through financial uncertainties until the new King Henry IV gave him an annuity of 40 marks. But the poet died soon after, in 1400.

From this brief sketch it is clear that, despite the cultivated ironic image of himself as a dreamer withdrawn among his books (as, say, in *The Hous of Fame),* Chaucer was an active man of affairs, mixing freely in government and courtly circles. Since love of French culture was common among such classes, Chaucer's tastes and reading were also influenced by it. Among his constant reading we must include the *Roman de la Rose,* the poems of Machant and the works of Ovid (in Latin). Chaucer's early work is often referred to as his 'French' period because of the influence of some contemporary French poets like Deschamps and Froissart. His 'Italian' period begins with *The Hous of Fame.* Without rejecting the French and Italian elements, Chaucer enters his 'English' period with *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Canterbury Tales.*

4.3 CHAUCER'S POETRY (1370-80)

The Roman de la Rose (or *The Romaunt of the Rose* in Chaucer's incomplete translation) was the most popular and influential of all French poems in the Middle Ages. It was different from earlier narrative poetry like the *Chanson de Roland* and marks the new taste for dreams and allegories. Begun around the third decade of the thirteenth century by Guillaume de Lorris, it ran to about 4000 lines (ending at line 4432 of the English translation). It became the model for innumerable allegorical love-visions. Closely following the courtly love conventions, Guillaume, a young poet in the 'service' of a lady, relates a vision of a beautiful garden where Cupid, the God of Love and his followers were enjoying themselves. Among the flowers, the poet is shown a Rosebud (the symbol of his lady-love) which he eagerly desires to possess. An allegorical contest begins at this point. Opposed by Chastity, Danger (aloofness, disdain), Shame, and Wicked Tongue, the poet is helped by Franchise (liberty), Pity, and Belaceil (fair-welcoming). Through Venus's intervention, Belacueil allows the poet to kiss the rose. As a result, however, Belacueil is imprisoned and the po'et-lover exiled from the garden. This is where Guillaume's fragment ends.

Forty years later, the poem was resumed by a different poet in a rather different spirit. Jean de Meun, a maturer scholar, philosopher, moralist and translator, added about eighteen thousand lines in which science, theology, social philosophy are all to be found within an entertaining style. Love, instead of the courtly conventions, is now analysed rationalistically in terms of a natural impulse for the propagation of the race. Jean de Meun is a satirist and his satire is directed at friars, knights, lawyers and doctors, and the idealised figure of woman in Guillaume's work. Although the story ends happily with the lover finally gaining possession of his lady-love, the satire stands out, prompting critics to compare Jean with Voltaire (brilliant eighteenth-century satirist). As must be clear to you by now, *Roman de la Rose* introduced Chaucer at once to the opposed styles and conventions of romance and realism: the two poets combined to form Chaucer's poetic style.

The earliest of Chaucer's original poems of any length is *The Book of the Duchess.* We have already seen why Chaucer wrote the elegy. For this poem, he mainly drew

upon the poetry of Guillaume Machaut. It is both an eulogy (formal praise) of Blanche and a consolation addressed to her bereaved husband. Chaucer accomplishes this double purpose by adapting the love-vision poem to the elegy. What are the usual features of the love-vision, many of which can be seen in *Hous of Fame, Parliament of Fowls* and the *Prologue to the Legend of Good Women'?* They include discussion of sleeplessness and dreams, the setting on May-day or in spring, the vision itself, the guide (often in the form of a helpful animal), the personified abstractions and so on. Despite the obvious immaturity of the poem, Chaucer's talent for realism is already evident in the hunting scene. His use of the dream is not merely conventional but shows a psychological interest.

It is not before ten years that he wrote another long poem, *The **Hous** of Fame.* In the interim period he had been to Italy and his reading of Dante probably gives him the idea of a journey to unknown regions. Although the device of the love-vision continues to be used, there is a greater mastery of style and metre. In the poetic development of Chaucer, this poem has a transitional role. Chaucer draws upon Virgil's *Aeneid,* Ovid and other medieval Latin writers. The work lacks in homogeneity partly because the centre of interest shifts from love to the uncertainties of fame. The poem is in three books. In the first book, the poet dreams that he is in the temple of Venus where the love-story of Dido and Aeneas is related. As he steps out, a huge golden eagle seizes him and carries him to the House of Fame where we are promised but never told the tidings of love's folk. Do they refer to the marriage of Richard and Anne or the expected betrothal of Philippa, the daughter of John of Gaunt? What stands out in the poem is the eagle's flight in Book II: the poet's speechless terror contrasts comically with the friendly talkativeness of the eagle who anticipates the Chauntecleer of *Nun's Priest's Tale.*

4.4 CHAUCER'S POETRY (1380-86)

In *The Parliament of **Fowls,*** we find that the poet has been reading lately a famous work, the *Somnium Scipionis.* In this work, the elder Africanus appears to Scipio the younger in a dream, takes him up into the heavens, where he shows him the mysteries of the future life. As night falls, the poet stops reading, falls asleep and dreams that Africanus has come to his bedside. To reward him for the study of his book, the latter takes him to a beautiful park where he sees the temple of Venus. Then he is taken to a hillside where all the birds have gathered before the goddess of Nature on St. Valentine's Day to choose their partners. The royal tercel eagle is given first choice and selects the beautiful formel eagle on the goddess's hand. But since two other tercels of lower rank also make the same claim, the dispute is considered by the general parliament of the birds. Finally Nature rules that the choice should rest with the formel herself, and she asks for a year's delay before making her decision.

The Parliament is a work of freshness and assimilation. The work may be an allegory on the betrothal of Richard II to Anne of Bohemia in 1381; the rival suitors were Friedrich of Meissen and Charles VI of France. Other allegories have been suggested. But the poem's appeal is independent of allegory. While the lovers' contest or the parliament of birds is conventional, the social and political satire is a new element. In contrast to the rival eagles, the other classes of birds—worm-fowl, water-fowl, seed-fowl—clearly represent the humbler ranks of human society, and their discontent seems to allude to the Peasants' Revolt. While the high-born suitors expound idealised courtly love, some of the lower representatives have little respect for it. The detached and dramatic presentation of opposed values and points of view looks forward to *The Canterbury Tales.*

Around this time, in the early eighties, Chaucer translated the *Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius. The popularity of this philosophical work is proved by the

fact that in England alone, King Alfred had translated it and centuries later, Queen Elizabeth undertook another translation . Along with Boccaccio, Boethius dominates Chaucer's Italian period: most of the longer passages of philosophical reflection in his poetry can be traced to Boethius. Its influence is particularly noticeable in *Palamon* and Arcite (which became the Knight's Tale) and Troilus and *Criseyde*. Chaucer's prose in this translation, in Astrolabe (1391) and elsewhere compares unfavourably with his verse.

In Troilus and Criseyde, Chaucer reaches a stylistic culmination, or he finally finds his distinctive narrative style, characterisation and verse form. Only the,Knight's Tale can compare with the sustained narration of Troilus. The immediate sources of both poems are in Boccaccio and both re-work material from the ancient cycles of romance. While the main plot of Troilus is based on the *Teseida* of Boccaccio, the Troilus story has a more complicated history. There is no mention of it in Homer. Several great Homeric figures like Achilles, Hector, Priam and Diomedes play minor roles in *Troilus*, while Pándarus, Criseyde and even Troilus, marginal characters in the Iliad, become the chief actors. The story appears to have been the invention of the twelfth-century French poet Benoit de Ste-Maure, the author of the *Roman de* Troie. But Benoit begins with the separation of the two lovers while Guido delle Colonne adds nothing but circulates the story.

It is only with Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato* that we have the complete story: he invents the crucial first part of the poem, the wooing and winning of Criseyde. Boccaccio added the pivotal figure of Pandaro (Pandarus). Chaucer transforms this simple and passionate story into a psychological novel in verse.

Troilus remains the ideal courtly lover that he is in Boccaccio. But whereas the latter's Pandaro was Criseyde's cousin and a young companion of Troilus, Chaucer makes Pandarus much older, Criseyde's uncle. He becomes a rather complicated figure, friend and philosophical adviser to Troilus, protector of Criseyde. He is a failed, old courtly lover with his own brand of humorous and disillusioned wisdom. Chaucer's Criseyde is also a truly complex character, even contradictory in her motives. She is not conceived in the mould of the heroic, the Amazon; at the same time, she is not the typically abstract courtly heroine. Her love is sincere and she has a mind of her own, taking her own decisions. But tender passion cannot cloud her unsentimental and practical intelligence without which a woman may not be able to survive.. She'is somewhat sceptical and disillusioned, a type portrayed again in Pertelote of the Nun *'s* Priest's Tale, Apart from psychological complexity, the human situation and the social status of women are unstable. Hence Chaucer is unable to condemn Criseyde's 'betrayal' when she accepts Diomedes's advances in the alien Greek camp. Chaucer begins with courtly love and moves up the *scala amoris* or ladder of love through tolerance to *caritas* or the Christian notion of charity (love of all humanity, love of God). The awareness of forces larger and stronger than man provides the philosophical basis for tolerant reconciliation. The influence of Boethius and Dante can be detected particularly in Troilus's speech on predestination in Book IV or Criseyde's discussion of false felicity in Book III.

The Legend *of Good Women* was begun, as the prologue says, as a penance imposed by Queen Alceste for Chaucer's offences against the God of Love and women in writing the Troilus and the *Romaunt* of the Rose. The original plan was to write about Cupid's saints, that is, women who have been faithful to the creed to love. But the project was abandoned.

4.5 CHAUCER'S POETRY (1387-1400)

Although The *Canterbury* Tales is Chaucer's most mature work, it includes some of his earlier writings. The plan of the tales was probably adopted soon after 1386, and

the *General Prologue* composed in 1387. Chaucer may have himself taken part in a pilgrimage in April of that year because of the illness of his wife, Philippe, who probably died soon after. Instead of the original plan of 120 tales, only 24 are told, of which two are interrupted before the end and two broken off soon after they begin. The group of pilgrims includes a wide cross-section of English society: a knight and a squire (his son), professional men like the doctor and the lawyer, a merchant, a shipman, various representatives of the religious orders like the prioress, the monk, the friar, the parson, a substantial farmer, a miller, a reeve, a cook, several craftsmen, and so on.

The General Prologue does not have a real source. Individual portraits of priests or peasants or knights abound in medieval literature and personified abstractions in religious and secular allegories are quite common. We also come across description of the different orders of society and the use of physical and temperamental characteristics to classify men and women. As typical figures, Chaucer's portraits are comparable to the formal 'characters' traced back to Theophrastus. But they are so vividly imagined and individualised that scholars have searched for real life parallels or sources. Small but closely observed details and peculiarities of dress, physiognomy, speech and so on make the portraits come alive. But Chaucer's pilgrims are equally representative of social groups and professions—these figures are generalised through typical features of character and conduct: the gentle knight, the corrupt Friar, the hypocritical Pardoner. Even their dress, appearance and physiognomy have a typical quality. In a large number of cases, the pilgrim described in the *General Prologue* relates a tale in keeping with his character and calling.

When the pilgrims have gone a short distance out of London, Harry Bailey asks them to draw lots. Whether by sheer luck or manipulation, the lot falls to the knight, socially the noblest in the group, to tell the first tale. He relates the story of the love of two friends, Palamon and Arcite, for the same lady. His tale receives enthusiastic approval, and the Host calls upon the Monk to tell the next tale. But social hierarchies are disrupted when the drunken Miller breaks in and tells an indecent tale about a carpenter. As soon as he finishes, the Reeve, being a carpenter himself, takes revenge by relating an equally scurrilous story about a miller. Thus, in the first three tales we are introduced to a basic technique of Chaucer's mature poetry and perhaps Gothic art in general: the courtly and the bourgeois, romance and realism, the serious and the light are juxtaposed.

After the Reeve, as the Cook begins in glee, Chaucer makes the Host stop his tale, perhaps in order to prevent repetitiveness. There are similar groupings and dramatic links among the stories but they come as though without any previous plan, suggesting the openness and movement of the pilgrimage. After a quarrel between the Friar and the Summoner, they tell stories defaming each other's calling. The comic device of cutting short a boring story is particularly useful when the 'tragedies' of the Monk's tale become tedious. It is ironic when Chaucer the poet's own *Tale of Sir Thopas* has to be interrupted by the Host.

Some stories are linked together by the problem or theme of marriage. The so-called marriage group begins with the Wife of Bath, who has had five husbands and would not mind a sixth. Her earthy frankness and open policy of dominating husbands are somewhat unconventional. Although the quarrel between the Friar and the Summoner breaks out after her tale, the Clerk's tale which follows challenges her position. The story of Griselda illustrates her patience and submission to her husbands, which is rewarded finally with happiness. Next comes the Merchant's fabliau about an old man who marries a young wife and is shamefully deceived by her. *The Squire's Tale* has nothing to do with marriage. But the *Franklin's Tale* returns to the theme, to the married life of Arviragus and Dorigen. Since it is shown as happy and harmonious because of mutual tolerance, and since it comes at the end of the marriage group, some scholars have identified the Franklin's views with those

of Chaucer. Gender and class are subtly related in the entire group and indeed in the *Tales,* defiant energy and appetite being associated with the rising middle-classes.

As it has been said, *The Canterbury Tales* is a veritable anthology of medieval literature. The courtly romance is represented by the *Knight's Tale* or the fragmentary *Squire's Tale. Sir Thopas* is a subtle parody of the more popular type of romance. The *Physician's Tale* retells a classical legend. The *Wife of Bath's Tale* is a folk-tale, while there are many instances of the fabliau. *The Pardoner's Tale* is an *exemplum,* a story with which preachers would adorn their sermon and point a moral. The sermon or didactic treatise is represented by *The Parson's Tale* and Chaucer's own *Melibeus* in prose. *The Nun's Priest's Tale* is a memorable example of the *beast-fable, the story of Chauntecleer and Pertelote.

Chaucer's idea of the pilgrimage as a narrative framework enables him to bring together the widest possible cross-section of medieval society. What binds this 'sundry folk,' this motley crowd is what gives unity to heterogeneous variety: the pilgrimage easily relates the material with the spiritual, the mundane with the religious. It also gives the *Tales* a dramatic power, especially in the comments, exchanges and jibes that enact ongoing social relationships in a microcosm. Of course, the secular and clerical aristocracy is left out as they would not have mingled with Chaucer's company; similarly, the real poor are excluded as they would not be able to go on such a pilgrimage.

It has been suggested that the general device of a series of tales within an enclosing narrative was borrowed by Chaucer from Boccaccio's *Decameron.* But the enclosing frame was only too common not only in medieval and classical Europe but in other parts of the world. Also, Chaucer does not seem to have read *Decameron.* Another parallel, the Novelle of Giovanni Sercambi, is more convincing because it actually uses the setting of a pilgrimage. But in every other respect, Chaucer's *Tales* is a very different work. It offers a comic pageant of fourteenth-century life with the pilgrims revealing their habits, moods and private lives indirectly through the stories they tell.

The order and arrangement of *The Canterbury Tales,* in spite of the links mentioned above, remains an open question. The tales have come down to us in a series of fragments in manuscripts of which the Ellesmere manuscript is the basis for modern editions. Fragment I contains *The General Prologue, The Knight's Tale* and the tales of the Miller, the Reeve and the Cook. Fragment II contains *The Man of Law's Prologue and Tale* which presents the adventures of Constance, a kind of allegorical figure of fortitude. The tale shows Chaucer's legal knowledge. In Fragment III we have *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* followed by the tales, both fabliaux, of the Friar and the Summoner. The fourth fragment contains *The Clerk's Tale* and *The Merchant's Tale.* In Fragment V we have *The Squire's Tale* which tells *a* story of adventure and enchantment in a distant land. The fragment also has *The Franklin's Tale.*

Fragment VI contains *The Physician's Tale* and *The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale.* The former tells an old Roman story taken from the *Roman de la Rose* with a long digression on the character and education of young girls. The Pardoner's memorable tale embodies in the sermon an *exemplum* or illustrative example, the old story of the three revellers who discover death in a heap of gold. In Fragment VII we have *The Shipman's Tale,* a popular fabliau about a merchant being cheated of his wife's favours and his money by a monk. *The Prioress's Tale* which follows is marked by elegant religious devotion, although the story about a schoolboy murdered by the Jews betrays Christian bigotry. *The Rime of Sir Thopas* is a literary and social satire on the average popular romance, especially involving the bourgeois intruders into chivalry and knighthood in Flanders. Chaucer's following prose tale, *The Tale of Melibee,* seems to be full of dull moral instruction but the Host, who found the former boring, is enthusiastic. When the Host requests a jovial hunting tale from the Monk

in keeping with his character, the latter relates *(The Monk's Tale)* a series of boring tragedies, that is, in the usual medieval sense, tales of the fall of fortunate men.

The next story, *The Nun's Priest's Tale,* is one of Chaucer's best. Here we have a character, not sketched in the *General Prologue,* being brought out vividly through the tale itself, The beast-fable tells the familiar incident of the cock, seized by a fox, escaping by tempting his captor to open his mouth to speak. Fragment VIII contains *The* Second *Nun's Tale* and *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale.* Like the Prioress, the second nun relates a Christian legend of the life of the famous Roman martyr, St. Cecilia. The Canon's Yeoman tells a contemporary anecdote of an alchemist trickster (possibly the Canon himself). The Yeoman and his master had overtaken the pilgrims after a mad gallop, but as soon as the Canon fears exposure in the tale, he runs away. In Fragment IX we have *The Manciple's Prologue and Tale.* The subject of the story is the tell-tale bird, famous in popular tradition, in the romance of the Seven Sages, as also in Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* The final fragment contains *The Parson's Prologue and Tale* and *Chaucer's Retractation.* The Parson delivers a long prose discourse on the Seven Deadly Sins. This is followed by Chaucer's repudiation of all his writings on the vanity of romantic love, sparing only his religious and philosophical work. Is Chaucer here in earnest? Is there a sudden change of heart common in the Middle Ages? It remains a difficult question.

4.6 CHAUCER'S COMIC VISION

Chaucer's genius, and that of his contemporaries discussed in Unit 1, lies mainly in narrative verse: he has an arresting story to tell, a vivid description to offer or even an argument to develop. We must not expect from him the lyrical intensities of the school of Donne, although he did write some beautiful lyrics. Matthew Arnold's criticisni that Chaucer's poetry lacks in 'high seriousness' may serve to distinguish his genius from that of Dante in his time, but otherwise his comic vision is attuned to the,medieval world.

He was not incapable of sublimity, as may be seen in his *Troilus and Criseyde.* But the common point of this courtly masterpiece with the more popular, more modern *Canterbury Tales* is an unheroic image of man and his unaided abilities. If we take even a brief look at the material culture of Chaucer's time we realise that England had certainly moved out of the dark fears that make Anglo-Saxon or Old English poetry, religious and secular, so intense, to a more tolerable and sociable, a more urbane world. Yet man is still far away from the mastery of his environment that produces in the Renaissance the image of the magus transforming human nature and the world in which we live. The tragedy of Faustus has no place in the medieval world. But instead of uncomprehending terror, Chaucer strikes a happy note of reconciliation and humorous acceptance of limitation. This discovery of humour, involving a double perspective and a style combining the courtly and bourgeois traditions, corresponds to the composite nature of man, made up of spirit and flesh, mind and body, In this sense, *The Canterbury Tales* seems to anticipate the Renaissance.

Although he sometimes directly ridicules social evils and vicious characters, Chaucer's satire is rarely venomous. In fact, he is more of an ironist than a satirist, engaged in somewhat detached and amused observation of the gap between the ideal and the actual in human affairs, Irony as a mode is particularly appropriate to the transitional world in which Chaucer found himself: settled verities were being increasingly relativized in the struggle between the old and the new, the religious and the worldly. Chaucer's irony has been divided into broader and subtler varieties. In the portraits of the Summoner and the Pardoner, the irony borders upon satire, in the less vicious characters or the more respectable figures, the ironic exposure is accompanied by an acknowledgement of earthy energy and resourceful villainy. The

subtler irony can be perceived behind the deference, awe and admiration of Chaucer the narrator. This is why Chaucer presents this fictional persona as an emerging bourgeois, middle-of-the-road observer not exceptionally shrewd or discriminating. Such subtle irony is not only limited to, say, the portrait of the Prioress but extends to an awareness of the instability and uncertainty of all things human,

4.7 CHAUCER LANGUAGE AND VERSIFICATION

Because of the condition of orality, Middle English was not standardised, as modern English is, but an assortment of dialects. Chaucer employed the London speech of his time, the East Midland dialect. Because of the importance of London, this later grew into standard English. To be very accurate, Chaucer's language is late Middle English of the South East Midland type. Its inflections are comparatively simpler; even the modem reader can understand it easily. But many words retained a syllabic ***-e,*** either final or in the ending ***-es*** or ***-en,*** which ceased to be pronounced later. The vowels had in general their present Continental rather than their English sound. Therefore, Chaucer's metre had a different feel from that of modern English. The most important difference between Chaucer's English and modern English, in terms of versification, lies in the many final *-e*'s and other light inflectional endings. Since these endings are usually pronounced in the verse, they are crucial to the rhythm.

The basic line of Chaucer's verse in ***The*** *Canterbury* Tales is the same as that of Shakespeare's blank verse or Pope's heroic couplets: the iambic pentameter consisting of five feet, each foot .made up of an unstressed (x) and a stressed syllable (/):

x / x / x / x / x /

A Knyght ther was, and that a worthy man

x / x / x/ x / x /

A Clerk ther was of Oxenford also

As in Shakespeare or Pope, much variation is possible within this basic pattern, like trochaic variations (/X) or extra unstressed syllables. While in modern English the final ***e*** in words such as 'name,' 'veine,' and 'ende' is silent, in Chaucer's London, the situation was fluid. At times Chaucer retains the pronunciation of the final *e* ('Rome' can rhyme with 'to me') and at times he does not. The general rule is that the final e ought to be pronounced except where the next word in the line begins with a vowel or an ***h.*** It will also be pronounced in the last word of a line and when a word ending in e in the singular is made plural (as in 'listes' or 'lokkes').

As we have seen in Unit 1, many French words were taken intq English in the second half of the fourteenth century. This French vocabulary covers mainly the fields of government and law, the Church, the arts, and social and dbmestic life–wherever the interests of the upper classes had spread. Borrowings from Latin belong largely to theology, the sciences, literature, and so on. As is to be expected, Chaucer made skilful use of the French, Latin and English elements in his vocabulary, moving easily from courtly culture to abstract intellectual issues and to fresh, realistic observation.

4.8 . LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have sketched Chaucer's life and poetic career, with special emphasis on *The Canterbury* ***Tales.*** After that we have attempted a brief estimate of Chaucer's vision. Finally, a note on Chaucer's language and versification has been added.

4.9 EXERCISES

1. What are the elements of Chaucer's life that helped his poetry?
(closeness to the nobility, his public office and diplomatic career. Journeys to France and Italy. Chaucer's favourite poets. See 2.2)

2. What kind of an influence did the ***Roman de*** la ***Rose*** have on Chaucer's poetry?

(Chaucer learnt courtly conventions from Guillaume de Lorris and realistic satire about many of those conventions from Jean de Meun. Produced the mixed style and irony. See 2.3)

3. How is the ***Parliament of Fowls*** a satire?

(It seems to be a courtly allegory involving eagles, but the satirical discontent of the other birds. See 2.4)

4. How does the Troilus story come to Chaucer?

(The story is not in Homer. It'seems to have been invented in twelfth-century France. Boccaccio's contribution. See 2.4)

5. Compare Boccaccio's Pandoro with Chaucer's Pandraus.

(Pandoro's old age, uncle to Criseyde in Chaucer. But in Boccaccio, Pandoro's youth, cousin to Criseyde. See 2.4)

6. What is the source of Criseyde's complexity?

(Her contradictoriness, her instability as a woman, Chaucer's own forgiving attitude. See 2.4)

7. What use does Chaucer make of the device of pilgrimage?

(Enclosing narrative frame, dramatic quality, spiritual and material elements. see 2.5)

8. How are the tales linked to each other?

(Comments, rivalries, dramatic links, theme of marriage. See 2.5)

9. Name the three major sources of Chaucer's vocabulary. What does each source contribute?

(Latin, French, English. See 2.7)

4.10 SUGGESTED READING

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UNIT 5 THE GENERAL PROLOGUE TO THE CANTERBURY TALES

Structure

5.0 Objectives
5.1 Introduction
5.2 The Opening Section of the Prologue
5.3 The Portraits
5.4 The Concluding Section of the Prologue
5.5 Let Us Sum Up
5.6 Exercises

5.0 OBJECTIVES

Our aim in this unit is to examine closely ***The General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales,*** since the previous two units have introduced you to the age of Chaucer and to a general survey of the poetry of Chaucer and his contemporaries. The paraphrase and annotation in this unit will sensitise you to the skill in characterisation, social commentary and ironic tone of Chaucer.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit will introduce you to the portraits which are individuals as well as social types. You will also be given an idea of Chaucer's irony and his use of the narrator.

5.3 THE OPENING SECTION OF THE PROLOGUE

The General Prologue begins with a memorable description of Spring. The immediate reason for this is that only with the return of mild weather after winter could people go on a pilgrimage. Many passages have been suggested as possible sources. Chaucer was clearly dealing with a conventional theme with commonplace features. Such conventionality was not a weakness but a strength in medieval literature. People in Chaucer's time passed winter inside dark, draughty, badly heated, smoky huts living on salted beef, smoked bacon, dried peas, beans, last year's wheat or rye and so on. The shortage of fresh food resulted in diseases like scurvy in winter. Thus when the April showers made the grass grow again, both cattle and men were delighted at the prospect of fresh food and recovery of health. The sweet showers revive Nature and by implication human nature; the underlying motif is of resurrection or spiritual renewal. This is the way in which the cycle of seasons is closely related to the cycle of human life. April provides material occasion and spiritual yearning for going on pilgrimage. The force of rejuvenating Nature is in the South wind which inspires or breathes upon the tender twigs to make them grow; it bathes every vein, that is, the earth and the vessels of sap; it spurs even the small birds to sing all night. The biological awakening passes easily into spiritual'quest, the desire to journey out of drab, everyday existence to distant holy shrines. The pilgrims come from all corners of England to visit the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket who was martyred in the Canterbury cathedral in 1170. The modem poet, T.S. Eliot,

wrote a play, *Murder* in the Cathedral, on this event. Eliot's Waste *Land* also opens with an ironic echo of Chaucer: "April is the cruellest month."

Chaucer habitually refers to time in the framework of astrology or mythology: he tells us here that the sun is in the early part of its annual course, just coming out of Aries, the first sign of the zodiac. This is how astrology (which also meant astronomy) links earthly life to the heavenly. The sign of the inn where Chaucer the narrator is joined by the twenty-nine pilgrims was a tabard or short sleeveless coat, embroidered with armorial bearings. The fellowship of pilgrims suggests a sense of community and their varied backgrounds make the description a miniature version of fourteenth-century society.

5.3 THE PORTRAITS

The first portrait of the Knight is an idealised one, a type of chivalry, gentle in speech and manner, gallant in battles and tournaments, dignified and simple in his soiled rough tunic and coat of mail. There is perhaps a very light touch of irony in his maiden-like shy manner and his lack of gaiety or liveliness. Perhaps these last two details individualise him: he seems a bit out of place in the age of declining chivaliy. His military campaigns are all actual crusades although he could have fought also in the Hundred Years' War. In the Mediterranean and north Africa he fought against the Moors and Saracens. He heads the table of honour of the Teutonic knights because of his campaigns against heathen tribes in Prussia, Lithuania and Russia.

In contrast to his Christian motives, his son, the squire, seems to have joined the company for pleasure. He is a young courtly lover, an aspirant to Knighthood, whose chivalric prowess has already brought him much honour. Apart from his handsome physique, many more details of his costume and appearance are given. I-Iis locks were curled and his gown embroidered like a spring meadow. Fashionable dress was denounced by parish priests as a waste of money that could have gone to the poor. , His fresh and youthful energy is further brought out in his sleepless love, and his ability to sing, dance, draw, write, jost and compose songs anticipates the type of the Renaissance courtier.

The Knight's Yeoman ranked in service just above the groom. Later, yeomen came to mean small, substantial landholders. His green dress, his horn and the talistnan image of St. Christopher (patron saint of foresters and travellers) show that he was a game-keeper by profession. Chaucer held the post of deputy forester in the royal forest of North Petherton for over seven years. Individual details include his close-cropped head and sunburnt face as well as the panache with which he carried his weapons. The bow ('myghty bowe' could mean the long bow) and arrows, arm-guard (of archery), sword, shield and dagger suggest that he may have been among the yeomen-archers and knifemen who routed French chivalry at Crécy.

The character of the Prioress is very subtly drawn, with due respect to her social rank. It was more than likely that she came from an upper-class family. Women from the peasant or artisan classes were easily married because of the dowry they brought of 'labour.' For the nobility, dowry meant money or family connection. But many knights were impoverished and their unmarried daughters had to take refuge in a nunnery, where they often spent a life of material comfort and spiritual contentment since virginity was much admired in the Middle Ages. Thus Chaucer's Prioress was well-bred but in her eagerness to imitate courtly manners given to vanities and foibles. The Church expressly forbade her to go on a pilgrimage, which meant coming out of cloistered life, and to possess pets, since the money needed for their upkeep could be used for the poor.

Against this social situation, Chaucer describes her beauty, dress and dainty table manners in the style of the romances–even her name and adjectives like 'symple and coy' fit in. She is given to swearing, though only by St. Eligius, who was also a type of social aspiration. Details of her sensuous mouth, delicate nose and unveiled, broad forehead, her dress and jewels (fluted wimple, ornamental rosary and the brooch) suggest a femininity imperfectly suppressed by her holy vows. Chaucer's gentle irony at her elegant manners is extended to her skill in the nasal intonation traditionally used in the recitative portions of the church service. Her French is also gently satirised since it betrays her aspiration to courtliness: her French could not be that of Paris but was rather what she could pick up in an English nunnery. But Chaucer does bring out some laxities in her conduct. Not only did she keep pet dogs against the rules but fed them roasted meat, milk and wastel-bread (an expensive white bread)–food that would not be available to most people in England. This moral apathy is deepened by the false delicacy of her sentimental charity: she was so tender of conscience that she would weep to see her pets beaten or dead. She would also weep to see mice trapped, but mice were after all dangerous pests (perhaps even carriers of the Plague). The tongue-in-cheek manner continues till the end. Modelled on the heroine of courtly romance, Madame Eglentyne wears a brooch whose motto–love conquers all–could mean carnal or divine love.

The Monk usually came of the gentry or noble class since education was expensive and monks had to be learned. The rules of the monastic order were initially laid down by St. Augustine (c. 400 A.D.) and then by St. Benedict (c. 700 A.D.). The monks had to follow the principles of obedience, poverty and celibacy, perform manual labour or pursue the life of a scholar or teacher and generally spend an abstemious life within the cloister. Their daily activities included praying and glorifying God, giving alms to the poor and copying manuscripts. As the wealth and administrative duties of the monastery increased; the monks fell into luxury. The 'outrider' monks had to supervise the estates and 'cells' or subordinate monasteries and therefore could not remain cloistered. Chaucer's monk, Daun Piers, is identified with the new world of wealth, luxury and pleasure. He contemptuously dismisses the Augustinian ideal of asceticism, renunciation of the world and cloistered learning. Chaucer's attitude is once again ambiguous: he neither entirely approves nor condemns. Certainly the Monk's vitality and healthy appetite for life suggest an opening up of the medieval world, a major social and ideological change. His love of hunting is not untypical, although physical details, foppish clothes and the bells in his horse's bridle serve to individualise him. In a sense all his defiant and amoral energy is concentrated in his eyes indicating a psychological and social tendency.

The Friars had to take the vow of poverty, follow the teachings of Christ, perform good deeds and preach all around the country. In Chaucer's time, there were four major Orders of Friars in England: the Dominicans, or Black Friars, the Franciscans, or Grey Friars, the Carmelites, or White Friars and the Augustinians, or Austin Friars. They were Mendicant Orders surviving through begging. Soon, however, begging became a flourishing business and begging rights in specified districts were being vied for by the friars. Since they could collect ecclesiastical taxes and hear confessions, they made a lot of money. In other words, Chaucer's Friar, Hubert, is an example of the corruption of the mendicant orders much attacked by the followers of Wyclif. He is a limitour, that is, licensed to beg within a certain limit, but his income far exceeded what he turned in to the convent. His soft white neck and habit of lisping are signs of lechery. With the help of gifts and trinkets, latest songs and blessing of houses (by singing 'In principio,' the opening verses of St. John's Gospel), he seduced women and later found husbands and dowries for them. Playing on the piety of people, he shunned the poor and the sick, frequenting taverns and the houses of the rich where he put on an obsequious attitude. After all, as Chaucer puts it ironically, people should donate money to the poor friars while it was neither respectable nor profitable for the latter to deal with the poor. Forbidden to meddle in civil affairs, the friars nevertheless took an active part on love-days, that is, on days appointed for settlement of disputes out of court. On such occasions they were opulently dressed. Like the monk, the friar also expresses a new kind of power through his eyes.

The Merchant represents a very rich and powerful class in England. There were two powerful groups of merchants: the Merchant Adventurers who imported English cloth into foreign cities and the Merchants of the Staple, who lived at home and exported English wool abroad. Although his general appearance suggested the confidence of wealth, the Merchant was actually in debt but maintained his financial reputation and credit by forever boasting about profits and bargains. He is quite fashionable (witness his neatly clasped boots and forked beard), puts on expensive though somewhat conservative clothes and his beaver hat links him to the Flemish trade. Middleburgh was the foreign headquarters of the Merchant Adventurers and the English port, Orwell, was used by the Merchants of the Staple. Perhaps Chaucer's Merchant belonged to both groups. He was secretly involved in two major economic crimes: usury and illegal dealing in foreign exchange.

Chaucer's Clerk is a university student preparing for a career in the Church. In contrast to the many licentious clerks, his is the portrait of the scholar whose unworldliness kept him poor: both he and his horse were emaciated and his clothes were threadbare. He has applied himself to the study of logic, the backbone of medieval university education. He was thus happier to have at his bedside twenty volumes of Aristotle—whose influence on medieval academic life was pervasive—than the luxuries of life. Historians tell us that at that time twenty books (produced no doubt entirely by hand) would have cost the equivalent of two or three burghers' houses. It is not surprising then that all his expenditure was on books. Chaucer puns on the word 'philosopher' (which also meant 'alchemist') when he says that the Clerk's philosophy did not give him gold. Needing the charity of benefactors, he tried to repay them by prayers for their souls. He never displayed unseemly levity in behaviour and was always brief, to the point and morally educative in his speech.

The Sergeant of the Law was one of the King's legal servants, chosen from barristers of sixteen years' standing. The judges of the King's courts and the chief baron of the Exchequer also came from their ranks. Chaucer's portrait has a special interest because of his own legal education and because it comes rather close to Thomas Pynchbek in real life. The lawyer has been at the Parvys, that is, the porch of St. Paul's cathedral, where lawyers met their clients for consultation. He has been appointed a judge by patent, that is, by the King's letters patent making the appointment as well as by plain commission, that is, by a letter addressed to the appointee 'giving him jurisdiction over all kinds of cases. Widely experienced and well versed in all the statutes and cases and judgements since the Conquest, he won many gifts from his clients. Chaucer's praise of his knowledge and wisdom is somewhat ironic, for the lawyer put on an air of being busier than he actually was. Moreover, by buying a lot of land he aimed at becoming a landed gentleman; his legal expertise helped him to unrestricted possession of property,

The Franklin (or 'free man') usually meant a substantial landholder of free but not noble birth. His exact social position is a matter of dispute. For some, he ranked below the gentry and aspired to be included in its ranks; others put him at par with knights, squires and sergeants of the law. He has certainly held important offices. He has presided at sessions of the justices of the peace, and has been a member of Parliament. He has also been a 'shirreve,' or an officer next in rank to the Lord Lieutenant of the shire, and a 'contour,' or special pleader in court. Certainly his dress is indicative of the gentry class. He was a famous epicure taking great delight in food and wine. His bread, ales, wine and meat were of excellent quality, and he also kept fat partridges in coops and fish in private ponds. Changing his diet or menu according to the seasons of the year, the Franklin was above all renowned for his prodigious hospitality.

The five guildsmen are smartly dressed in clothes befitting their station. Since they belonged to different crafts, the fraternity of which they all wore the livery must have been a social and religious guild, a parish guild. The deportment of the men made them veritable burgesses and aldermen. For they had the requisite property and their

wives were equally ambitious. Their being in a group suggests an emerging class identity: they are the merchant princes of the future.

The Cook, Roger of Ware, is a culinary artist who is not exactly likeable. This is not merely because he has a sore on his shin but because the Host later accuses him of selling stale, unhygienic and contaminated food.

Tlze Shipman dresses efficiently like the Yeoman. He was also master of his craft but thoroughly unscrupulous. Although he was master of a trading ship, 'Maudeleyne,' he was given to piratical ways and unlawfully attacked other vessels at sea. In these sltinnishes, if he had the upper hand, he drowned his prisoners–apparently not an unusual practice at that time. He would tap the wine-casks in mid-sea when seasickness had sent the merchant and his men to bed; when the casks would be delivered half-empty, it was the merchant who would suffer. He roved freely from the south lo the north, from Spain to Sweden.

In the portrait of the Doctor of Physic, philosophy and science are fused, as they are in medieval intellectual life: medicine is grounded in astrology. As we have already seen briefly in the first unit, each of the twelve signs of the zodiac was believed to control a different part of the body: the theory of the four humours derives from this. In the portrait of the lawyer, Chaucer showed good knowledge of law; here he shows an equally good knowledge of medieval medicine. The importance of astrology to medical practice is also dealt with in Chaucer's *Astrolabe.* What was the method followed by the doctor? I-Ie watched his patient and chose the astrological hours which would be most favourable to the treatment; he had the skill for taking the auspicious time for making talismanic figures. This was natural magic, a legitimate science, as opposed to black magic or necromancy. The planet known as the lord of tlze ascending sign, and also the Moon, must be favourably situated, and the malefic (or harmful) planets must be in positions where their influence would be negligible. The doctor used the theory of humours (which was again touched upon in Unit 1) which comes down to the seventeenth century, to Ben Jonson, for instance. The four elementary qualities or contraries combined in pairs to produce the four elements: earth (cold and dry), air (hot and moist), water (cold and moist), fire (hot and dry). Similarly the fundamental contraries were held to combine in the four humours: blood (hot and moist), phlegm (cold and moist), yellow bile (hot and dry), black bile (cold and dry).

The list of eminent authorities in medicine cited by Chaucer begins with the legendary Aesculapius. Dioscorides, a Greek writer on medicine, flourished around 50 A.D. Rufus of Ephesus lived in the second century. Hippocrates, the founder of Greek medical science, was born about 460 B.C. Haly is probably the Persian physician I-Iali ibn el Abbas (died in 994). Galen was the famous authority of the second century. Avicenna and Averroes were famous Arabian philosophers and medieval authorities of the eleventh and twelfth centuries respectively. Serapion seems to refer to three medical writers of the Levant. Rhazes lived in Baghdad in the ninth and tenth centuries. Damascien is of less certain identification. Constantyn, a monk of Cartlzage, brought Arabian learning to Salerno in the eleventh century. The three authorities ending the list were all British, living in the latter part of the thirteenth centuiy and the fourteenth century.

That the doctor read the Bible rarely was not untypical, for doctors, especially if they followed the Averroist school of opinion, were commonly regarded as sceptical. Not much is said about his dress but we can make out that he was a stately man of fashion though somewhat overfond of money. Chaucer seems to be ironic and equivocal about the doctor's love of gold when he puns on gold which was used in medicines. The irony seems to become sharper as we are told that the doctor has thriftily saved the income he has made from the Black Death. Chaucer further exposes a corrupt nexus between doctors and druggists (apothecaries). The latter were charged with foisting incompetent practitioners upon patients, and the doctors accused of causing patients to be imposed upon by their particular druggists. But Chaucer describes the

doctor rather in the ,manner of the knight, as a 'verray, parfit praktisour'–we have to be constantly alert about his ironic undertone.

Chaucer's wife of Bath is easily one of the most arresting figures among the pilgrims. As is often the case, Chaucer mingles literary model with social reality: she is only partly an imitation of the description of La Vieille in the *Roman de* la *Rose*. Many of her characteristics could be traced back to the fact that she was born when Taurus was in the ascendant and Mars and Venus in conjunction in that sign of the zodiac. This accounts for her sexual appetite and refusal to be dominated by men in marriage. She may thus be a successor to an earlier type of the heroic woman, the Amazon located now in a middle-class milieu where martial qualities were expressed in the domestic world of gender relations. Among her personal traits, which have prompted critics to identify her, are her love of travel, her rather unfashionable dress and equipment, and the fact that she was deaf and her teeth were set wide apart. Chaucer also gives an accurate statement as to th ´ocality of Bath from which she came. 'Beside Bathe' doubtless refers to the suburban parish of 'St. Michael's juxta Bathon.'

Since the reputation of the cloth woven at Bath was not of the best, Chaucer's claim that she surpassed the Dutch weavers of Ypres and Ghent in weaving is ironic. Ypres and Ghent were important centres of the Flemish wool trade and Flemish weavers emigrated to England in Iarge numbers in the fourteenth century. It is generally believed that the development of the rural cloth industry was due to Edward III's invitation to these Flemish weavers. But actually the water-power for running fulling-mills was largely available in the Cotswolds, the Pennines, and the Lake District, and by the beginning of the fourteenth century the cloth industry started moving to these districts. The unorganised village cloth-workers accepted lower wages than their urban counterparts and their cloth was therefore cheaper.

Like the yeoman, the Wife of Bath is very efficiently and neatly dressed. On Sundays at home she may wear a ten-pound 'coverchief' (a head covering somewhat like a turban, worn only by the provincial in late fourteenth-century England). On the pilgrimage she has put on a very broad hat and her hair is neatly covered by a wimple worn underneath the hat. She wore a protective skirt about her ample hips to guard against splashes of mud, her hose were tightly and neatly drawn, her shoes were of expensive soft leather and her spurs sharp.

The Wife took so much pride in her skill in weaving that she demanded first place in making the offering on Sundays, for the order in which parishioners went up to the altar to offer alms and oblations was determined by importance in the community. Such pride was only too common and the Parson specifically preaches against it, The pride is redeemed by boldness, frankness and vitality in the Wife's portrait. Mixing easily in male company, she was skilled in the arts of love, for she knew all the cures of love (which are listed in Ovid's *Remedia Amoris*). She was a widely-experienced pilgrim who has been thrice to Jerusalem, to Rome and to other shrines on the continent. These long pilgrimages were undertaken primarily for pleasure and as such neither unusual nor inconsistent with her character. They guaranteed safety and comfort to travellers much in the way modem conducted tours do. But they were condemned for the temptations they offered to vice. The wife has had five husbands at the church door. The celebration of marriage at church door was common from the tenth to the sixteenth century. The service was in two parts, the marriage proper and the nuptial mass, celebrated afterward at the altar.

The Parson's portrait is an idealised one of a good parish priest. It should not be taken as alluding to Wyclif or any of his followers, although it praises the virtues and condemns the abuses that were highlighted by Wycliffites. *The Man of Law's* Epilogue, however, makes a contemptuous reference to the Parson as a Lollard. The poet himself was quite close to some of the important patrons of the movement. But not only are there differences but Chaucer characteristically captures the moving

spirit behind reform in humble individual existence rather than in political unrest. The Parson's poverty and learning recalls the Clerk and like him his wealth was entirely spiritual. Holy in thought and work, he was devoted to his pastoral responsibilities. Although he could impose the penalty of excommunication for the non-payment of tithes (ten per cent tax levied by the Church on every parishioner), he would not condemn the poor for being genuinely unable to pay the tax. But since it was his duty to collect the tithes, he would make up the deficit out of his own meagre resources including the voluntary contributions which belonged to him by right. Benign, patient and diligent, he took no idle pleasures. Even if he was ill, he would visit on foot, in all kinds of weather, his parish members irrespective of rank or wealth or the distance of their dwellings. Above all, unlike a large number of the religious functionaries, he practised what he preached and set an example himself as a priest in charge of his flock before asking others to follow it. For he knew very well that he controlled the moral lives of his parish-members and if he was corrupt or unclean, what would happen to them?

He was totally free from the impulse to acquisitiveness and power which provided the psychological basis for capitalism and which was magnified by the new money-economy. Other priests often deserted their parishioners to run off to London for better-paid and more comfortable offices. There he could have sung mass daily for the repose of a soul ('chantry') or he could have been retained or engaged for service by a gild to act as their chaplain. But he remains in the village. He was neither severe nor arrogant to sinners but always merciful, provided of course they were repentant. For he would not spare the unrepentant, again irrespective of rank or wealth. His uncomplicated honesty contrasts subtly with the over-fastidious conscience of the Prioress, and in his humility he demanded no reverence from his flock.

The Plowman is another idealised figure, a fitting brother to the Parson. He was a small tenant farmer or a holder of Lammas lands (village lands let out from year to year). Neither hostile to nor fearful of the upper classes, he is a true representative of rustic life. He exemplifies the dignity of labour: he carried loads of dung, knew how to thresh, to dig and to make ditches. The contemporary books on husbandry emphasised the same duties and Langland's Piers Plowman performed them as well. Dressed in the unfashionable tabard (a loose tunic without sleeves) which corresponds to a kind of labourer's smock, he led his life in perfect charity, unruffled by pleasure and pain, loving God and his neighbours. No wonder he was always willing to labour for any poor peasant in difficulty without any payment.

The Miller's clothes are obviously not important. What is striking in the portrait is his massive physical strength. His physical characteristics were regularly associated by physiognomists with the kind of nature he is shown to have. His short-shouldered, stocky figure, his fat face with red bushy beard, his flat nose with a wart on top–these variously denoted a shameless, talkative, quarrelsome, and lecherous disposition. Chaucer may not have actually consulted the learned sources for these ideas as they had become quite familiar. Able to heave a door out of its hinges or break it with his head, the Miller's wart with its tuft of hair, his black and flaring nostrils and huge mouth all indicate a kind of coarseness that reminds us of fabliaux. No wonder he was a loud, scurrilous talker and ribald jester.

A miller in the Middle Ages possessed an important monopoly, for all the peasants under the lord of a manor were obliged to take their grain to the miller of the estate on which they lived. The miller's rate for grinding was fixed by law, but since his was the only mill he could easily, like Chaucer's Robin, overcharge and steal some of the grain as well.

The Manciple was a servant who purchased provisions for a college or an inn of court. The temple referred to in Chaucer's text would have been the Inner or Middle Temple near the Strand, both of which were occupied in Chaucer's time by societies

of lawyers. Like the Miller, he was also a cheat and his deceptive powers are ironically described as wisdom. Chaucer the poet finds it astonishing that, whether he bought the provisions by payment or on credit (the 'tally' was a stick on which the amount of a debt was recorded by notches), the learned lawyers were no match for his craftiness. These extremely capable lawyers were easily fooled by the ignorant manciple.

The Reeve is a perfect companion and competitor of the Miller, especially in matters of devious dealing. What was the exact office of the Reeve? The chief manager of an estate, under the lord of the manor, was the steward (or seneschal). Below him was the bailiff, and below the bailiff was the provost, who was elected by the peasants and had immediate care of the stock and grain. Normally the Reeve was subordinate to the bailiff, but these titles were not rigidly fixed and Oswald, Chaucer's Reeve, seems superior to a bailiff and even performed some of the steward's duties. Chaucer represents him as dealing directly with his lord, ruling under bailiffs and hinds, outwitting auditors, and accumulating property.

The medieval Reeve was a natural rival to the Miller on an estate, since they competed with each other in cheating the peasants. This is why they quarrel and the crafty Reeve rides the farthest away from the Miller. As an overseer or manager, the Reeve's duty was to inspect everything on the estate regularly, to buy needed supplies and to impose fines on the workers if necessary. He knew all about the storage of grain, when to sow and when to reap, about the condition of his lord's livestock and poultry, and he was an expert in keeping accounts. As indicated in passing in Unit 1, the lord of the manor was probably an absentee landlord, making the Reeve all-powerful. This is why his dishonesty and cunning make him such a terror to the peasants. He was so clever that without showing any arrears or losses he was able to become rich at his lord's expense: a house and a robe at the cost of the lord were nothing unusual. In fact, he could please his lord by lending him some of the lord's own possessions and obtain thanks and rewards in the bargain. His closely-cropped head, coat and rusty blade indicate his inferior social position. A slender choleric man with long, thin, calfless legs, his physiognomy denotes sharpness of wit, irascibility and wantonness. The reference to his handsome Norfolk dwelling suggests a real-life figure. What the Miller obtained by loud, outrageous stealing, the Reeve acquired by meanness, severity and manipulation of accounts.

If the Miller and Reeve are fellow-rascals, they do not have on us the unpleasant and repulsive effect of the partners in viciousness, the Summoner and the Pardoner. The Summoner (or Apparitor) was an officer who cited delinquents to appear before the ecclesiastical court. Such officials, and even the Archdeacon were corrupt. Some scholars believe that Chaucer's portrait of the Summoner is more unfavourable than historical records seem to warrant,. But Chaucer was following literary tradition

The very first physiognomical detail is unsavoury and Chaucer's comparison of his diseased, fiery face full of eruptions with a cherub's is caustic in its irony. The Summoner actually suffers from a kind of leprosy, a kind of skin disease brought on by uncontrolled lechery. His scabby brows and scanty beard made children afraid of him. All known medicines have been used–mercury, lead compounds, sulphur, borax and oil of tartar–but no ointment has cleansed his white blotches and pimples and knobs on his face. His incurable, revolting disease is a picture of his soul. Chaucer's medical knowledge further told him that the Summoner should not eat garlic, onions and leeks or drink strong red wine. In his drunken state he has set a huge garland on his head and carries a flat loaf of bread as a shield. Some scholars think that he was meant to represent a debauched Bacchus. Given his profession, it is not surprising that he had picked up like a parrot a few terms in Latin which he would boastfully repeat when he got drunk. But if anyone should question him further, then his ignorance would be exposed, although he tried to wriggle out by parroting a legal formula. If the Summoner found anywhere some rascal in sin, he would encourage him not to fear the excommunicating curse of the archdeacon since money would set everything right. Chaucer is perhaps ironic in stating that the curse was worth exactly

as much as his 'assoillyng' of the soul. Assoillyng means either canonical absolution, that is, the removal of the sentence of excommunication, or the ordinary sacramental absolution. But Chaucer is not really being a heretic or a Wycliffite; he simply condemns the abuses of an avaricious clergy. The 'Significavit' refers to the opening words of a writ remanding an excommunicated person to prison.

The Summoner's portrait becomes sinister when we discover his manipulation of the private lives of people around him. He would happily excuse a man for keeping a concubine (a practice common ainong the celibate priests) for a year, if he was paid only a quart of wine. He then indulged in the same sin himself. Being sexually immoral, he probably came to know the unsavoury secrets of other people's lives. Perhaps this is why he was able to hold the young men and women at his mercy, under his control. He knew their secrets and acted as their counsel; perhaps he exploited them as informers against their elders.

Pardoners (or quaestors) were sellers of papal indulgences. Many were forbidden to preach, and some were even laymen. Many travelling pardoners were wholly unauthorised, and the tricks and abuses they practised were denounced by the Church. Perhaps the character of Fals-Semblant in *Roman de la Rose* gave Chaucer the idea of the Pardoners' confession before his *Tale*. Friend and fitting companion to the Summoner, the Pardoner similarly abused his calling. The literature of complaint is much more severe in its censure of Pardoners because dealing largely with the helpless and ignorant poor, they did greater harm to the soul than the Summoners. The system of papal indulgences grew from the fact that medieval men, after proper confession and repentance, gave money to the Church for 'good deeds' to be performed in their name—that was believed to guarantee some reduction of time in purgatory and hasten the progress to paradise. The Pardoners sold indulgences but often they did not insist on confession and repentance; moreover they tended to pocket the money given to the Church in exchange for pardons. In order to sell pardons more effectively, the fourteenth-century Pardoner sold saints, relics and cultivated the art of preaching. These relics, as we see in the case of Chaucer's Pardoner, were no relics at all, but bones and rags.

The song of the Pardoner and the Summoner's vocal support seem to insinuate an unhealthy relationship between the two. That he was of 'Rouncivalle' is significant, since the Order of St. Mary Roncevall in London was involved in public scandals concerning the sale of pardons. Chaucer comically describes the Pardoner freshly arrived from Rome with his collection of so-called relics. Among these are a pillow case (claimed to be part of Our Lady's Veil), piece of cloth (exhibited as part of the sail of St. Peter's boat), a 'latoun cross and some pigs' bones. With these spurious relics he cheated the Parson and his poor parishioners, receiving more money in one day by his preaching than the priest did in two months. His eloquent preaching in the Church pulpit made him a greater danger since the congregation was moved by the discourse to make generous offerings to the preacher. Like the Summoner, he was not distinguished by his dress. He did not wear his hood because he thought it was the latest fashion to wear only a cap on which he had sewed a 'vernycle,' a miniature copy of the handkerchief St. Veronica was thought to have given to Christ on the way to his crucifixion. His physical characteristics are repellent: he had a goat's voice, he was beardless and his yellow hair fell in thin strips over his shoulders. The details cumulatively lead to the assertion that he was a gelding or a mare, an emasculated eunuch. He leaves behind a sense of unhealthiness.

5.4 THE CONCLUDING SECTION OF THE PROLOGUE

After this portrait gallery, Chaucer returns to the Tabard Inn where the pilgrims had assembled. But before he proceeds further, he attempts an aesthetic defence of the coarseness of his 'bourgeois' style: he has been guided by realistic truth and moral

honesty. The defence is similar to those offered by Jean de Meun and by Boccaccio. He finds divine support in the honest speech of the Bible and Plato's *Timaeus* 29B provides the source for the close relationship between form and content.

We are moved on to a hearty supper presided over by the Host, Harry Bailly. His hospitality and manly gaiety dispel the effect of the Pardoner's portrait. In his characteristic playful spirit he suggests after supper that the pilgrims, in order to lighten the boredom of the long journey on horseback, tell two stories Canterbury-ward and two homeward. The Host will be the master of ceremonies and decides to accompany the pilgrims. As the judge, he promises the best story teller a supper on return, paid for by the pilgrims. Everyone agrees happily to the Host's proposal and there is already a sense of community among the heterogeneous company. A distance out of London, by a brook at the second milestone on the Kent road, the Host invites the pilgrims to draw lots. Whether by chance or by plan, the lot falls on the Knight who begins the game with pleasure.

Apart fiom the brief portrait of the Host, there is also the persona of Chaucer the narrator. Although his two tales give him a clearer shape later, already the somewhat detached, ironic, self-deprecating bourgeois figure is discernible. He is a little in awe perhaps of the Knight and the Prioress, familiar and unsentimental about the rising bourgeois figures, deeply respectful about the humble, devout and unworldly characters and bitingly satiric about the corrupt and the vicious. As he constructs this persona of the narrator, he asks forgiveness for any disruption of degree or hierarchy in his succession of portraits because he does not have a strong intellect.

5.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit detailed annotation of the Prologue has been provided so that apart fiom Chaucer's skill in characterisation you may also grasp the larger social and intellectual issues and of course the comic strategies involved.

5.6 EXERCISES

1. Why does the pilgrimage (and the poem) begin in spring? (See 3.2)
2. On the basis of the annotations, attempt an analysis of the portraits of the Prioress, the Monk, the Friar, the Wife of Bath, the Parson, the Plowman, the Clerk, the Miller, the Reeve, the Pardoner, the Summoner. (This is only for practice.)
3. Bring out the different shades in Chaucer's irony. (Broad and subtle irony.)
4. What individualises the portraits?
5. What makes them typical?

   (The individual elements may include physiognomy, dress, eccentricity but dress and physiognomy are also representative of class or social group. Actually there is no opposition. Perhaps individuality ultimately comes from Chaucer's vividness of imagination.)

UNIT 6 'A STUDY OF THE NONNE PREESTES TALE'. I

Structure

6.0 Objectives
6.1 Introduction to the Unit
6.2 Introduction to the Nonne Preestes Tale (NPT)
6.3 Note on the Narrative Art
6.4 Stories and Story-Tellers in the Tale
6.5 The Priest, the Poet, and other Characters in the Tale
6.6 The ironic Structure-Sympathy and Detachment
6.7 The Complex Formal Design: Sermon, Fable, Mock-heroic, Comic, Ironic
6.8 Summing Up

6.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to help you study the text in a critical manner. After reading this unit you will be able to

(a) Comprehend and translate the language of the text,
(b) Appreciate its poetic qualities,
(c) Evaluate the Nonne Preestes Tale,
(d) Know Chaucer as a great narrative poet.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we have discussed various aspects of NPT. It is a tale among the tales of the Canterbury Tale. We have shown how it is related to the context. The other Tales in CT form that context. We have briefly mentioned the framework of the whole poem. It consists of (a) The General Prologue (b) The talk on the Road and (c) the tales.

Two Italian parallels, possible sources, have been mentioned.

The distinctive quality of the narrative act of Chaucer has been brought out. It has been shown the story is characteristic of the story teller. The irony and drama of the story have been brought out.

The complex formal design of the tale, we suggest, should be analysed into the following main elements:

(a) Sermon
(b) Reflection
(c) mock-heroic
(d) comedy
(e) the dream, the dream stories and the debate on dreams
(f) the themes
(g) the tale

Each one of these elements has been briefly discussed.

6.2 INTRODUCTION TO THE NONNE PREESTES TALE

In other units on Chaucer you have learnt about his age, his poetic output. The Canterbury Tales and the General Prologue. You know that Chaucer is regarded as a great story-teller in English verse. You are now going to study one of the Canterbury Tales which is one of the best short stories in English verse.

In the general Prologue (lines 785-800), the Poet makes the Host devise the narrative plan. This is a dramatic manner of stating the plan, and the fact that the plan turns out to be too ambitious sheds ironic light on it. The Host's plan is not the poet's. According to the plan, The Canterbury Tales should have had one hundred and twenty four stories, but it has only twenty complete and four incomplete ones. Chaucer has, thus, left the poem incomplete. Moreover, the sequence and grouping of the tales is determined variously in the Ellesmere and other manuscripts. The poet had left that undecided. But the poem is an aesthetic whole.

The three main structural units of The Canterbury Tales (CT) are : 1. The general Prologue, 2. The Tales, and 3. The Talk on the Road, linking them and providing a lively transition from one tale to another.

You studied the general Prologue in detail. It is important to appreciate the value of the other two structural units-the tales and the Talk on the Road.

NPT is not an isolated tale. It belongs to a series of tales. It is, therefore, useful to have an idea of the general perspective of the Canterbury Tales. An idea of the other tales in outline will make you see the place of NPT in the whole scheme better.

The knight, appropriately granted the privilege of telling the first tale, tells a romantic story in the, heroic manner. His tale of the contest of Palamon and Arcite for the love of Emily is full of philosophical reflections. An example is the following lines from a speech of Theseus.

> The Firste Mover of the cause above
> Whan he first made the faire chain of love,
> Greet was theffect, and high was his entente,
> Well wist he why and what thereof he mente
> For with that faire chain of love he bond
> The fire, the air, the water, and the land
> In certain boundes that they may not flee.,

After the knight's Tale, we have the Miller's tale of an Oxford carpenter persuaded by his wife and a clerk to sit all night in a tub, to be ready to row away when Noah's Flood came again.

The contrast between the romantic and the realistic, the serious and the comic, is illustrated in the different styles of these first two tales.

The thirdtale, The Reeve's, answers the miller's ridicule of the old carpenter by a story ridiculing a miller. Then follows the Cook's unfinished tale. Next we have the prose tale of Melibee told by the poet himself. This is followed by the man of Law's Tale. Then we have the shipman's Tale in whicha merchant is deceived by his wife and a monk. The next tale, the prioress's, is of the little chorister murdered by Jews for his devotion to the Blessed virgin and of the miracle the virgin wrought for him. This is followed by Chaucer's Tale of Sir Thopas, written as a parody of the old romances of chivalry. Then we have the Monk's Tale of the Fall of Princes:

Our text, NPT, comes, after this tale. The Doctor of Physic's Tale of Appinius and Virginia follows it. The next tale, the Pardoner's is of the three rioters who went in quest of Death, and found him in their greed for gold. Next, the wife of Bath's tale of the condemned knight saved by an old woman who taught him the answer to a riddle. She had made him promise beforehand to marry her, and, on his marrying her, became a beautiful girl. Then we have the Friar's tale of a summoner who was seized by the Devil. The summener retaliates in his tale which follows. Then the clerk's Tale, which is an old rendering by the poet of Petrarch's Latin story of the Patience of grisilde. The Merchant's Tale, which follows, answers the clerk with a story of how a young wife deceived her old husband.

The squire's Tale of Cambuscan and his fair daughter Canacee, and the magic sword, mirror and ring is followed by the Franklin's Tale of the Truth of Dorigen and the generosity of a squire and astrologer. Then comes the Second Nun's Tale of St. Cecilia Next, we have the Canon's Yeomans's Tale of how another canon cheated a priest by pretending to transmute silver into gold. This is followed by the Manciple's Tale of how Apollo punished a crow for revealing a woman's untruth. The last tale by the Parson is a prose sermon on the Seven Deadly sins and true Penitence.

Neither an epic nor a single narrative, CT is a unique medley. The tales exemplify two central themes—the familiar human instincts of sex and acquisitiveness, two of the seven deadly sins—i.e. lechery and avarice. G.L. Kittredge (1911-12) regarded CT as a kind of human comedy in which the Pilgrims are the dramatic personae, "and their stories are only speeches that are somewhat longer than common entertaining in and for themselves (to be sure), but primarily significant, in each case because they illustrate the speaker's character and opinions, or show the relations of the travelers to one another in the progressive action of the Pilgrimage". He spoke of "the marriage Act of the Human comedy" in which the wife of Bath is "at or near the centre of the stage". The famous line spoken by the wife is not unrelated to the cock's infatuation with the hen in NPT. She exclaimed in the Prologue to her Tale:

> Allas! Allas! That ever love was sinne
> And the cock adapted a line from the Latin Bible
> Woman is mannes joy and all his bliss.

The Talk on the Road—the third structural component - links the tales together, The Host, who is personally conducting the tour, dominates the talk. He is tactful, alert and humorous. When he has an exchange of angry abuse with the Pardoner, the knight intervenes as a peacemaker. Quarrels and disputes in the Talk on the Road, however, centre round "the age old war of the sexes". Strikingly, there are many confessions in the Talk - the wife of Bath's, the Pardoner's, the Canon's Yeoman's and the Merchant's. These confessions give the Talks an air of honesty and sincerity, a sure sign of spiritual progress. The Poet's Relraction concludes the poem, revealing the spiritual and symbolic aspects of the realistic pilgrimage:

> Of thilke parfit glorious pilgrymage.
> That highte Jerusalem celestial !

It may be suggested that the pilgrimage is a masquerade unmasking the real self of the pilgrims including the poet.

The Decameron by Boccacio in the Italian language has been held by Chaucer scholars to be a close parallel to the Canterbury Tales in many respects. "The general topics of its tales are very similar to those of Chaucer: four of Boccaccio's tales are analogues to four of Chaucer's; and in Boccaccio's apology for the impropriety of some of his stories he makes the same defence as that offered by Chaucer for the same fault (see GP lines 725-46). But the unity, balance, neatness and symmetry of Boccaccio's plan contrasts with the diversity and lack of plan in CT. In the Decameron, on hundred stories are told in ten day, ten on each day, one by each

member of a group of ten". Another Italian collection of stories, the Novelle by Giovanni Serccambi of Lucca, an imitation of the Decameron, contains 155 stories. All the tales in this are told by the author himself. The framing story in the Novelle is a detailed nanative of routine events in contrast with the Human comedy of Chaucer's CT. Both Boccaccio and Sercambi were contemporaries of Chaucer, but there is no evidence of Chaucer having met them in course of his visits to Italy.

Check Your Progress I

1. Describe the narrative plan of CT. Who devised it? Refer to the lines in the GP. Critically examine the author's management of the plan.

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2. Is CT an unfinished poem? Mention two other famous unfinished poems in English.

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3. What are the three structural units of CT? How are they related?

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4. Do the tales have any unifying theme or themes?

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5. Mention two striking features of the Talk on the Road.

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6. Attempt a comparison of the following lines:

(a) Allas! Allas! that ever love was sinne.
(b) Woman is mannes joy and all his bliss.

Also refer them to their contexts.

6.3 A NOTE ON THE NARRATIVE ART

Recent theories of narrative include both history and fiction in narrative as closely related forms of "order-giving" and "order-finding", Man has been described as a

fiction-making and symbol-using animal. Language is one of the most useful symbol systems used by man. Fiction is both fabricated and feigned. This make-believe is a fundamental human activity. Role-playing, game-playing, day-dreaming and literature are all included within it. With fiction we investigate, pel-haps invent, the meaning of human life. A story is a way of doing things with words. Words - language - are more than its medium. Reordering experience or existence by narrative affirms and reinforces, or creates, the most basic assumptions of a culture about human existence, about time, destiny, selfhood, heaven, hell etc. The ideology of a culture is asserted through a story. The story of Rama in Indian culture, for example. Such stories are endlessly repeated.

Fictional details have been made to reveal such matters as the difficulty of acquiring self-knowledge, or the near-pervasiveness of self-deception, or the nature of the struggle against egotistic degradation of love. And in proportion as language is, or is not, trúe to experience, it is factual or fictional Narration description, dialogue, exposition are the major forms or functions of language. Verse narratives appeared before prose fiction in most literatures.

The narrative art of the tale may be analysed in terms of the Labovian diamond. The first hundred and twenty lines give the orientation, the next three hundred lines present the dream and its interpretations by the cock and the hen. The dream of the event and the event are related like idea and reality. The crisis is resolved through a play of int. And the morals drawn are what is termed the jaunty coda.

Narratives, like languages, have their grammars. A story has a setting and an episode system or plot. The events are linked syntagmatically in a plot. Settings and episodes have paradigms. **A** setting may be state(s) or action(s). An event may be a natural occurrence, àn action, or an internal event. Stories are of various types - e:g. (a) danger of death stories. NPT belongs to this Type (b) detective stories, (c) crime stories (d) ghost stories (e) science fiction etc. These types are paradigms of narrative.

6.4 STORIES AND STORY TELLERS

NPT collocates a number of stories. Some of them are dream stories - or stories about dreams - told by the cock and the priest. The widow, the protagonist of the other story (Which is the setting for the comic fable of the cock, the hen and the fox), is contrasted at once with the cock and the nun by implication. The dream stories are embedded in the fable, the fable in the widow's story, the widow's story in the Priest's, the Priest's in CT, and CT is Chaucer's story to the primary reader(s). Both oral and written forms of communication are relevant. You and I are readers reading the tell anew, and I shall help you interpret it critically. It has become a text which forms part of the Canon of British poetry, and its readers form an elite community which consists of many groups. Ours is the group of the Indian scholars of English literature.

The cock, the priest and the poet are the three story-tellers of this tale. The first two are created by the third. Every reader re-creates them all in his mind. Fiction and history are mixed up in the process. The literary genre of narrative poetry in medieval Europe and Chaucer's England should be appreciated in the light of an observation of Northrop Frye : "People don't think up a set of assumptions or beliefs; they think up a set of stories, and derive the assumptions or beliefs from the stories"

Check Your Progress 2

1. Amplify "order-giving" and "order-finding".
2. How are fiction and symbol related?

3. Is the linguistic symbol "fabricated and feigned"?
4. What is "convention" in language and l terature?
5. Describe the functions of fiction.
6. How do stories reorder experience or existence? Give examples.
7. How are ideology and mythology related?
8. Does fiction help us know ourselves and others better ?
9. Are stories like dreams? Discuss (ten sentences)
10. What is a fable?
11. Analyse the tale in terms of the Labovian diamond.

6.5 THE PRIEST, THE POET AND OTHER CHARACTERS IN THE TALE

Like Shakespeare, Chaucer did not invent his stories. The closest possible paralled, or source, of the story of NPT is found in. The Roman de Renart, a 13th century French collection of satirical fables. The digression on dreams and the reflective passages are Chaucer's original contribution. The comic, mock-heroic and historical aspects of the form of the tale are the gifts of Chaucer's genius.

What makes the tale dramatic is that the author does not say a single word directly. In the Prologue to the Tale, the bight, the Host and the priest talk, and in the main body the priest, the story-teller, and the characters of the tale talk. The poet is almost unheard except in phrases like 'quod the knight' and "quod oure Hooste" in the Prologue to the Tale, and in the last couplet of the Epilogue.

The narrator-author identification is, however, apparent in the reflective passages, particularly, (a) the passage on "necessitee condicioneel" (lines 471-84) and (b) the passage on Geoffrey de Vinsauf, author of Poetria Nora, a 12th century treatise of rhetoric (lines 581-88). The former is serious, while the latter is ironic and serio-comic. The passage on man-woman-relationship (lines 491-500), it has been suggested, has the tacit support of the author.

The three human characters, the Prioress, the Priest and the widow of the tale - are all creatures of imagination, and belong to the background of the tale on which the foreground is occupied by the animal characters. The priest is the narrator detached from the author. Unlike the wife of bath or the Pardoner, he is not portrayed in the General Prologue. There, after the portrait of the nun, we have the following couplet:

> Another Nonne with here hadde she,
> That was her chapeleyne, and prestes thre

Skeat commented: "Chaucer wrote this couplet in forgetfulness of his general scheme and omitted to reconcile them". It is in this couplet that we have the first mention of the priest as one of three. He is later identified as Sir John by the Host in the Prologue to NPT. The Host requests him to tell a merry tale, and he complies (line 42-54).

His physical features are described by the Host in the Epilogue (lines 689-93). The Host Jocularly says that if the priest were secular, he would be a cock used for purposes of breeding. His strong muscles, thick neck and large chest are described.

The poet provides some glimpse into his character. His jade is "foul and lene" (line 467). This suggests his attitude to riches or the rich life of ostentation. He is ironic enough to hint a subtle similarity between his mistress and the cock on the one hand and an implicit contrast of the prioress with the widow on the other. Critics have suggested that the poet presents him as a sly misogynist,

But, above all, he is an excellent story teller. Appropriately a sermon, the story is mock-heroic and reflects the character of the story-teller who faintly reflects the author.

The priest is ironically the confessor and spiritual adviser to the Prioress, and at the same time dependent on her for livelihood. His cautious protest in "I kan noon harm of no woman divyne (line 500) and his ironic insistence (in lines 441-48) on the truth of his story (lines 445-46) and comparing it with the women's favourite book of Launcelot de Lake do all hint a critical attitude to chivalry and romance.

The widow is the only human character in the story who is described at any length, (see lines 55-80). Her simple life is illustrated in her slender meals (lines 67-80). The implicit contrast with the Prioress is seen better if affectation and courtly manners of the Prioress described in the general Prologue are compared with the simple life of the widow. She is idealised and allegorical, but realistically particularised. Consider lines 63-66. The number of the daughters, the sows, the kine and the sheep "that highte Malle" is sufficient concereteness of detail.

Check Your Progress 3

1. Chaucer is at once a pilgrim, an "innocent" reporter and narrator, and the author of CT. How do you relate these aspects of his art?
2. In what sense the human characters of the tile are in the background?
3. Attempt a character - sketch of the priest.

6.6 THE IRONIC STRUCTURE—SYMPATHY AND DETACHMENT

The English word "irony" is derived from the Greek word "eironeia" which means "simulated ignorance". Simulation is acting, pretending or feigning. Irony is thus dramatic. Secondly, the ironic use of language has an inner meaning for the privileged and an outer for the rest. Dramatic irony is more then merely verbal. It has to do with situation or event. The classical greek myth of Oedipus is an example of tragic irony. Moreover, according to classical Indian poetics, the best kind of poetry does not state but suggests meaning.

The ironic structure of NPT is prominent in the play of wit at the core of the story. The fox and the cock outwit each other by turns. Consider lines 639-48 which show how the cock saves himself from a tragic end by befooling the fox. The fox had flattered, hoodwinked and trapped him. His clever trick would not have worked if the fox had seen his hidden meaning.

Discretion and politeness, characteristic of the priest, require that his criticism of the prioress, his immediate target, and of women in general, should be indirect or ironical. He could not afford to offend his employer. Hence the boldness of the ironist is the most remarkable aspect of his character as a person and an artist. The subtle self-expression of the narrator at once identifies him with and detaches him from his creator, the author. In this context, the priest's ironical reflection (lines 491-500) is more revelatory than Chauntecleer's ironical mistranslation of a Latin text (lines 391-400).

When we consider the narrative structure of the tale, we notice that digressious are. more interesting than the central story. The dream, the discussion about it, and the character of Pertelote, are all introduced for the purpose, among other things, of dramatising and reflecting on "the age-old war of the sexes". There is no doubt that

without this digression the story would have lacked its life and colour, but the superimposition is undeniable. And that impregnates the form of the story with the spirit of the poet.

Pertelote hates chauntecleer for losing heart in fear (see lines 142-46). She asserts on behalf of all women the medieval ideal of chivalry and romance (lines 147-51). The brave knight and the sweet courtier is the hero. But the cock is only sweet and witty, not brave.

In the debate on dreams, however, she stands for reason and he for vision. Do they allegories the opposition of cold calculation and rash impulse?

The widow-not the wife's the anti-feminist norm. The Christian moral outlook is pitted against the romantic. The tension of the two reflects the force of social change breaking through the poet's consevative temper.

The priest confabulates in the following:

> My tale is of a cock, as ye may heere,
> That took his connseil of his wyf with sorwe,
> To walken in the yerd upon that morewe
> That he hadde met that dreem that I you tolde.

You will notice that the reflective passage on freewill and predetermination is felt by the self-conscious priest to be incongruous. Secondly, the cock followed his own free will, not the advice of his wife. The priest is confused or at least confusing the audience. A close consideration of the text, particularly lines 486-89, and the reflective passages preceding and following these lines, makes it clear. The author's comic irony does not spare the narrator.

Check Your Progress 4

1. What is irony? How is it different from antithesis and ambiguity?
2. How are irony and wit related? Is irony necessarily devoid of sympathy? Discuss, with examples.
3. Find two examples of verbal irony in the text.
4. Discuss the ironic structure of NPT.
5. Show that the priest's irony is directed against women.
6. How does Chaucer present the priest ironically?

6.7 THE COMPLEX FORMAL DESIGN: SERMON, FABLE, MOCK-HEROIC, COMIC, IRONIC

The aspects of the complex form, as given above, are:

(a) Sermon
(b) reflection
(c) mock-heroic
(d) comedy
(e) the dream, the dream – stories and the debate on dreams
(f) The Themes
(g) The Tale

Sermon – As the story-taller is a priest, the story is aptly a sermon. The moral of the sermon is given at the end of the story. It is dramatic rather than didactic *or*

hortatory. There are three morals drawn respectively by the cock, the fox and the priest. The cock's experience, which had verged on the tragic, had, by a lucky flash of intelligence, turned comic. And his moral is : One should keep one's eye open. The fox loses the game, and is served right. He sounds a wiseacre in his moral. The priest's moral is given in three and a half couplets. The first cpuplet points to the story. Notice "such". The priest gives his evaluation of the cock's character in three epithets. In the second couplet, he turns to his audience. If they hold the tale a folly, they are requested to take the moral gist and ignore the narrative,

In the next three lines, he appeals to the authority of St. Paul. His view of text is till valid. A text is a code to he decoded by the reader-audience. The priest ends his Tale with a prayer.

The Tale is an exemplum or example illustrating the moral. The "defense" of poetry has traditionally been that it is both entertainment and edification. The funny tale has a moral or many moral lessons as a sort of tailpiece. Compare the relation between the tale and the moral of NPT with that of Rime of the Ancient Mariner.

Reflection – The description of the human setting of the fable is reflective or normative. The widow and her way of life is approved. The cock's reflection on murder and god's justice (lines 284-91) is conventional, but his reflection on "woman" (lines 397-400) is much more characteristic and highly ironical.

The priest's reflections on (a) "Truth" in a story (See lines 439-448), (b) free will and predetermination (468-84),(C) woman's counsel (491-500), (d) flattery (559-64), (e) destiny (line 572) and (f) rhetoric and Geoffrey Vinsauf (581-88) are all functional. They are meant to help the audience interpret and evaluate the action.

Mock Heroic – NPT is primarily a fable, and a fable is intrinsically mock-heroic, for it assumes an identity or parallelism between animals and humans. Moreover, the tale reflects the poet's serio-comic outlook in the use of hyerbole and disproportion.

Chauntecleer, the mockery of a hero, is presented in lines 84-98 which describe his voice and appearance. The comic exaggeration and the conventional humanisation are remarkale.

The priest explains, tongue-in-cheek:

> For thilke tyme, as I have understonde
> Beestes and briddes koude speke and synge.

Pertelote's ideal cock is woman's ideal Man. The cock's dream stories have not only human characters but learned sources in Cicero and Macrobius. His learning and learned allusious to Christian and classical lore are of course mock-heroic.

The royal cock "looketh as it were a grym leoun" (line 413). The fall of this prince of a cock is averted by a happy stroke of luck. The cry that the "woful hennes" made is mock-heroically described as greater than the cries described in heroic epics like Homer's Iliad and Virgil's Aencied. Pertelote shrieked louder than "dide Hasdrubales wyf". The hens cried like the senators' wives when Nero burnt Rome. The epic analogies are unmistakably mock-heroic. The priest's reflections on Adam and Eve, on free will and predetermination, are all mock-heroic, for the occasion is slight or comic. The Tale is unique in the tradition of mock-heroic poetry in English, Dryden and Pope wrote, respectively, Mac flacknoe and the Rape of the Lock. But unlike these poems, NPT deals with low animals. Nor is it allegorical satire like Animal Farm. It mocks heroism, as Don Quixote mocks heroism, romance and chivalry. Chaucer's realism is a forerunner of Cervantes's and Shakespeare's comedy.

Comedy : Comedy is the essential aspect of the form of the Tale. It is not mere sugarcoating for the sermon. The pure fun and humour of the fable is the superficial comic element, Secondly, the union of the elite appeal of the rhetorical and philosophical amplifications with the folk tale brings out the comic ineongruity between high and low poetic styles. Chaucer manipulates the styles to create serio-comic effects. Moreover, parody, burlesque and farce are used. A comparison of the first ten coupletes of the tale (lines 61-80) with the following sixteen and a half (lines 81-113) shows how realism and the plain style are mixed with the romantic and the rhetorical. The ironical angle of the artist transforms the priest's homily into poetry. The moral stance becomes inseparable from the aesthetic. The cock's story (in which character is more important than incidents) is interpreted by the priest, and the poet judges or interprets this interpretation in the wider context of the whole poem. Poetry, we know, is the criticism of life. A close consideration of the comedy of the cock's life – his pride, his pedantry, and his two temptations – (a) woman and (b) yielding to flattery – shows that the main plot requires only the last trait, i.e. yielding to flattery, and the other traits belong to the subplot in which the dream and the hen figure prominently. The two plots (1) the cock – and the fox plot and (2) the cock, the dream and the hen plot are of course linked but the link is not causal or rational.

The comedy of the plots lies (a) in the mingling of satire with sympathy and (b) in the play of wit. The primary plot is realistic and ironical, and the secondary plot romantic and symbolical. The character of the cock determines the incidents, but the character of the priest is no less remarkable, Notice how the poet transmutes his reflection and makes it reflection his self rather than pure reason, what the priest asserts in the lines 486-500 in general and in particular is confused and confusing. In the last couplet, he imputes his words and views to the cock. The cock had refuted his wife's argument about dreams, but forgot to heed the warning of his dream, The other unexpected turn of events turns the tale into a hapi-comedy corresponding to the serio-comic art and vision of the poet.

The Dream, the Dream Stories, and the Debate on Dreams

The Dream : Fiction is like dream or daydream. The use of dream in fiction is, therefore, doubly insubstantial. In middle English poetry, the dream is used as a poetic technique, and suggests vision or imagination, Langland's Piers Plowman and Chaucer's own.. The House of Fame, The Parliament of Fowls and Troilus and Cressida use the device of dreams.

Dreams have always exercised the human mind. The medieval interpretations were allegorical or analogical. The psychoanalytic interpretation of Freud and Jung have revolutionized modem thought. The view of the human mind is now radically different because of the recognition of the role and importance of the unconscious in human life and activity. Think of the waking dream, ambition or fantasy of people.

Chaucer added the dream of Chaunteleer to the traditional story. The conflicting interpretations by the hen and the cock are highly dramatic. More than one third of the tale is occupied by this digression or secondary plot.

The dream is presented in lines 116-140. The cock had dreamt of a frightening beast. It was "lyk an hound, and wolde han maad arrest upon my body, and han had me deed." In other words the hound-like beast would have seized and killed him. And so, even after waking.

"yet of his look for fere almost I deye." This fear had made him groan, and frightened Pertelote.

Chauntecleer interprets his nightmare as warning against a possible danger of death. The warning prepares him, only partially, for the event, and he is able to save himself in crisis, for he keeps his wit about him. If he had not dreamt of the event, he could

not have managed the crisis so well as he does. The dream is, thus, an integral part of the plot, and not a mere digression.

Dream Stories: Pertelote dismisses dreams as meaningless. She takes the scientific but unimaginative stand that they are caused by physical disorder. She prescribes laxatives and herbs as a remedy for bad dreams. She does not tell any stories. But Chauntecleer tells many stories to prove the truth of his view that dreams are significant. They provide a vision of the future. Prophecy, vision, imagination are human faculties which may be described as waking dreams. Arts including the art of poetry and the narrative art are the collective dream of mankind. They attempt to connect the ideal and the sensory aspects of experience.

Stories are like dreams. Both reflect experience. Chauntecleer is a dreamer and story teller. Pertelote's pragmatism yield no room to such functions or behavior.

Chauntecleer's first story is from "oon of the gretteste auctour that men rede." This unnamed author is Cicero Chaucer's use of learning is remarkably more dramatic than any other English poet's except Shakespeare's.

The story is of two pilgrims who had to part company and put up for the night in separate lodgings. One of them dreamt about the other that he was in danger of death. The dream was repeated. But he did not take it seriously, but he could not ignore the third dream. In the first two dreams, the fellow pilgrim seemed to be making an appeal for help.

"Now help me, deere brother, or I dye!"

In the third dream, the spirit of the fellow-pilgrim reports that he is slain. "My gold caused my mordre."

The second theme of the story is : "mordre wol out". a sort of moral drawn. But the relevant moral is that dreams should not be dismissed as empty and irrelevant.

The second story is about two persons who were to sail to some destination. One of them dreamt that the voyage should be postponed, and he advised the other fellow to do so. But the other said: I sette nut a straw by thy dremynges,

> For swevenes bean but vanytees and japes;
> As expected, the one who sailed was drowned.

The moral is: "no man should been too reccheless of dremes" and some dreams are to be dreaded. This second story, also from Cicero, ("in the same book I rede Right in the nexte chapitre after this") is shorter. The old Testament, Homer's liad and Macrobius, a medieval writer who interpreted and classified dreams, are the other sources for the reference to some dreams famous in literature. Chaucer rummaged through Christian and classical literature to find a definite interpretation of dreams which interested him. Langland was more visionary and his Piers Plowman is in the form of a dream. Realism was Chaucer's forte, which makes him the father of modern poetry.

The debate on Dreams: This debate serves two artistic purposes. It presents (a) the contemporary theories on the subject and (b) the characters of the cock and the hen, man and wife. The scientific point of view is contrasted with the superstitious or popular pint of view. Both seem to be half true, and Chaucer perhaps never made up his mind on the topic. However, the debate gives the presentation of the theories a human and dramatic context. This is distinctively poetic, and contrasts with the abstract manner of philosophy.

Let us briefly notice the tonal effect. The hen states her attitude to the cock who has been frightened by his dream (141-156). Then she presents her view of the origin and cause of dreams. And finally she prescribes the remedy. But the cock is much more elaborate and pedantic in his presentation. He uses stories, anecdotes and learned references in support of his point of view. He appears to be a self-centred pedant. But he is also the sufferer. She seems to have little sympathy for him, but she is practical and tales what she regards the necessary steps to help him. Chaucer manipulated the characters in his serio-comic view. The self pity of the cock is matched by what ironically looks like the "heartless" attitude of the hen. And the cock too is made to transcend self-pity by the end. He woos and flatters the hen, acts the loving husband, and seems to forget his fear of the impending danger of which the dream was a premonition. After all, destiny works through character, necessity being conditional, not absolute, in such cases.

Themes: **Some** major themes **of** the Tale are the **following**

1. The simple life and the plain diet. The Christian or religious attitude to poverty and wealth or ostentation. Poverty has moral approval. Wealth is regarded as sinful.
2. The medico-scientific view of dreams contrasted with the popular superstitious view.
3. Reflection on murder or homicide.
4. Man-woman relationship.
   a. Womman is mannes joye and al his blis
   b. Wommannes conseil broghte us first to wo,

And made Adam fro Paradys to go

5. Freewill and predetermination

   "symple necessitee" and "necessitte condicioneel"

6. Reflection on flattery and the role of courtier.
7. Rhetoric-Geoffrey de Vinsauf s theory
8. Destiny- inescapable
   Fortune- Sudden turns
9. (a) Morals drawn
   Keep your eyes open and mouth shut

   (b) "Taketh the fruyt, and lat the chaf be stille"

The tale: The first two thirds of the tale present an idyllic and romantic atmosphere. It is like paradise before it was lost. The pace of the story is leisurely. The characters are introduced - First the widow who led a simple life, then the cock, chauntecleer, the protagonist, and his hens.

Of which the faireste hewed on her throte
Was cleped faire damoyscle Pertelote

They are man and wife. The cock loved her very much. His voice is "murier than the music orgon" of the church.

Then the dream is presented, and the debate on dreams follows. Chaucer shifted the focus of interest from Chauntecleer's fate to Chauntecher's dream.

- Incident and Character are integrated.

"What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" Said Henry James. The debate on dreams illustrates the characters of the cock and the hen.

The villain, the colfox, enters the scene in the last third of the story. Then the movement becomes rapid. There is more of action in this part-non-verbal action. Speeches or dialogues are brief.

The narrator exclaims and reflects after introducing the villain. He manipulates the pace. Consider lines 460-80, and beyond. He reflects on "wommennes conscil"

Wommanenes conseil brought us first to wo, And made Adam fro Paradys to go.

But he shifts the ground:

...for I noot to whom it might displese If I couseil of wommen wolde blame, Pass over, for I seyde it in my game. The priest is agitated and confused. He reveals his feeling against women through "the cokkes wordes" and disclaims them. 'I kan noon harme of no womman divyne".

This sudden turn given to the story is highly interesting.

Chauntecleer has deliberately mistranslated the Latin sentence earlier. He is presented as the courtly and chivalrous flatterer of women. The priest is satirically outspoken. The two male Views of women-chivalrous and satirical or cynical — are presented. This theme — i.e. the male view of women-is superimposed upon the plot.

Bpth the debate on dreams and the expression of misogyuist feeling are digressious skillfully woven into the story. The latter digression is the intrusion of the subjective feeling of the narrator into the story. Here, the narrator is not differentiated from the author. One critic pointed to the "deeper simplicity" of Chaucer which reflects faithfully the paradoxes of personality, the contradictions of experience.

The action is both mental and material and social. Chauntecleer became "was oithis fox that lay ful lowe" as he cast his eye on a butterfly. The fox flatters and cheats the frightened cock into singing with his eyes shut, and seizes him by the throat. The lamentation of the hens is followed by the chase of the fox. The chase is lively.

The transitions from the human to the animal, from the serious to the light, from the high style to the low are remarkably artistic in the Tale. The narrator reminds the audience at various points (lines 115,419 486 and 673) that the tale is of a cock etc; he describes the animal behavior at many points (refer to lines 195-201,411-418; and he moves from the low or realistic style to the romantic or rhetorical at many points. The low style of lines 55-80 is followed by the high style of lines 81-115, the serious theme of lines 471-484 is interrupted by the reminder (line 486) that the tale is merely of a cock, and again the serious reflection on woman's counsel and the loss of paradise is taken up.

The play of wit averts the crisis and turns the plot from a tragic into a comic one.

Morals are drawn by both-the cock and the fox. The priest too draws his moral and turns to his audience.

The author addressed readers — contemporary and future readers. NPT is an artifact- an important item in the English literary tradition. It has survived all the social and cultural changes since Chaucer. It has something of a universal appeal. Its poetry has an eternal freshness.

Check Your Progress 5

1. Describe the complexity of the form of NPT. (use twenty sentences)
2. Write a note on the mock-heroic aspect of the tale (10 sentences)
3. Do you think the theme of man-woman relationship is irrelevant to the tale?
4. Briefly discuss the function of dreams in life, referring to the interpretations of dreams by Freud and Jung.
5. Write a note on Chaucer's interpretation of dreams. Do you think Chauntecleer expresses the poet's point of view?
6. Do you think the use of the dream in the tale in a digression?
7. Write a note on the use of learning and narrative in the debate on dreams.
8. Bring out the dramatic aspect of the debate on dreams.
9. Attempt a critical appreciation of the narrtive art of Chaucer with reference to NPT.
10. How is the theme of "necessity conditional" illustrated in the tale?
11. How are plot and character related in the tale?
12. What, if anything, is shared by the three story-tellers in the tale -i.e. the cock, the priest and the poet?
13. Write a note on the comedy of the tale, Is it a merry tale? The Host Wanted a story "as may oure hertes glade "As a reader of the tale, do you find your heart gladdened? How?

6.8 SUMMING UP

This Unit prepares us for a critical study of the text of NPT given as Appendix I in Unit-2. There we shall also have the translation of the text, notes and glossary. Both the Units are intended to be studied together. You will notice that your first reading of the text has to be supported with the critical guidance provided in these units.

An introduction to Chaucer and his age together with a detailed study of the General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales is provided in other Units. You are expected to be familiar with them as well for a better appreciation of Chaucer's poetry.

UNIT 7 A STUDY OF 'THE NONNE PREESTES TALE' II

Structure

7.0 Objective
7.1 Introduction to the Unit
7.2 Learning and Allusion in NPT
7.3 Speech, Dialogue, Reflection, Narration and Descritption in the Tale
7.4 Levels of Meaning in NPT
7.5 Contemporary Historical Allusion
  7.5.1 Notes
  7.5.2 Glossary
7.6 An Outline Survey of Chaucer Criticism
7.7 Suggested Reading
7.8 Let Us Sum Up

7.0 OBJECTIVE

After having read this unit you will be able to:

(a) Translate passages from the text into modem English prose,
(b) Interpret the text,
(c) Explain passages from it,
(d) Discuss Chaucer's use of learning and allusion
(e) Examine his style and
(f) Be familiar with the tradition of Chaucer criticism

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In the first unit we described the context of the text, the narrative art of Chaucer with particular reference to this tale, and the complex formal design of the poem.

In this unit we describe the use of learning, allusion and rhetoric made by Chaucer, his style, verse and diction, and the meanings of the tale.

The text with translation into modem English verse, notes and glossary is provided. For a close study you are expected to read it many times in the light of the critical interpretation provided in the two units.

An outline of Chaucer criticism is given to help you place Chaucer properly in the English poetic tradition Norms and values of literary criticism keep changing, but there is something in art and poetry and the humanistic culture which may be said to be changeless or unalterable, After all, great poets are acknowledged to be great at all times. The mystery of their charm cannot be fully explained by criticism or scholarship.

7.2 THE USE OF LEARNING AND ALLUSION IN NPT

The Tale itself is an adaptation from a French collection of satirical fables, Roman de Renart. The two dream stories are taken from Cicero, the great Latin prose-writer. Dionysius Cato on dreams, Macrobius's commentary on the Dream of Scipio, are refereed to. The dreams of St. Kenelm, Scipio Africanus, Daniel and Joseph of the

Old Testament are mentioned in support of his view by the pedantic cock. All this reflects Chaucer's interest in the contemporary lore of dream-interpretation.

Analogies and parallels are used to introduce learned allusions to the Iliad, the Greek epic by Homer. Aeneid, the Latin epic by Virgil, and to an obscure History of the Trojan war by Dares Phrygius. Allusions to the Christian myth of the loss of paradise, to the theological debate on free will and predestination, the theory of St. Augustine, to the consolations of Philosophy by Boethius (which Chaucer had translated), To Thomas Bradwardine, do all give the tale an atmosphere of learning, reflectionand a philosophical context, appropriate to the narrator who is a priest. The reference to the Gospel of St. John is important. The cock is made to twist or adapt the quotation. He mistranslates deliberately. All this illustrates the ironic method of the poet. The reference (in line 446) to one of the most romantic knights of the Arthurian romances — Sir Launcelot de Lakeis sly and ironic.

Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus Christ with a kiss. New Ganelon betrayed his master Charlemague and caused his defact. Sinon was a greek who tricked the Trojans into admitting the wooden horse into their city. These three traitors in the spheres of religion, history and myth are compared with the fox, the villain, in the Tale. The familiar parallel of Adam, Eve and Satan is there too.

Some obscure references for a 20th century reader are there. A medieval moralising treatise on beasts, a Latin bestiary, Physiologus, attributed to Theobaldus, is mentioned (in line 505) by the Fox. He claims also to have read a song "Daun Bumal the Asse" (Sir Burnal the Ass) in Nigel Wireker's book.

The author of Poetria Nova, Geoffrey de Viusauf, was regarded in Chaucer's time as a great authority an rhetoric and poetry. The Priest is made to imitate his rhetorical manner in lines 581-608. Contrast the rhetorical, hyperbolic style of these lines with the vivid, realistic description of the chase in the following eight couplets. Astronomy and astrology were Chaucer's favourite objects. We have some evidence of that in this tale too. The Peasant's Revolt of 1381— a contemporary historical event- and one of its leaders- Jack straw- are mentioned in the tale (lines 627-630). The noise that was made in chasing the fox is compared to the noise made by the crowds in the said rebellion.

The use of learning by major English poets like the metaphysical poets, particularly John Donne; John Milton, Alexander Pope and T.S. Eliot is like, and unlike Chaucer's.

The metaphysical poets wrote for a small circle of readers. Milton too was interested in finding "fit audience, though few". Besides, he reflects the conflict as well as the compromise of the Renaissance with the Reformation in his poetry. Classicism and Christianity were undivided in Chaucer's time, but his humanism has a secular bias, which is a mark of his originality. The classicism of Dryden and Pope is imitative and the theme of their poetry is contemporary society, particularly, men of letters and the state of letters in their time. This is something of a late development in the history of English poetry. It may be described as the narrowing down of the subject of poetry to poetry itself — a circularity. The Waste Land by T.S.Eliot was first received as a very obscure and pedantic poem. Modernism—an amalgam of symbolism, imagism, romanticism and classicism- appeared with this poem. Chaucer's use of learning is most creative. Only Shakespeare may be said to have assimilated it better.

Chaucer's allusions to the poetic, mythological and philosophical traditions of Europe show that he is most European of English poets. Dryden and Pope were mere imitators of the ancients. T.S. Eliot was an American and with him the Trans-Atlantic modem English poetry had emerged. Milton's Christianity, unlike Dante's, was sectarian and reflected a spiritual c'onflict between reason and faith. Byronism

idolised Byron. Homer, Virgil, Dante and Shakespeare are perhaps the greatest European poets, but Shakespeare's "Englislmess" is at once more insular and universal than Chaucer's classical simplicity or Milton's Latinism. Of Chaucer, Shakespeare and Milton, the last is most exotic, the first is wanting in the depth and range of Shakespeare. Perhaps the freedom from French influence was not complete.

7.3 SPEECH, DIALOGUE, REFLECTION, NARRATION AND DESCRIPTION IN NPT

NPT is a dramatic tale. The action here is more verbal than non-verbal. The debate on dreams, the play of wit between the hero (chauntecleer) and the villain (colfox), the reflections of the priest, the dramatic story-teller, are all verbal action.

The non-verbal action of of two types here. The dream is a psychic event, hardly 'action'. The only physical action is the fox seizing the cock by the neck and running to the forest. The 'action' on the part of the hero, apart from his interpretation of dreams including his own, is wooing, dalliance and enjoyment (see lines 391-437) and play of wit in resolving a crisis.

Speeches, dialogue and reflection, therefore, are more important in this tale than 'action' of the other type. The tale is, thus, remarkable for psychic and mental action. It is more literary or linguistic than might appear on the surface.

The speech of the fox addressed to the cock (518-555) is highly rhetorical and full of dramatic irony. Compare it with Iago's speeches to Othello in the play of that name by Shakespeare, or Satan's in Milton's Paradise Lost. Evidently, this is a mock-heroic tale in contrast with the serious tragedy and the solemn epic. The brief dialogue between the cock and the fox is crucial action. The cock takes his revenge in a speech of seven lines (three and a half couplets 641-47) and the fox falls in the trap through a speech of half a line (648).

The morals drawn by the participants in the action state the importance of vision (one should keep one's eyes open) and silence (one should not talk when one should hold one's peace). Silence, after all, is golden, while speech is silver. We notice the use and abuse of language –to conceal and to reveal motive. Truth and falsehord in verbal behaviour are to be distinguished by intelligence.

In the debate on dreams, the hen is matter of fact and scientific. She uses expository language or style. Her speech of more than sixty lines (142-203) reflects a skilful control or organisation of feeling and idea.

The cock is long-winded and pedantic in his reply. He is given two hundred lines (204-405) in which he tells two dream stories and refers to many famous dreams in scripture and the classics, implying a correspondence between them and his own. He argues that dreams signify joy or trouble and his own "avision" foretells adversity, His proud, pedantic and amorous character is adumbrated in his mistranslation of a Latin sentence from the gospel according to St. John. He wins the argument but forgets its purpose. He behaves like a smug fatalist ignoring the warning of the dream.

The priest is using the tale as an exemplum. His story is a contemplative and didactic sermon. His reflection on the theological problem of freewill and predetermination relates this tale to the knight's Tale and to Troilus and Creside. And in all the three "Chaucer's balance in his just comprehension of tragedy and his gentle sense of humour" may be seen. Poetry and philosophy are united dramatically. In this respect, Chaucer is second only to Shakespeare among great English poets.

The priest's reflection on women or man-woman relationship is curiously less objective. Consider the passage (421-48) where the transition form a solemn, rhetorical tone to satiric- ironical is remarkable. The paradisal happiness of the cock (434-37) before the fox enters the scene is pastoral or romantic. Notice the word "pasture" used in line 419. But the correspondence with the myth of Adam-Eve-Satan is coloured with antifeminine feeling. The priest's ironic statement that his story is "true" as is the book of Launcelot de Lake reveals the subjective feeling of the narrator author. And a little later he turns again to the topic of woman's counsel to man. His evasive and timid tone is characteristic and tells the story of his own dubious love-hate relation with his mistress prioress.

Chaucer's view of rhetoric is reflected in the priest's reference to Geoffrey de Vinsauf, whose guidance was blindly accepted by poets and rhetoricians of Chaucer's time. Chaucer's poetic technique is more remarkable for irony, satire and realism than for rhetoric and romance. He juxtaposed the plain style with the high style in the tale, creating an ironic effect. In the description of the paradise of married love dramatilly rendered (391-420) the poet uses a rhetorical method but not without irony. The realistic style of the chase (609-635) may be contrasted with it.

Chaucer's narrative art combines description, reflection and narration in an aesthetic complex. The narrative has all the qualities that a good narrative requires: (a) the pace and movement of the story, (b) suspense and crisis, (c) Transitions from the serious to the gay tone and back, (d) drama (e) action, (f) contemplating or reflecting on the action, and (g) artistic control of the matrial of experience. Tradition and individual talent are perfectly blended.

Description is poetic at places, e.g. the description of Chauntecleer's voice and appearance. It is not always so poetic. It is matter-of-fact in tone more frequently. The use of poetic devices like the simile and rhetorical devices like exclamations may be noticed for particular consideration.

In the use of similes, Chaucer is the supreme English poet, as Shakespeare is in the use of metaphors. The Homeric similes of Milton are equally remarkable. The comparisons and similes of lines 85-98 are brilliant. Figure them out.

The most important aspect of Chaucer's style is that the tale is a verse narrative. Modern fiction is normally written in prose. Verse contrasts with prose in many respects. It is more regular and rhythmic. The verse of Chaucer's poems is radically different from the traditional alliterative verse of his age. The influence of Chaucer on the later English poets is immeasurable because they found the syllabic verse pattern introduced by him more congenial then the old alliterative verse.

The music of the heroic couplets of NPT should be appreciated. The initial difficulty of middle English pronunciation can be easily overcome. The syllabic structure of words is somewhat different, especially because the final-e is sounded and adds an extra syllable to the word in many cases.

Chaucer's diction is not 'poetic' in the way in which, according to Wordsworth, that of late 18" century English poetry is. In the General Prologue Chaucer defended.his plain style (lines 725-742). His argument is that rudeness, vulgarity or even obscenity of speech may be dramatically proper on the ground of realism. Secondly, sincerity and honesty require that there should be no reserve (or euphesim) and that words must correspond to action. He mentions both Christ and Plato—the two fountainheads of European culture—in support of his argument. In all this Chaucer was being only half serious. His comic and ironic. vision is reflected in his poetic manner.

7.4 LEVELS OF MEANING IN NPT

"On the primary level the Nun's priest's Tale is a brilliant and complex exposure of vanity, self-esteem, and self-indulgence through the mock-heroic treatment of a beast fable. On the secondary level, the Nun's Priest joins the discussions of the Pilgrims on poverty (Man of Law, Wife of Bath), women's advice (Merchant), rhetoric (Host and squire), and marriage. He is also presenting in the contrast between the widow and Chantecleer a veiled comment on his position vis-a-vis the Prioress. Finally, on the level of involuntary revelation, be falls into the pedantry that he is ridiculing and uncovers for a moment in his confusion the feelings of a misogyist dependent on a woman. In this moment there is revealed a second conflict, the conflict between the artist, building with the materials of his art a world where his feelings achieve symbolic and universal expression, and the man, expressing his feelings directly."

7.5 CONTEMPORARY HISTORICAL ALLUSION

A touch-and-go allusion to contemporary historical events and personages is made in the Tale. J.L. Hotson suggested so in 1924. According to him, Colfox of the Tale is based on Nicholes Calfox. The real Colfox was one of those who were responsible for the killing or gloucester, a prince of England and youngest son to Edward III. Chaucer likens the Colfox to famous traitors. The other historical event to which Chaucer seems to have referred is the duel at coventry between Henry Bolingbroke, then Duke of Hereford, and Thomas Mowbray Duke of Norfolk. King Richard stopped the proceeding just before blows were struck, and exiled the antagonists: Henry for ten years, and Mowbray for ever. "Such an heroic encounter, ending a bit ingloriously, but without hurt, for both combatants, furnishes ar excellent occasion for a sympathetic, humorous fable, done in a grave and gay mock-heroic style". A striking similarity between chauntecleer's colours and Henry's arms is noticed. And the striking likeness between the fable and the duel is brought out.

Check Your Progress 6

1, Write a note on Chauntecleer's use of learning, distinguishing it from the Priest's and the Poet's.

2. Comment on
   a) Chaucer's attitude to rhetoric
   b) His use of rhetoric

3. Compare Chaucer as a learned poet with some other English poets.
4. Write a critical note on Chaucer's use of language.
5. tudy the essay "Colfox Vs Chanticleer by J. Lesley Hotson included in Chaucer: Modern Essays in criticism (1959) edited by Edward WAGENKNECHT
   Do you find the argument of Hotson convincing or merely curious?
6. How are poetry and history related? A great critic suggested that poetry is less abstract and more concrete than philosophy and less concrete and more abstraSct than history. How is this the advantage of poetry?
7. Bring out the poetic features of the style of Chaucer.
8. What makes Chaucer the greatest master of narrative in English verse.
9. Discuss Dryden's description of Chaucer as "the father of English poetry"

7.6 AN OUTLINE SURVEY OF CHAUCER CRITICISM

Chaucer was admired by his contemporaries and imitated by the poets of the succeeding generations in the fifteenth century A.D. The following eulogy by John Skeleton is among the first:

O Noble Chaucer, Whos pullissh yd eloquence
Oure Englysshe rude so fresshely hath set out.
That bounde ar we with all dew reverence,
With all our strength that we can bring about,
To owe to you our servye, and more if we mowte...

Hoccleve praised Chaucer as "the first finder of the English language". Henry VIII exempted his works from his ban on "forbidden" books. Ascham approved of him, and Spenser acknowledged him as "master" from whose "well of English undefyled" he drank deep. Ben Jonson had read Chaucer, and Milton's comments on Chaucer are respectful.

It may be seen that the critical acclaim during the first two centuries after Chaucer focussed on language. Then the language became old and obscure. The transformation of English from Middle English to Modem English was complete.

Joseph Addison's lines on Chaucer in the sixth miscellary (1694) show the new attitude of unfamiliarity with the language."

... Chaucer first, a merry bard, arose,
And many a story told in rhyme and prose,
But age has rusted what the poet writ,
Worn out his language and obscur'd his wit.
In vain he jests in his unpolish'd strain,
And tries to make his readers laugh in vain.
Alexander Pope said:

Authors, like Coins, grow dear as they grow old;
It is the rust we value, not the gold.
Chaucer's worst ribaldry is leam'd by rote,
And beastly Skelton Heads of Houses quote:

But Dryden was much more balanced. However, the general Tendency of the 18th century, or the age of neo-classicism, was to dismiss Chaucer's verse and language. In fact, the unfamiliarity with Chaucer's language continued till Matthew Arnold,

But Dryden held Chaucer "in the same degree of veneration as the Grecians held Homer, and the Romans Virgil." He called Chaucer" the father of English Poetry" and described him in a fine phrase as "a perpetual fountain of good sense." In Chaucer's verse, however, he found only nine syllables in place of the actual ten, because he did not count the final-e as syllabic in works like "aboute" and "withoute" in lines 81-2 of our text. They rhyme as well, But his appreciation of Chaucer's art of characterisation is more than fair.

"Chaucer followed Nature everywhere, but was never *so* bold to go beyond her... we have our forefathers and great-grand-dames all before us, as they were in Chaucer's days: their general characters are still remaining in mankind, and even in England."

Rewriting or translating Chaucer started with Dryden. A Pope and William Wordsworth also rewrote parts of Chaucer. Nevil Coghill's translation is less free and closer to the original both in language and spirit.

In the mid-19" century the Chaucer society was founded, and towards the end of the century Skeat's edition of Oxford Chaucer started appearing. But Matthew Arnold was, it seems, not aware of the new wave of Chaucer scholarship. His famour criticism of Chaucer as lacking in "high seriousness" derived, partly, from his own lack of humour and, generally, from the romantic aesthetic which regards the artist as her and takes art more seriously than is done in real life and society.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century Chaucer studies have been steadily growing on both sides of the Atlantic. Some prominent American scholars like kithedge, Manly, Root, Lowes and John Speirs have contributed much to the revival of interest in Chaucer's poetry. It is true that Chaucer studies till about 1920 had strong historical bias. Ever since then Chaucer criticism has emerged and developed as a special branch of English literary criticism.

The texts of Chaucer's poems have been authoritatively edited by F.N. Robinson, J.M. Manly, Edith Rickert, and their pioneer W.W. Skeat. A Chaucer Bibliography with a supplement covering the period 1908-63 and A companion to Chaucer studies (1968) are indispensable to scholars and researchers.

Chaucer's Life-Records, Chaucer's World, Five Hundred years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion are valuable books of reference.

The outline given above shows that Chaucer has always been accepted as a great master of English poetry, but during the last three centuries and a half his language seems to have proved a stumbling block to the reader and the critic.

The emergence of linguistics, particularly Historical linguistics, or Comparative Philology as it was earlier known, made it possible for scholars to appreciate the difference of Chaucer's East Midland Dialect of Middle English from the standard English of today. Secondly, historical scholarship recreated Chaucer's England and his social and literacy context. The last six decades have seen the publication in books and journals of studies of Chaucer's verse, language, poetry, style etc. and his place in the English poetic and literary tradition.

The historical approach of the late 19th century and early 20th century Chaucer scholarship interpreted fiction as fact, mistaking realism for reality. The latest view in this respect is that the description of reality in language can only be realistic and must involve the subjective bias or prejudice of the describer. Secondly, Arnold's complaint that "high seriousness" was wanting in Chaucer is now seen in its historical critical perspective. It is accepted that Arnold's view derived partly from his ignorance of Chaucer's language and unfamiliarity with Chaucer's poetic output as a whole, and, more important, from the romantic aesthetic which regarded poets as prophets or legislators of mankind. Poetry, said W.H.Anden, a poet, can make nothing happen. Miles Burrows, a less known poet talken in a poem of two types of poets—the arch poet and the minipoet and concluded, in a poem entitled "minipoet"

> but most of us prefer the minipoet
> for the sort of journeys we make now a days.

In India, however, pilgrimages like the one undertaken by Chaucer's pilgrims in the Canterbury Tales are still common. Journeys are always of all sorts, but there is of course a great difference between Chaucer's England and our India.

What is of universal interest in the poetry of Chauer which is illustrated in NPT at its best is the wealth of experience, the firm grasp of human nature in its great variety, and above all the easy mastery of the art of poetry and a rare assimilation of the tradition of learning.

7.7. SUGGESTED READINGS

A Criticism of **Chaucer** as a whole

1. ***The Canterbury*** *Tales:*
A ***selection of*** *critical Essays* — J.J. Anderson **(ed)**

2. *A Reader's guide* ***to Geoffrey Chaucer*** — Muriel **Bowden**

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The outline given above shows that Chaucer has always been accepted as a great master of English poetry, but during the last three centuries and a half his language seems to have proved a stumbling block to the reader and the critic.

The emergence of linguistics, particularly Historical linguistics, or Comparative Philology as it was earlier known, made it possible for scholars to appreciate the difference of Chaucer's East Midland Dialect of Middle English from the standard English of today. Secondly, historical scholarship recreated Chaucer's England and his social and literacy context. The last six decades have seen the publication in books and journals of studies of Chaucer's verse, language, poetry, style etc. and his place in the English poetic and literary tradition.

The historical approach of the late 19th century and early 20th century Chaucer scholarship interpreted fiction as fact, mistaking realism for reality. The latest view in this respect is that the description of reality in language can only be realistic and must involve the subjective bias or prejudice of the describer. Secondly, Arnold's complaint that "high seriousness" was wanting in Chaucer is now seen in its historical critical perspective. It is accepted that Arnold's view derived partly from his ignorance of Chaucer's language and unfamiliarity with Chaucer's poetic output as a whole, and, more important, from the romantic aesthetic which regarded poets as prophets or legislators of mankind. Poetry, said W.H.Anden, a poet, can make nothing happen. Miles Burrows, a less known poet talken in a poem of two types of poets—the arch poet and the minipoet and concluded, in a poem entitled "minipoet"

> but most of us prefer the minipoet
> for the sort of journeys we make now a days.

In India, however, pilgrimages like the one undertaken by Chaucer's pilgrims in the Canterbury Tales are still common. Journeys are always of all sorts, but there is of course a great difference between Chaucer's England and our India.

What is of universal interest in the poetry of Chauer which is illustrated in NPT at its best is the wealth of experience, the firm grasp of human nature in its great variety, and above all the easy mastery of the art of poetry and a rare assimilation of the tradition of learning.

7.7. SUGGESTED READINGS

A Criticism of Chaucer as a whole

1. *The Canterbury Tales: A selection of critical Essays* — J.J. Anderson (ed)

2. *A Reader's guide to Geoffrey Chaucer* — Muriel Bowden

3.	*Chaucer in His Time*	Derek Brewet
4.	*The poet Chaucer*	Nevill Coghill
5.	*Chaucer and His world*	F.E. Halliday
6.	*Chaucer and His Poetry*	G.L. Kittredge
7.	*Chaucer and the Rhetoricians*	J.M. Manly
8.	*Chaucer and the shape of creation*	R.O.Payne
9.	*Chaucer's Prosody*	Ian Robinson
10.	*The Poetry of Chaucer*	R.K. Root
11.	*Chaucer Criticism* (2 volumes)	Richerd J. Scheeck & Jerome Taylor (edd)
12.	*Chaucer the Maker*	John speirs
13.	*Critics on Chaucer*	Sheila Sulivan (ed)
14.	*Chaucer: Modern Essays in Criticism*	Edward Wagenknecht (ed)
15.	*On the Sources of the Nun's Priest's tale*	K.O.Peterson

Note: Either A.W. Pllard's or F.W Robinson's edition of the text should be used. Nevil coghill's translation into modem English verse should help the student translate passages from the text into modem English prose.

Works of Reference

1.	*Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Centerbury Tales*	W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster
2.	*Chaucer's Life-Records*	M.M. Crow and C.C. Olsen (edd)
3,	*A Bibliography of Chaucer* ***1908-53*** (Supplement'1954-63 by W.R.Crawford)	D.D. Griffith
4.	*Companion to Chaucer Studies*	Beryl Rowland (ed)
5.	*Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion*	Caroline F.E.Spurgeon

Notes:

1. A Brief Note on Chaucer's grammar

The middle English dialect (East Midland) of Chaucer forms the basis of modern English. Therefore, the vocabulary and grammar of this dialect are far less strange than those of the other dialects of his time, e.g. that of Langland's Piers Plowman.

The spellings in the text indicate both orthographic and phoretic differences. The difference in the quality of vowels and some consonants has been partly reconstructed on the basis of the spellings which were far from standardised in Chaucer's time. The printing press was introduced soon after Chaucer by Caxton who published Chaucer for the first time.

Word- endings like-e, -en, -n and –es were pronounced in Chaucer's time. The genitive singular is normally fonned in –es, -s: Poules, Goddes, Nonnes. Plurals were formed in fully sounded –es the -en suffix was also used : eyen, doghtren. Some plurals had zero inflection: nyght in "seven nyght oold". Adjectives possessed a fully sounded –e final independent of inflection: "muche fold". "poure estaat" The definite use of adjectives had an e-final in the singular: the brighte sune, faire Pertelote. His sweete preest. The indefinite use had no e-final in singular a greet disese. Adjective in the plural inflection were formed with the final –e, fresshe flowers. The predicative use had no final –e as in "neither whit no reed" comparatives and superlatives doubled the final consonants : redder

Adverbs with final –e: faire, poore, aboute.

Pronouns: Here appears as hir or hire, and in the accusative or dative as here. Them is usually hem and their here but also her and hir. That has its plural tho, the plural of this is thise. Which is used for all genders, and is inflected when adjectival.

Verbs: Ist singular is formed with a final -e:

I gesse, I seye

3rd singular is formed by –eth, -th.

The plural of all persons is formed in –en, -n or the weakened form –e: men han been ... WE all desiren, That werken, dreams been to drede, they been etc.

Strong verb **conjugation:** ladde, sent, foond, eet, lette, shente, hadde etc. The imperative present in the plural takes –eth: Beth. Also telle war, redeth etc,, dredeth. Infinitives end in -en,-n, or –e:

To goon, To doon, to telle, to grone, to han, to tellen

Strong verb past participle form:, end in -en, -e: fallen, understonde, shente but maad Weak vers in –ed, -d attamed,

Wakened, mordred, dremed

Both strong and weak verbs frequently have the prefix y-

The most remarkable features of the vocabulary of Chaucer are:

(a) Obsolete words like eek, quod, sooth, clap, wot, noot, woot, mete, somdeel, sweven, steven, cleped, hight, sikerly, stape, ywis, avantour, mote, gargat, gabbe wlastsom, biknewe, gladsom etc.

(b) Compounds and Derivatives which are obsolete.

namoore	=	no more
nevaradeel	=	never a deal
nas	=	was not
noot	=	know not (n+woot)

nere	were it not
n'apoplexie	no apoplexy
thilke	the same
evericlion	every+each+one

(c) Change of form and meaning in certain words

1. Hevinesse = Seriousness, sadness
   Now the word is used in the literal physical sense more than in this metaphorical sense.

2. disese = the present-day meaning has narrowed down to "illness"

3. Think = seem, appear in Chaucer's use. Consider the sentence, it thinketh me= it thinks me= it seems to me.

4. lust = Chaucer's meaning "desire" has no sexual connotation.

5. recche = reckon, interpret, read

Syntactic features

A. 1. That = What –See line 2
   2. for to telle =for telling or to tell
      for to bewaille = to bewail
   3. But for = But because
   4. Whan that = When (see line 122)

B. Double negatives – e.g. I noot revere ... (line 17)
   no wyn ne drank seh (line 76)
   nas no man in no region (line 544)

Notes to the text

Line 1 The Prologue to NPT links it with the preceding Monk's Tale. The Knight (Who has the pride of place among the pilgrims) interrupts the monk. The monk, in his tale, has recounted universal tragedy – human and superhuman. Lucifer, Adam, Samson, Hercules, Nero, Alexander and Julius caesar are some of the great tragic figures presented by the Monk. He interprets their various tragedies in the light of his faith in destiny or predetermination.

From a tragic tale to a comic is a transition designed by the poet whose art and vision are essentially serio-comic.

NPT is followed by the Physician's Tale in which a father kills his daughter to save her honour.

Line 14 St. Paul's Cathedral in London. At the end, too, (line 675) there is a reference to St. Paul, This gives the tale some of its form-rounding off.

Line 16 The phrase "Fortune covered with a clowde" refers to the Monk's conclusion to his tale as follows:

How fortune, ever fickle, will assail
With the sudden stroke the kingdoms of the proud.
And when men trust in her she than will fail
And cover her bright face as with a cloud …
(Nevil coghill's translation)

Notice the theme of Destiny versus free will is retained in NPT, but the tone is comic and ironical.

Line 90 — The equinoctical was a great circle of the heavens in the plane of the earth's equator. Chaucer's interest in Astronomy is well-known. According to, medieval astronomy, the equinox made a complete daily revolution, so that fifteen degree would pass, or ascend, every hour. The cock knew this instinctively and would crow precisely every hour.

Notice the unity of time being observed in the tale. The action starts at dawn with the groaning of the cock. The hen warns him against going out in the ascending sun, but he goes out at 9 a.m. Later "undren" (line 456) indicates time from 9 am to 12 noon. The rest of the action, particularly the chase, seems to take place in the afternoon.

Secondly, Astrology, the science of medicine, psychology (particularly the theory of humours) and astronomy were all interrelated. Knowledge in Chaucer's time was more general and interdisciplinary then in our time.

Lines 93-98 — The colours of the cock's physical appearance as well as those of the colfox (lines 136-38) have a poetic and rhetocial effect. Moreover, they have a historical connotation, as pointed out by J.L. Hotsun (see suggested Reading List)

130 — The line should be paraphrased: Now may God (make) my dream mean (read) well.

Line 148-51 — The ideal husband of his age of chivalry and romance is mocked by the poet in a manne reminicscent of Restoration comedy. Compare this with Millamant mocking the romantic ideal of a husband in The Way of the World.

Lines 157-72 — Notice the connection between the theory of humours classifying humans into four psychological types, the interpretation of dreams, and the medical advice given by Pertelote, *An* impressive display of learning as by a court lady: The comic and mock-heroic tone is apparent.

174 — Dionysius Cato, the author of a Latin book of maxims

218 — The author is Cicero, the famous Latin author known for his prose style and learning. Divination and Valericus Maximus are the two books by him both or either of which may be the source of the two dream stories of the cock.

344-355 — The story of the life of St. Kenelm is told in the Golden Legend translated by Caxton.

After the death of his father kenulphus in 821 A.D. Kenelm became the king of Mercia at the age of seven. But his aunt, Quenedreda got him murdered. Later he was made a saint.

This vision of a stately tree stretching to the stars and with branches covered with flowers is sublime. The tree was ablaze with lamps. He saw himself standing on the top, and three parts of the earth bending towards him reverentially. While he was appreciating the magnificent spectacle, some of his relatives cut the tree down. Rut he was transformed into a little white bird. The allegorical vision is poetic.

357-58 Macrobius, who interpreted the dream of the worthy scipio of Africa, confirms that dreams are significant. His classification of dreams together with philosophical and astrological explorations attracted medieval readers. The SOMNIUM SCIPIONIS of Circero, originally a chapter of De Republica, Book VI was edited with a commentary by Macrobius about 400 A.D.

362 The Book of Daniel in the old Testament of the Bible states Daniel's belief that dreams are significant.

364 Joseph in the Book of Genesis in the Bible also asserts that dreams are significant. The dreams of the Egyptian Pharaoh, his baker and butler were indicators of coming events.

372—74 Croesus, King of Lydia, dreamt that he was seated on a high tree, where he was made wet by Jupiter and dried by Phoebus. His daughter, Pania, interpreted the dream as reaning that he would be captured and hanged on a cross, where the rain would moisten him and the sun would dry him. And the dream came true.

375—82 Hector, a Trojan hero, was killed by the greek warrior Achilles in the war of Tray. This story is taken from the Greek epic Iliad by Homer. But Homer does not mention any dream of Andromache, Hector's wife. Chaucer's source for this was the History of the Trojan war by Dares Phrygius.

All the learned allusions made in the context of the dream lore have two main sources: (a) Greek and Roman classics and (b) Christian scripture. Chaucer is fairly representative in his use of learning in poetry. After the Renaissance, a split between the Christain and the classical surfaced, most prominently in Milton's Paradise Lost. Scholars have traced a conflict in Milton's psyche between conscious and unconscious pulls. There is no such conflict in Chaucer.

397-400 In Principio are the first words of the Gospel of St. John. Here this Latin phrase means "as surely as in the beginning" (when Eve tempted Adam). The Latin sentence means "woman is man's ruin." But Chauntecleer deliberately mistranslates it.

421 An implicit reference to a common Hebrew tradition, according to which creation tookplace at the time of vernal equinox B.C. 3761.

424 May 3 is the date, because thirty days of April and two days of May had passed.

The time is 9 O' clock in the morning.

May 3 is significant in Chaucer's poetry. (a) In the Knight's Tale, it is soon after midnight on May 3 that Palamon breaks out of prison. (b) In Troilus and criseyde, after a sleepless night on May 3, Pandarus urges Criseyde to listen to the suit of Troilus. It appears that May 3 was traditionally regarded as an unlucky day. Or was some autobiographical reference hinted?

428-29 The zodiac is an imaginary circular band found the heavens, and the sun's annual course is the middle of this band. This band is divided into twelve signs of the zodiac of which Taurus is the second. 360 degres of the circle divided by twelve yields 30. This is how months and days of the year were astronomically calculated. The sun was supposed to begin its course in the first sign of Aries on 12th March. 30 days for the thirty degrees of Aries plus 21 days for the twenty one degrees of Taurus bring is to 2nd May. "Somewhat more" (line 423) brings us to the 3rd May.

430 The cock knew all this by nature or instinct, not by any other "Iore" or learning.

433 The daily motion of the sun is referred to . Forty one degrees and a fraction makes 9 O' clock.

Thus it is nine am on the third of May. The progress of the action under a unity of time scheme makes it dramatic.

446 Launcelot, a prominent knight of King Arthur's Round Table in the Arthurian romances. A French version by walter Map known for its untruthfulness was held by women in great esteem. Chaucer was referring particularly to this "book."

449 Colfox = coal-black fox. col-here is M.E. col = Coal; a variety of Sox chiefly distinguished by a geater admixture of black in its fur.

"Colfox, as a common noun, occurs only in this passage. But Colfox is also a proper name, a surname; and is found in England from Chaucer's time to ours". Hotsun (1924). Nicholas Colfox and Richard Colfox; two contemporaries known at court, were punished and pardoned by Henry IV. Nicholas Colfox had been involved in the murder of the Duke of Gloucester. It was worse than murder; it was treason.

The emphasis on the themes "Mordre wol out" (lines 284-91) and treason (lines 460-63) is interpreted by Hotsun as reflecting Chaucer's attitude to Nicholas Colfox.

The partial resemblance of Chauntedeer with Henry Bolingbroke and of Colfox with Nicholas Colfox as well as Thomas Mowbray is not a complete allegory. But their duel at Coventry stopped just before blows were struck is faintly reflected in the encounter between the cock and the fox.

456 "Undren of the day" is the time from 9 a.m to 12 noon"

461-62 Judas Iscariot betrayed christ with a kiss, new Ganelon was an officer under Charlemague, and by his treachery caused his master's defeat, and the death of Roland, for which he was tom to pieces by horses. Sinon was a Greek who tricked Trojans into admitting the wooden horse into their city. Thus, these are three traitors in the spheres of religion, history and myth.

Apart from a rhetorical mock heroic effect, these lines also have a historical overtone, as Holsun shows.

474 bulte it to the bren-separate the flour from the chaff, the truth from falsehood or fiction

475 St. Augustine was regarded as the representative of the orthodox doctrines on the subject. He believed in predestination.

476 Boethius (470-525 A.D) treats the topic in De Consolatione Philosophie in a passage which distinguishes between "simple" necessity and "conditional" necessity. Chaucer translated the book into English.

Thomas Bradwardine, a lecturer at Oxford and later Arcbitshop of Canterbury in 1349 wrote a Latin book De Causa Dei defending predestination or predetermination.

491 The story of Adam, Eve and the serpent in Paradise is one of the basic myths of Christianity. The concept of original sin is derived from it. And the relation between character and destiny depends on it.

505 Physiologus is the title of Latin bestiary, a medieval moralising treatise on beasts, attributed to Theobaldus. The priest refers to it not without humour.

529 Boethius wrote a book on music in Lain, De Musica. He belonged to the mathematical school of music of Pythagoras. His music did not have musch feeling. The comparison is hypocbolic, comic, mock-heroic and ironical.

546-52 The story here alluded to is found in a poem entitled Burnellus Sen Speculum Stultorum written by Nigel Wireker in the time of Richard I. Master Brunedl the ass, is the hero of the book, a 12th century satire on the vices and corruption of society in general and of the religious orders in particular, under the guise of a narrative of the adventures of the ass who wanted a longer tail. The story referred to is briefly this: A young man named Gundulfus broke a cock's leg by flinging a stone at it. The cock took his revenge by omitting to crow in the morning on the day when Gundulfus was to be ordained a priest and to receive a benefice. The result was that Gundulfus and all his family overslept, he lost the benefice and become a beggar while his parents died of grief.

575 Friday is a day dedicated to Venus. It is traditionally associated with bad luck.

581—86 Gaufred was Geoffrey de Vinsauf, author of the Poetria Nova, Which was long recognised as an authoritative treatise on poetry, containing instuctions for composing poetry in different styles the passage referred to is an example of lamentation, and deals with king Richard's death.

Chaucer is somewhat ironic of the plaintive style. He has used rhetoric in this tale at important points in the action, consider lines 441-48, 460-64, 527-30 and many other passages.

590-93 Pyrrhus had seized king Priam by the beard and slain him as the Latin epic Aeneid by virgil tells us. To compare the crisis of the cock with the fall of Try is mock-heroic

597-602 **Hasdrubal** was the king of Carthage when the Romans burnt it in 146 B.C. **Hasdrubel** slew himself; and his wife and two sons burnt themselves in despair.

604-607 Emperor **Nero's** burning of the city of Rome was cruel fun. Nero, a Roman emperor A.D. 54-68, is proverbial for his brutal tyranny. He is said to have been fiddling while Rome was burning.

628 The reference here is to the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. Jack straw was one of the leaders of the revolt. He and his men killed many flemings to whom the English workers were hostile in self-interest. He was subsequently beheaded.

GLOSSARY

A

Abrayde = woke up with a start
accord = musical harmony
accordant = in keeping with
actes = records
aferd = afraid
afright = frightened
ageste = terrified
agayn = toward, back
agon = gone past
agrief = unkindly, as a **grevance**
agu = ague
al = quite
al-be—it = although
alday = continually
als = also
altercation = controversy
anhanged = hanged
anon = at once
anyght = at night
anoye = annoy
appothe = **carie** chemist, one who sells medicines
aright = rightly
asure = azure
atones = at once
attamed = started, began
atte = at the
attempree = temperate
autorite = authority
auctour = author
aungel = angel
avantour = **boaster, braggart**
aventure = luck, chance
avysion = vision, dream

B

Bad=bade, commanded
bak = back
bane = death, destruction
bar = bore, conducted
battailled = indented like a castle wall
bame = beam, perch
bene = bean, a **trifle**
benedicitee = God bless us, a benediction
benefice = benefice, living
beth = plural of be
betwixe = between
bifel = happened
bifom = before
bigyle = beguile, cheat, trick
biknewe = acknowledged, confessed
biwaille = bewail, lament
biwreye = betray
blithe = merry
bole = bull
bord = table
bour = hall
brast = burst
bren = bran, husk
brend(e) = burnt
briddes = birds
bulte = separate, sift
burned = burnished
byde = wait, vide
byle = bill, beak

C

Cas = case, circumstance, happening
catel = property, possession
centaure = the herb called **centaury**
certes = certainly
chaf = chaff, husk
cherl = rustic, peasant
clappe = to talk
clepe = call
clerk = a scholar, a learned person, a student of philosophy
clomben = climb
closs = closed
close = enclosure
colera = choler (one of the four humours)
commune = common
cote = cottage
countrefete = imitate
cours = journey, voyage
cronycle = chronicle

D

Damoysele = damsel
dar = dare
daun = sir
debonaire = gracious
dede = deed
dede = dead
deel = bit, part
deign = please
desport = amusement, sport
deye = dairy woman
dissymilour = dissembler
divyne = guess
doghtren = daughters
doke = duck
donge = dung
drecched = distressed
dreynt = drowned
dystaf = stick, clef stick, part of spinning wheel, distaff

E

Ech = each
Ech = each
eeris = ears
eet,ete = eat, ate
eke = also
ellebour = hellebore
elles = else, otherwise
endite = compose
engendren = originate
engyned = tortured
ensample = example
entente = intention, motive
equinoxial = celestial equator
er = ere, before
erst = before
eschewed = avoided
ese = ease
estaat = state, condition
evermo = ever more
expown = expound, make clear
.ey = egg
eyle = ail, afflict

F

Faire = fairly, fair
fayn = willingly
felonye = crime
fil = befell, happened
flaugh = past tense of fly fley flew
foond = found
fors = count, heed
forwytying = fore-knowledge
for = against
fro = from
furnetere = **funitory,** the name of a plant
fyr = **fire**
faren = gone, fared
feend = fiend
fer = far
flatour = flatterer
flour = flower

forncast = pre-ordained
forslewthn = lose by idleness
forwoot = foreknows
foul = dirty
fume = vapour
fyn = fine

Gabbe = boast, speak wildly
gape = open the mouth
gentillesse = gentleness, graciousness
gilt = guilt, sin
glade = gladden
grace = good fortune
greve = grove
grote=four penny piece

Habundant = abundant
happe = happen
harrow = a cry for help (interjection)
heeld = held
heere = hear, here
heet = heated
hele = hide
hente = sized

herkneth = harken, listen
hewe = hue, colour
hir selven = herself
holden = esteem, consider
hostelrie = inn, hotel

hoten=command, promise
housbondre=economy
hyder=hither
hym=him

In = inn

Jade = Poor horse
Jape = mockery
Jolif = happy, jolly

Kan = can
keep = notice, take heed
koude = could
kynde =nature, instinct, kind (noun)

Ladde = led
lat = let (v)
lawriol = spurge laurel

G

gan = began
gargat = throat
gesse = guess, suppose

gladsome = gladdening
gon = go
graunt = great, many, much
grone = groan
grym=fierce, grim

H

han = have
hardy = bold
hath = has

heele = health
heeries = hairs
hegge = hedge
hem = them
herbergage = harbourage, accommodation, lodging
hevyness = sadness, sorrow
hir, hire = her, hers
hight = called
hoo-ho-hoold = safe keeping
hostlier = inn-keeper, hotelier
housbonde = husband
howp = whoot
hydous = hideous

I

iniquitee = iniquity, wickedness

J

jangle = chatter, talk idly
jeet =jet

K

katapuce = catapuce
kepe = guard, protect
kyn = cows

L

lak = lack, shortage
latter = later, final
leere = learn

leme = flame
lese = lose
lette = let
levere = rather
lif = dear
list = please, want wish
litel = little
logge = lodging
loken = locked, held fast
lorn = lost
Lust = desire

leoun = lion
leste = hinder
leve = leave
leye = bet
liggen = lie in ambush
lite = little
lith = limb,lies (v)
loggyng = lodging
loove = learning, advice
losengeour = deceiver, flatterer
lyte = little

M

Mad = made
maistow = mayest thou
malencolye = melancholy
mateere = matter
maze = muddled thought
mercy = thanks
mery = merry, cheerful
meschief = trouble
mette = dreamed
ministre = officer
moralite = moral lesson
mordred = murdered
morwenynge = morning
muche = much
murie = merry
Myddel = middle

maister = master
maked = made
maner = kind of, sort of
maugree = in spite of
mente.= meant
mervaille = marvel, wonder
meschaunce = misfortune
messe = mass
meynee = crowd, mob
moot = may
mordre = murder
morwe = morning
moste = must
multiply = increase
myrie = merry
myrthe = mirth

N

Namo = no more
narwe = narrow
nat = not
natureely = naturally
neded = needed
nedes (adv) = needs,
nere = were it not
nones = occasion
noon = none
notabilitee = n notable thing
noys = noise
nyce = foolish
nys = is not

namoore = no more
nas = was not
natheless = nevertheless
ne = not, nor
nedely = necessarily
necessarily neer = nearer
nought = not at all
nonne = nun
norice = nurse
nothyug (adv) = not at all
ny = near
nygard = niggard, mean person

O

Ofter = ofener
oold = old
oother = other
orlogge = clock
outsterte = started out, rushed came out
owene = own

ones = once
oonly = only
orgon = organ
out (interjection) = come out help
outerly = utterly

owle = owl

P

Paramour = lover
parfit = perfect

pardee (interjection) = by god
passe = pass on, surpass

peer = equal
pekke = peck, pick
physik = medicine
plesannce = pleasure, will
pleyn = complain, mourn bewail
poure = poor
powpe = to blow, puff
preeve = proof
prively = secretly, privately
prime = nine O' clock in the morning

pees = peace
peyne = to take pains
pitous = piteous, pitiable
plesen = please
point = detail

poweer = power
preeste = priest
preye = pray
prow = benefit
pyne = tormented

Q

Quelle = kill

quod = said

R

rage = frenzy
real = royal, regal

reccheless = reckless, heedless regardless
reeke = care, mind
rennen = run
repaire = retire
repleet = over full
retor = rhetor, orator
revers = reverse, opposite
roghte = cared
rome = roam
roore = roar

ravysshed = delighted
recche = interpret, reckon head
rede = red, read(v)
reme = realm
rente = income
repleccioun = over eating repletion
report = relate
reulen = govern, control
rewe = regret
roial = royal
roune = ran

S

Saufly = safely
see = sea
sely = silly,simple, innocent
sentence = meaning, judgment
sewe = pursue, follow
seynd = singed, toasted
shende = harm, punish
shoon = shone
shrewe = curse(v)
shul = shall
signification = forewarning
siker = sure
sire = sir
sklendre = slender, frugal
sleen = slay
sly = cunming
sodeyn = sudden
somdel = somewhat
sond = sand
sone = son
soore = sorely
soothfastness = truth
soverayn = sovereign, supreme

secree = secret
seken = seek, search
sente = sent
sette = consider worth
seyn = say
shaltow = shalt thou
sholde = should
shortly = in short
shrihte = shrieked
signe = sign
sik = sick
sikerly = certainly
sith = since
skrike = screech
slepen = sleep
snout = muzzle
solas = comfort, solace
somtyme = occasionally
sondry = sundry, various
sonne = sun
sooth = truth
soothly = truly
sovereynly = especially

sterten = start up
stikke = stick
stonden = stand
strecche = stretch
streyn = strain, compel
substance = ability
suffisaunce = sufficience, satisfaction
suspecioun = suspicion
swerd = sword
swich = such
syngen = sing

steven = voice
sterte = started
stoor = store
streit = narrow
stynte = stop, end
subtiltee = cunning
suffre = allow

sustre = sister
swevene = dream
syn = since

T

taak = take
tarie = wait
terciane = **tertian,** running every third day
thee = prosper
ther-as = where
therewithal = moreover
thinken = think
tho = those

talking = discourse
techen = guide, teach
tespye = to espy
thanne = then
therwith = in addition to
thilke = the same
thise = these
thogh = though
thridde = third

thre = three
thyn = thine
toon,toos = toes
tribulation = sorrow
tyde = time, hour

thritty = thirty
thurgh = through
tiptoon = tiptoes
tome = **turn**
twies = twice

U

Understoden = understood
undren=time before midday
upright = face upwards

undiscreet = **taetless**
unto = in addition to

V

Venym = **posion**
vers = verse
viage = voyage
voys = voice

verray = very
veyn = vain
vileynye = wickedness, evil

W

War = aware
wex = grow
whan = when
what though = although
wheither = whether[3].
whilom = **formerly**
right = person
wilfully = deliberately
witying = knowing
wo = woe
wol = wish, will
wonder = wonderful, strange
wont = accustomed

wende = go
weylawey(interjection) = alas!
whatso = whatever
wheeras = where
whelp = dog
whit = white
wikke = wicked
wise = **manner(n),** wise (adj)
wlatsom = loatheome, hateful
wode = wood
wltestow = wilt thou
woned = lived.

wook = woke
wort = root, cabbage
woot = know
wys = certainly

Y

Yaf = gave
ydoon = done
yere = year
yfounde = found
yis = certainly
yn = in, down
yollen = yelled
ywrite = written
ybeen = been
yeerd = yard
yeve = give
ygon = gone
ymaginacioun = imagination
ynough = enough
ywis = certainly

7.8 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we have concentrated on the study of the text. We have the modern English verse translation together with the Middle English text in the Appendix. We have learnt how to translate passages from the text into modern English prose with the help of the verse translation. We have also tried to understand and interpret the text. The notes and glossary help us in explaining learned allusions and learning the meanings of obscure words. We have noticed the use of learning, allusion and rhetoric in the tale. We have also viewed the tradition of Chaucer criticism and the changing taste of readers and critics of Chaucer. For further studies, we have a short list of suggested reading material. We have considered the poetic style of Chaucer and appreciated the dramatic nature of the narrative.

Check your Progress

1. What are the main themes of NPT?
2. Consider the rhetorical features of the tale. Discuss in particular the similes.
3. Discuss Chaucer's art of characterisation.
4. Write a note on the criticism of Chaucer made by
   (a) Dryden and
   (b) Matthew Arnold.
5. What has been the contribution of the twentieth century to Chaucer criticism?

APPENDICES
I

THE CANTERBURY TALES

Fragment I (Group A)

General Prologue

Here bygynneth the Book of the Tales of Caunterbury.

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halve cours yronne,
And smale foweles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open ye
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages);
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
And specially from every shires ende
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,
The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.
Bifil that in that seson on a day,
In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay
Redy to wenden on my pilgrymage
To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,
At nyght was come into that hostelrye
Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye,
Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle
In felaweshipe, and pilgrimes were they alle,
That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde.
The chambres and the stables weren wyde,
And wel we weren esed atte beste.
And shortly, whan the sonne was to reste,
So hadde I spoken with hem everichon
That I was of hir felaweshipe anon,
And made forward erly for to ryse,
To take oure wey ther as I yow devyse.
But nathelees, whil I have tyme and space,'
Er that I ferther in this tale pace,
Me thynketh it acordaunt to resoun
To telle yow al the condicioun
Of eoh of hem, so as it semed me,
And whiohe they weren, and of what degree,
And eek in what array that they were inne;
And at a knyght than wol I first bigynne.
A KNYGHT ther was, and that a worthy man,
That fro the tyme that he first bigan
To riden out, he loved chivalrie,