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Geoffrey Chaucer

THE GENERAL PROLOGUE TO THE CANTERBURY TALES

AND

THE PARDONER'S PROLOGUE AND TALE

Dr. Neeta Gupta

STRUCTURE

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1. INTRODUCTION

Chaucer (1343-1400) is one of the earliest known great poets to write in English. Best known for his lengthy work *The Canterbury Tales*, he is often referred to as the 'Father of English literature.' Writing in Middle English, Chaucer makes liberal use of Latin and French words too. You may come across many words that are no longer in use in the English language as we know it today such as the word 'ful' used by Chaucer's means 'very' in modern English.



You will find that even the spellings of words differs in Chaucer. Medieval English or Chaucer's English is surely a little difficult to understand at a first glance, yet it does not take away from the delight and pleasure that Chaucer's poetry has to offer and especially so *The Canterbury Tales*.

From *The Canterbury Tales* you have *The General Prologue* in course this year. You are required to read the text in the original. To make the task of reading Chaucer a bit easier it would be advisable to use a good, annotated edition of the prescribed text. If, however, you still feel the need to read a translated version of the same, the best choice would be Nevill Coghill's translation of *The Canterbury Tales*, published by Penguin Books.

The General Prologue is an introduction to Chaucer's very long narrative poem *The Canterbury Tales*. Here Chaucer introduces us to each of the twenty-nine pilgrims who have gathered together at an inn in Southwark to set off on a pilgrimage to Canterbury the next morning. Chaucer himself joins them and becomes the thirtieth pilgrim in the group. The pilgrims are drawn from all walks of life and it has been observed that in *The General Prologue* Chaucer gives us almost a cross section of fourteenth century society. The pilgrim Chaucer takes upon himself the job of describing each pilgrim in the group.

What was society like in Chaucer's times? What were the various professions that people engaged in? What were the socio- economic conditions? Did religion and the Church play a significant role in people's lives? In the analysis of *The General Prologue* these are just some of the issues that are discussed and explained in this Study Material.

2. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Introduce you to Chaucer, the poet, and acquaint you with his varied literary output.
- Help you comprehend the salient features of his poetry with special reference to *The Canterbury Tales*.
- Acquaint you with the socio-historical background of the period.
- Help you understand the important aspects of *The General Prologue* and *The Pardoner's Tale*
- Provide a comprehensive textual analysis of the prescribed text with special emphasis on Chaucer's language.



- Analyze Chaucer's use of various literary devices to delineate his characters who are individualized despite being representative.
- Acquaint you with Chaucer's use of irony and humour and wit as he paints his character portraits.
- Familiarize you with Chaucer's art of story telling through an analysis of *The Pardoner's Tale*.

3. CHAUCER'S LIFE AND WORKS

3.1 Early Years

Chaucer's birth is conjectured to be around the year 1340. Though born and bred in London, Geoffrey Chaucer belonged to a family of wine merchants who can be traced to the town of Ipswich. It is thought that the family was of French origin because of their name Chaucer which in French 'Chaucier' means 'hose-makers.' They were, however, vintners having property in and around London. Both Chaucer's father and his grandfather are known to have served the King at various times performing the duty of collecting the King's customs.

No record survives of the poet's early years and we can only conjecture about how and when Chaucer received the education that fitted him for his career as a courtier and a poet. The first concrete evidence shows him to be already employed as a page in the household of the Countess of Ulster. Chaucer's life as a page would have taught him many things. The polite manners and elaborate etiquette of the gentlefolk would have been observed and learned by him while waiting at the table. Keeping his eyes and ears open he probably picked up many scandalous and comic stories as well. His interest in music can be traced back to these years, but being a literate, he, while listening to the songs and romances, also read them for himself, both in English and French. His remarkable memory for the poems of the continental French poet Machaut, surfaces in *The Book of the Duchess*. It was here that he was given instruction in military training. His life as a page offered him ample opportunity to observe human behavior minutely and probably just like the pilgrim Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales*, he went about his job quite inconspicuously.

3.2 Professional life

Subsequent records show Chaucer serving three different Kings in non-poetic capacity. The amount of tact, diplomacy and adaptability required to have equally good relations with three different monarchs, is anybody's guess and we can form a rough estimate of the kind of



person Chaucer might have been to have succeeded in this difficult job. Records show that he accompanied King Edward on his invasion of France; was a diplomat to the continent trying to establish peaceful relations between France and England; went to Italy in 1372 - a journey which was to influence his literary career; was appointed comptroller of customs in 1374 and was legal guardian to young Edmund Staplegate of Kent and to the heir of the late John Solys. He probably even went to France to negotiate a marriage between the French Princess and Richard II, but was not successful. Chaucer's own marriage was, however, with a certain Phillipa Roet. His marriage was another step towards further advancement in court because Philippa was in direct attendance to the Queen. She was the daughter of Sir Payne Roet, a knight of Hainaut and King of Arms of Guienne in the reign of Edward III.

Having served as comptroller of customs, Chaucer was appointed one of the Justices of Peace for Kent on October 12, 1385, and in 1386 he was elected Knight of the Shire for Kent. It is around this time that we find Chaucer engaged in hectic literary activity since the three of his greatest works have been dated to this period of his life. *Troilus and Criseyde* was written between 1382 and 1385; the *Legend of Good Women* probably in 1385 or 1386 and *The Canterbury Tales* was begun around 1387. It is quite likely that he voluntarily resigned from his duties as a comptroller of customs to devote more time to his writing, for records show that around this time he vacated his office as well as the house over Aldgate. He took up residence in the country. During the latter part of the year 1387, Chaucer's wife passed away, but the poet did not marry again. On July 12, 1389, he was appointed clerk of the King's works. He held the post for two years and since it involved a great amount of risk to life, he relinquished his job on June 17, 1391. The new position he now took up was as subforester of King's Park in Somersetshire.

Around this time however, Chaucer's good fortune seemed to be ebbing slowly. There are records to prove that he borrowed small sums of money and in April 1398, a certain Isabella Buckholt sued him for a debt of £14. But the evidence is not adequate to prove that in the last decade of his life Chaucer was in serious financial difficulties. Moreover, his support at court was strong enough to have any of his petitions granted to him. In October of the year 1398, his petition for a daily butt of wine was granted immediately by King Richard. In 1399, Henry IV usurped King Richard's throne but Chaucer received favours from this new King as well. In December 1399, Chaucer made another change of residence to Westminster Abbey and died in this house on October 25, 1400. He was buried at Westminster Abbey.



3.3 Literary Career

Chaucer began his literary career by translating *Roman de la Rose*, a French composition begun by Guillaume de Lorris and completed by Jean Clopinel. By translating a French work, Chaucer was only following the prevalent fashion but his next work, *The Book of the Duchess*, which was an elegy on the death of Queen Blanche, the wife of John of Gaunt, was his own composition. This was accompanied by three other short poems *Pity*, *Complaint to his Lady*, and *A.B.C.* All these poems were modeled on French ideals of poetry. In the next group of poems, we find Chaucer branching off into narrative verse for the first time. *Life of S. Cecilia* and *Stories of Griselda* and *Constance* show an increasing confidence in the language and also certain touches of humor which were later to form an integral part of Chaucer's poetry.

Twelve Tragedies and *The Complaint of Mars* intervene between the writing of his second great work i.e., *Troilus and Cressida*. Meanwhile he translated *De Consolation Philosophiae* of Boethius. Subsequently *The House of Fame* and *The Parliament of Fowles* followed. Both of these were marriage poems written with a characteristic touch of Chaucerian irony and humour. His next ambitious attempt was *The Legend of Good Women*, but the tale of *Palamon and Arcite* is alluded to in the Prologue to the *Legend* and is perhaps one of Chaucer's finest works. *The Legend of Good Women* was abandoned after he had written nine of the nineteen tales planned. The idea of having a number of tales linked by some device had already taken shape in Chaucer's mind. *The Canterbury Tales*, though left unfinished, were a successful rendering of this same idea. This was his last important work and its writing spread over many years. Chaucer wrote a few other short poems apart from these - *The Former Age*, *Fortune*, *Truth*, *Gentilesse*, *Lak of Stedfastness* are minor poems. Then there are the three ballads which are usually called *The Complaint of Venus*, *the Envoy to Scogan*, *the Envoy to Bukton* and the *Compleynt of Chaucer to his Purse* which was most certainly his last work, complete the long list of his literary achievement.

The Canterbury Tales is undoubtedly Chaucer's most well-known and often read work. With the *General Prologue* in part and with *The Canterbury Tales* overall, Chaucer ushered into the world of poetry, new subjects and new methods of treatment. This was perhaps his greatest achievement because when he began to write, the adventures and romances of the knights and ladies had begun to lose their charm. Chaucer drew upon reality, upon people he met daily and who were familiar figures to everyone because they were English people and not figures drawn from French, Italian or Latin literature. Not only were the subjects new, Chaucer's method of treating them was new as well. He introduced the



conversational tone into English poetry. His easy flowing metre succeeded in removing the monotony and complications that were there earlier in the octosyllabic couplets and long involved stanzas. Chaucer's seven-line stanza and ten or eleven syllabled couplets were refreshing. His gentle humour and seemingly serious but jesting manner makes Chaucer a delight to read. As a teller of tales and as a painter of pen portraits Chaucer remains unsurpassed even today.

3.4 His Poetic Vision

In his prolific poetic career Chaucer's poetic vision took shape gradually and as it grew it became more detailed, sharp and realistic by the time he came to write *The Canterbury Tales*. As Nevill Coghill writes:

He began to notice – but always with apparent good humour – the many self-contradictions between a man's profession and his behaviour; he became aware – one might almost say delightedly ironically aware – of certain blackguardism in humanity. Certainly, there were some blackguards ... but it would seem that for all his awareness of their wickedness he had no real fear they would corrupt the world. They would meet their reward in due course, and he had a fair comic idea of the kind of hell in which some of them would meet it.

This, I think, underlies the cheerfulness of Chaucer's poetical vision of the world; he does not deny the evil in it, on the contrary he singles it out, often enough, and with acuity and relish; but the general good health of society and the general agreement as to the purpose of life, seen with lightest allegory as a pilgrimage, seems to have led him to think that the evils he saw about him could be contained, as the pilgrimage moved along, without too much trouble; he did not share the view of his great contemporary, the author of *Piers Plowman*, that the Day of Anti-Christ was upon them. (p.18).

In *The Canterbury Tales* the readers are constantly subjected to a kind of double vision, which by implication puts things in correct perspective. The attitude of the poet, however, continues to have a tolerance for all human frailties, therefore the satire never ever borders on the invective and the world remains light-hearted.

Because of Chaucer's cheerfully hopeful poetical vision, coupled with frequent touches of humor and irony, *The Canterbury Tales* make for an interesting and delightful reading despite laying bare the corruption rampant in fourteenth century England and exposing the rogues who thronged its streets.



4. CHAUCER'S ENGLAND

You may take one look at Chaucer's poetry and wonder why you are expected to read it? Not only is the English archaic and therefore almost beyond easy comprehension, but you may even think why read a poet at all who lived and wrote almost six centuries ago? What can we have in common with a man from the fourteenth-century? Granted that he was one of the first great poets of the English language, but is that reason enough to worry our heads over the antiquated spellings and the difficult vocabulary that mark Chaucer's poetry? Poetry, which should be pleasant and leisurely reading, is here made laborious and difficult when accompanied by the constant activity of reading footnotes and referring to the glossary to search for meanings. This exercise may be laborious and tedious but it is precisely one of the very important reasons for reading Chaucer as it enables us to see how the English language developed. There is no end to the delight that Chaucer's poetry brings once we get used to his language. In *The Canterbury Tales*, especially so *The General Prologue*, he never ceases to amaze with his endless variety, his humour, his deft use of the couplet, his richly creative picture of fourteenth century England and his in-depth understanding of human nature..

As a result of the Norman Conquest, French became the language of law and administration in thirteenth century. English gradually lost its hold and prestige. Of course, it was still the spoken language but was less used for educational purposes. Gradually it lost even the standard spellings that had evolved in the late Anglo-Saxon times. It came to be written more phonetically, according to the local dialects. To this English Chaucer grafted many French words and a few words of Latin and Italian too. His English comes close to Modern English, which begins taking shape around the sixteenth century. But Chaucer takes the credit for being one of the first earliest known and great poets to write in English instead of French and Latin which were supposed to be the language of the literates. Chaucer's contribution to the English language therefore becomes one of the most important reasons for reading his poetry.

Once you do get down to reading Chaucer, and especially *The General Prologue* which is prescribed in your course, you will realize that though not easy it is also not very difficult. As you read on, another fact that emerges is the surprising extent to which you will be able to identify with the satirical spirit of the work. Chaucer may be writing of medieval personages, but the kind of things he criticizes, be it human behaviour or corruption in places high and low, position of women or the increasing materialistic attitude, they seem to be all too familiar. In fact, the strains of feminism that you will see in the Wife's character will amaze



you because of its modern relevance. Chaucer sure was one poet who could look very far ahead of his times to give us one of the earliest feminists. So early in fact that feminism as a movement was still many years away. This is true of the *General Prologue* as well, which is a collection of pen portraits. In these portraits you will find that the atmosphere being reflected is something close to what it is in our present times. The same kind of questioning spirit, skepticism, loss of faith, increase in corruption, greed for material goods, desire for upward mobility, is seen in Chaucer's portraits. By now you must be curious to know more about an Age which is so far back, yet so like our own. We all know that the literature of a period reflects that age and if the work under consideration is a satire, as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is, it becomes necessary for us to find out more about the Age which is thus being exposed and satirized.

4.1 The Middle Ages and 'Change'

The one word that describes the Middle Ages is 'change'. It was a change from the old to the new, from medieval to modern, from feudalism to capitalism, from town to city, from a king by Divine right to a king who proves himself most able. There were many developments taking place; aristocracy was on the decline, the increase in trade had given rise to capitalism, which made for greater social mobility of the classes. Serfdom was being abolished. The spread of schooling had increased the number of literate people, and men now being able to read the Bible on their own, had begun to question the Church. In fact, it was an age of rapid transitions, of achievements as well as disasters.

4.2 The Political Front

On the political front, England's victories began at Crecy, when the English routed the French in the Year 1346. This was followed immediately by the crushing defeat of the Scotch at Neville's Cross and the tempo was kept up when after another ten years, on Sept. 19, 1356, the Black Prince won another brilliant, victory over the French near Poitiers.

These were the years of amazing good fortune for England. It reigned supreme on land as well as sea and the proud Englishman was exposed to the new feelings of nationalism and patriotism. But it was too good to last and too difficult to maintain. The downfall began in the year 1367 when England went to war with Spain. Though the Black Prince won the battle at Najera, yet the victory was fruitless and the war with Spain dragged on for many years incurring heavy losses. By the year 1385, there was such a reversal in the military situation that the threat of the French invasion made the Englishman tremble with fear.



4.3 The Setbacks

While on the one hand the picture of 'Merry England' is associated with Medieval England, with happiness and prosperity all around, on the other hand it was one of the most strife-torn times in the history of the country. Not only were there political setbacks, but there were also ravages of Nature too in the form of disease and pestilence. The most dreaded of these was the Plague or the Black Death, that struck England in the year 1348. Beginning in Dorchester it spread rapidly from one town to another, claiming innumerable lives as it went. As though the loss of lives in the first visitation of this appalling calamity was not enough, it returned to strike three times in the century and swept with it nearly half the population of England.

4.4 The Labour class

At first prices fell sharply because people had forgotten to set much store by material goods. But gradually, the pendulum swung to the other extreme and money once again recovered the purchasing power it had in the former years. The rising prices made the gulf between the rich and the poor even more wide and the worst sufferers were the laborers whose wages had not been increased at all and were now not even enough to help them survive. After the year of the Black Death, the labour class began demanding higher wages, and since there was shortage of hands due to the heavy loss of life in the plague, these labourers got what they demanded. It was with a mind to curb the unreasonable demands of these labourers that in the year 1349, the king issued a proclamation, forbidding the payment of higher wages than had been given before. The next Parliament passed the famous *Statute of Labourers*. Though this statute attempted to fix the wages of the labourers as well as the prices of essential commodities, the cunning tradesmen thwarted the latter aim. The labourers sought ways and means to improve their lot. They disregarded their allegiance to their lord or manor and moved from place to place in search of better wages. Thieving and robbing were on the increase. Discontent grew and spread fast culminating in the famous uprising of 1381, also known as the Peasant's Revolt.

Trade unionism and the labour movements of the later years were foreshadowed in this uprising. For three days England had a bitter taste of the fury of the discontented masses. Many people were massacred. The poor peasants, being denied even the minimum sustenance, attacked the house of the rich in a fit of rage. John of Gaunt's palace was raised to the ground. The king made a show of promise of granting them pardon but once the rebels had returned home he revoked his orders and there followed widespread execution of the rebels all over England. Chaucer's Ploughman in *The General Prologue* is indeed an ideal and not factual portrait of a member of the labouring class.



4.5 The Rising Middle Class

While we see such abject poverty on the one hand, on the other there was a sudden influx of wealth due to growing trade and commerce and due to the plundering brought from the various wars that England won. People apart from the aristocracy or landed gentry, were now becoming rich. The feudal set-up was breaking up thus leading to fluidity in classes and greater social mobility. Now it was not necessary that a serf remain a serf. Trade had brought with it the promise of wealth and the corresponding rise in capitalism gave rise to new standards of living. Chaucer, too, in *The General Prologue* has included various people to represent these rising merchant classes – there is the Shipman, the Five Guildsmen, the Wife of Bath, the Manciple, and the Merchant and so on. But one interesting fact about these people is that they seem to be indulging in a lot of extravagances. As far as the Five Guildsmen are concerned, Chaucer is careful to point out that they are dressed above their station having even their knives tipped with silver thus drawing our attention to a very interesting development of the times. Extravagance in dress and of food had grown to disgusting limits. In fact, the literature of the times is full of humorous and satirical descriptions of the clothes people wore and the food they ate. To control this situation the Parliament issued an ordinance regulating the kind of clothing for all ranks in society and for regulating the diets of certain classes in society. Of course, one need not add that the system did not work and so we find Chaucer's Guildsmen flourishing their silver tipped knives quite brazenly.

4.6 The Ecclesiasts and the Church

Society in Chaucer's times was becoming increasingly materialistic and people did not fail to use dishonest means. The Reeve and Manciple are just two of the many examples from Chaucer's gallery who can illustrate this point. But dishonesty and corruption at the level of the Church had become so rampant that frequently the satirist aimed to bark at this institution of fourteenth century England. Even Chaucer is most critical of the ecclesiastical characters among his pilgrims, and not without reasons. The churchmen who preached a spirit of sacrifice had become greedy and self-seeking. Those who were to be the epitome of discipline, sharing and teaching others to have respect for authority were now themselves showing a complete disregard and contempt of authority. The begging Friars were able to extort money even from the needy; the wicked pardoner cheated the people by selling fraudulent relics (just as Chaucer's Pardoner does). The Monks were harsh landlords and the parish priests were shirkers of duty. Chaucer's poor Parson is an idealized portrait just as the Ploughman was earlier.



4.7 Spread of Literacy

Apart from the rise in commerce there was rapid growth in another direction as well. Literacy was on the rise with a rapid spread of schooling, and it was no longer the privilege of the clerics or clergy only. In the latter half of the fourteenth century, literate laymen were abundant in number. But the shortage of books was keenly felt since printing was not possible. The printing press, which was in a sense, the greatest invention of the age, was still many years away. For the time being, books were circulated in manuscript form and copies were made by hand. It was a tedious and laborious process where scribes were especially employed for the purpose. Often they made mistakes and if a copy was made from a copy, these mistakes were carried further. At times a mistake, even if noticed, was not corrected because it would mean spoiling the looks of a whole page. Thus, an untidy manuscript was far more reliable than one which was absolutely clean and beautiful. This process of copying books by hand thus led to variations in each copy, and today, if we try to reconstruct say Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, it will mean taking about eighty manuscripts into account. We can understand therefore, why books were such priceless possessions in Chaucer's England and were even bequeathed in wills. Speaking of Education it is worth mentioning, the two very important contributions that fourteenth century England made in this direction. The new college system was introduced for the first time in England and the Inns of Court for the study of law were opened where Chaucer is supposed to have studied for a few years.

In *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer puts before us a picture of a society in which medieval ideals were breaking down and as Dudley French writes these ideals "had become so old fashioned that only a few quixotic persons any longer allowed them to interfere with their materialistic purposes." Excitement and apprehension about the coming age, and nostalgia for the passing values are both mingled in *The Canterbury Tales* to make it a true picture of fourteenth century England.

Check Your Progress

1. List some of the rapid transitions that took place in Chaucer's times.
2. Why was Chaucer's England known as 'merry England'?
3. What were the major setbacks that ruined the picture of 'merry England'?
4. How did the increasing materialism affect the Church and the middle class?



5. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE GENERAL PROLOGUE

The plan of *The Canterbury Tales* might have been conceived earlier but was adopted around the year 1386 and the *General Prologue* was probably written in the year 1387. Some of the Tales have been dated till the year 1394 but not later than that and the work as it stands today is still incomplete. Already while writing *The Legend of Good Women*, we see Chaucer trying to link up several stories together. The theme of *The Legend* was however too monotonous for the liking of a man whose distinctive genius was for variety. It is not surprising therefore that the moment Chaucer thought of using a pilgrimage to string together a collection of a variety of stories, he promptly laid aside the writing of *The Legend* and plunged straight ahead into *The Canterbury Tales*.

5.1 The Framework Device

The device of a pilgrimage to link up a collection of tales is part of a general tradition of frame-story or a series of tales enclosed within a narrative. The idea had been used by many writers all over the world and perhaps the earliest example one can find is in the tales of the *Panchtantra* from India. There were several such tales in circulation for example the Spanish *Conde Lucanor* of the Infante Juan Manuel, the *Decameron* of Giovanni Boccaccio to which Chaucer's own idea of a pilgrimage is often traced and the Italian *Novelle* of Giovanni Sercambi, which shows an even greater similarity to *The Canterbury Tales*. There is no concrete evidence to prove that Chaucer possessed any of the above-mentioned works or used them at all for his stories. On the other hand, there is no reason that prevents us from believing that the idea might have come to him as an entirely original one. The sight of pilgrims, travelling along the road to Canterbury, making merry as they went, often accompanied by sounds of bagpipes, must have been a familiar sight to him. Perhaps, as he looked at these merry companies the idea might have come to him to link together his scattered stories. As Pollard says, in this idea he also found 'a peg on which to hang fresh ones by depicting a company of such English travellers and assigning to them such tales as would best suit their characters and professions or raise a laugh by their incongruity' (p. xxxii).

5.2 The Pilgrimage as a Framework Device

The occasion for the Tales is a pilgrimage to the shrine of Thomas a Becket who had been murdered on Dec. 29, 1170, and canonized three years later and had by Chaucer's time, become almost the national saint. The shrine, to which his body was transferred in 1220, was a venerated spot and visited by pilgrims from all walks of life. The popularity of this



pilgrimage had still not waned by Chaucer's time and so we find it becoming an apt subject for his collection of tales. A definite point in time is chosen. The month of April to be exact and the narrative is in first person lending credence to the idea that Chaucer himself had participated in just such a pilgrimage. To pass their time on the way to Canterbury it is decided that each pilgrim (there are thirty in all) will tell two tales, while going to and two while coming from the shrine at Canterbury. If everything had gone according to plan, and if the work had been complete there would have been one hundred and twenty tales in all.

5.3 A Cross-section of Society

We have seen how the device of the pilgrimage to link up a collection of tales is part of a general tradition of a frame story, or a series of tales enclosed within a narrative. But *Canterbury Tales* is different than most of the classical or medieval examples we can find, because here the framework does not remain merely a mechanical device to link the stories. In fact, it is a means of maintaining a smooth flow of action and also of keeping a certain group of people engaged quite naturally in a certain form of entertainment. This ingenious device of the pilgrimage not only creates a happy occasion but also an opportunity for bringing together all sorts of people from various areas of life. Though the group of thirty pilgrims is not schematically representative of English society, yet it covers well enough the main social classes. Only the very rich or the very poor are excluded from the group, otherwise we have a whole gamut of characters. There is a Knight, a Squire and a Yeoman who reflect on the changes in the feudal set-up. The Monk, the Friar and the Prioress are used to expose the corruption in the regular order of the Church. The five Guildsmen i.e., the haberdasher, the carpenter, the weaver, the dyer, and the tapestry maker, accompanied by their Cook and dressed in clothes above their station, flaunting their riches, represent the growing industry and the rising middle-class of Chaucer's England. The daring Shipman brings in the sea, which had opened immense possibilities for trade; the Physician brings in the state of medieval medicine. The Wife of Bath who is a cloth merchant, is once again representative of the expanding trade of the fourteenth century as well as becomes a vehicle for information on the position of women in fourteenth century England. The portraits of the clergy (which form nearly one third of the company) are significant for the tolerance with which Chaucer points out the foibles of the monastic orders in describing the Monk and the Prioress. He is more severe in describing the worldliness of the Friar and openly attacks the corrupt Summoner and the Pardoner. His ideal portraits of the Clerk of Oxford, the Parson, the Knight and the Ploughman, perhaps reflect his own admiration of the basic ideals of earlier medieval society, during these times of changing standards.



5.4 The Pilgrim Chaucer

After a brief introduction, we meet Chaucer the pilgrim, as he rests at the Tabard inn at Southwark, waiting to go on his pilgrimage to Canterbury the next morning. The nine and twenty, ‘sondry folk’ who enter the inn at night are all discovered to be fellow pilgrims. Chaucer having spoken to all of them during a few hours decides to describe them:

*But nathless, while 1 have tyme and space
Er that 1 ferther in this tale pace
Me thynketh it accordaunt to resoun
To telle you al the condicioun
Of each of hem, so it semed me.
And whiche they werne, and of What degree
And eek in what array that they were inne. (Chaucer, Lines: 35-41)*

At the end of the portraits, Chaucer recalls his intention and declares that he has fulfilled it

*Now have 1 toold you soothly, in a clause
The estaat, th’array, the number and eek the cause
Why that assembled was the company. (Chaucer, Lines: 715-17)*

It is interesting to note however, that Chaucer does not keep to the rigid standards he lays down for himself and as if realizing this, he apologizes in the end:

*Also 1 prey you to forgive it me
Al have I not set folk in her degree
Heere in this tale, as that they should stande
My wit is short Ye may well understand. (Lines: 743-47).*

Two things ought to be noted in the lines quoted above. First is Chaucer’s admission of not having followed any set pattern of description, and second the reason he gives for having done so - namely his wit being too short for such a purpose. To take the latter first, even at this stage we can be careful not to take Chaucer at his word. The picture he presents of himself, as Chaucer the pilgrim, is one of a self-effacing, naive, and gullible observer who takes things at face value and reports them as such. He seems to be a simpleton, who approves of whatever he sees. Yet there is much lying beneath the surface of the portraits and the mask is peeled off once we make a distinction between Chaucer the pilgrim and Chaucer



the poet. The poet Chaucer, who is a clever and shrewd observer, is responsible for the deft use of irony, the tongue-in-cheek manner in which the pilgrims are described. For the irony to be more effective and for the sarcasm to be more scathing, it was necessary that Chaucer create a gullible persona for himself who could claim that his wit is short.

5.5 The Plan of *The Canterbury Tales*

At the outset, Chaucer had declared his intention of describing each pilgrim according to a certain set plan. Had he kept to this plan, the *General Prologue* might have been a string of drab, dull monotonous and repetitive portraits. As it happens however, Chaucer deviates markedly and we find no two portraits being painted in the same colours. Variety becomes the guiding principle, not only in the different kinds of people described, but also because no two characters are treated in the same way. No single method of presentation therefore becomes dominant and we have portraits ranging from nine lines to sixty-two lines.

This group of pilgrims decides to pass the time on their long journey to Canterbury by telling tales. Each pilgrim is required to tell two tales while going to and two while coming from Canterbury and the best tale will earn the teller a meal at the expense of the rest of the pilgrims. Pilgrimage and picnic thus go hand in hand for these pilgrims. The element of 'pleye' or 'game' forms an essential part of the tales. Had the initial plan been completed, we would have had 120 tales in all. As the work stands, however, we are left with twenty finished stories, two unfinished ones and two interrupted ones. Not all the pilgrims get a chance to tell their tales but even in its unfinished stage the work includes a vast variety of the art of storytelling. Nearly every type of medieval narrative is included – the romance of chivalry, the allegory, the courtly lay, the fabliau, the beast epic, the story about saint's lives, the mock sermon, and the ethical discourse.

5.6 The Opening Lines

The opening lines of the *General Prologue* celebrate the coming of spring. Though we may feel that this beautiful picture of the April showers and new life all around has been described so for the first time, Chaucer is in fact following a convention. The very phrases and images used here, show a striking parallel to a passage from Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Troiae*. A translation of the same passage further enforces the point:

It was the season when the sun, hastening under the turning circle of the zodiac, had now entered its course under the sign of the Ram, in which the equinox is celebrated, when the days of the beginning of spring are equal in length to the nights; then when the season begins to soothe eager mortals in its clear air, then when as the snows melt,



gently blowing zephyrs wrinkle up the waters; then when fountains gush out into slender jars; then when moistures breathing out from the earth's bosom are raised up within trees and branches to their tops, wherefore seeds leap forth, crops grow, fields become green brightened by flowers of various colours; then when trees put on renewed foliage everywhere; then when the earth is decked with grass, and birds sing, sounding like the cithara in the euphony of sweet harmony." (Bowden, p. 20)

The similarity between the passage quoted above and the opening lines of the *General Prologue*, is amazing. The sun is in the Ram; the sweet zephyrs inspire the tender crops; the new sap or the moisture rises in the trees and leaves infusing them with new warmth and life; even the birds who sing in sweet harmony are mentioned. The repeated use of the word 'when' also seems to be similar in both passages. The difference however lies in the style and the rhetoric. Let us now take a brief look at how Chaucer's description works:

*Whan that April with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendered is the flour
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweet breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tender croppes and the younge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours Y - ronne,
And smale foweles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open eye
So priketh hem nature in her corages,
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
And palmeres for to seken straunge stronds.* (Chaucer, Lines:1-13)

The actual expressions may be similar but what distinguishes Chaucer's passage from other similar descriptions, is the easy flowing verse which seems deceptively artless and effortless. The rhymes of the couplets, instead of constraining the plan of words lend meaning to thought without making the reader feel the skill that has rendered them so. And the concluding couplet establishes the rhetoric of the passage which has worked on a pattern of cause and effect, that *when* certain phenomenon are observed in Nature *then* certain other things take place as a consequence.

The emphasis of the passage is on the renewed life of spring. There is no hint of the famous Chaucerian irony. It is a sheer exultation, on the part of the poet, in the rejuvenating,



vivifying power of Nature. At this point there is no indication that the poet is different from the narrator. The images and symbols used in the passage, all point towards a life reborn from deadness. The April showers have pierced the ground and reached the roots and leaves. The cold dead winter is over and a regenerative power which stirs new life into everything, is felt all around. The wind zephyrs from the south is sweet and the sun, as it begins its new course, is young still. This physical regeneration of Nature has a corresponding effect in man and stirs in him a desire for a spiritual renewal as well thus leading to the idea of a pilgrimage.

It is amazing to note that the first eighteen lines of the *General Prologue* form a single long sentence, barely making any concession to syntactical inversions or other such poetical licences. The opening sentence of *Paradise Lost* has often been compared to the opening sentence of the *General Prologue*. Both are equally confident, equally lengthy, equally demonstrate the mastery of each poet on his craft yet with so much of difference, As Derek Pearsall puts it. “The opening of Milton’s poem is like the launching of a great ship down the slipway, the opening of Chaucer’s is like the imperceptible edging away from shore..” (Pearsall, p. 24). In these eighteen lines, Chaucer brings us a long way from a conventional description of spring-time renewal of Nature to a spiritual renewal in man. At the end of the passage, Nature and super-nature exist in harmony.

5.7 Characterization

John Dryden in his *Preface to the Fables*, observed about Chaucer’s characters in the *Canterbury Tales* that ‘here is God’s plenty.’ Here indeed is God’s plenty! We have almost all social classes being represented here barring the nobility and the paupers. Both would be unlikely members of such a group of pilgrims. The feudal class or the world of chivalry is represented by the Knight, the Squire and the Yeoman; the Clergy is represented in the regular orders as well as the lower orders; the rising middle class, the medical profession, the law, the tradesman, are all represented here.

There is a moral grouping as well, so we have the ideal characters like the Knight, the Parson the Ploughman and the Clerk who are virtuous and beyond reproach. Then we have the lesser mortals with their follies and foibles like the Wife, the Squire or the Prioress and the Franklin. In addition we have the avaricious Miller, the lawyer or the Doctor who loves gold in special. We also have the vicious villains of the piece like the Summoner or the Pardoner who seem to be beyond redemption. What is interesting is that these characters may be representative of a class, a profession or a moral trait or lack of it, but such is Chaucer’s art of characterization that he individualizes each one of them.



At the outset, Chaucer had declared his intention of describing each pilgrim according to a certain set plan. Had he kept to this plan, the *General Prologue* might have been a string of drab, dull, monotonous, and repetitive portraits. As it happens however, Chaucer deviates markedly, and we find no two portraits being painted in same colours. Variety becomes the guiding principle, not only in the different kinds of people described, but also because no two characters are created in the same way. No single method of presentation therefore becomes dominant, and we have portraits ranging from nine lines (the Cook) to sixty-two lines (the Parson). Beginning with a Knight who represents the landed gentry, coming down to the Ploughman who belongs to the labouring class, Chaucer gives an impression of describing the pilgrims in a descending social order. The men of profession and the men of trade and commerce come in between. The ecclesiastical portraits are described along with the secular. Yet Chaucer deviates from this ordering too when a group of five rogues is appended to this list. These five men, belonging to different walks of life, however, have one thing in common. They are all rogues of first order and adept at cheating. These five men, belonging to different walks of life different walks of life, however, have one thing in common. They are all rogues of first order and are adept at cheating men and women they came across in their respective areas of work.

Chaucer has presented his characters in groups and here too he does not follow any systematic order. As Derek Pearsall observes:

The general impression of hierarchy and the traditional ordering of the estates is further disturbed by the counter pointing against it of other kinds of grouping, suggestive of the multiplicity of ways in which man as a social being can be viewed. The Parson and the Plowman are linked by brotherhood, of both blood and spirit, the Knight, Squire and Yeoman by kinship and service; the five Guildsmen and their Cook by service alone; the Prioress, Monk and Friar by religious profession; the Man of Law and Franklin by common interest; the Summoner and the Pardoner by something probably unspeakable (Pearsall, p.58).

This absence of any set pattern in the ordering of the pilgrims is carried over into the description of each one of them, when again Chaucer gleefully breaks all formal standards. Not only does the technique differ from one portrait to another, even within a single portrait there is no ordering of detail. Chaucer describes a person as though his eye is wandering over him. He might notice one detail here, one there. He might be reminded of something by association and would proceed to tell us about it. The descriptions are almost haphazard, and therefore refreshing and more effective. Thus Chaucer brings in a breath of fresh air into the



world of formal portrait-in-words which goes back to classical Antiquity and which had rigid standards. Medieval rhetoricians such as Matthew of Vendome and Geoffrey of Vinsauf wrote treatise on rhetoric in the thirteenth century and gave several models or patterns, as it were, to be followed by the portrait painter. These patterns were so rigid and followed so rigorously that almost nothing was left to the imagination of the reader.

If we approach the *General Prologue* with some knowledge about these set patterns, we can at once note, and with pleasure, how Chaucer deliberately avoids using any systematic methods of portraiture. His method is the absence of all method. His ordering of detail is quite arbitrary. Sometimes he may begin by describing the dress of the person where so much is implied that one can almost see the character through the kind of clothes he wears. For example the Knight's portrait begins with a description of his dress and Chaucer tells us that his '*gipoun*' or tunic, still carries the marks of his armour and his horses are good. We may think this is mere factual information yet if we read between the lines Chaucer has told us much more about the Knight than it seems. The fact that his *gipoun* is still stained with marks of his armour tells us that the Knight has just returned from one of the crusades and has wasted no time at all to go on his pilgrimage. We also come to know that he is not bothered about his external appearance and has therefore not cared to change. Chaucer has been careful about this essential equipment. A lack of means is however not the cause for the Knight's poor appearance. Chaucer is careful to point out that he rides a good horse.

At times the details of dress may come at the end of the portrait almost as an afterthought, and the description may begin with a general comment on the character, for example:

A Monk ther was, a fair for the maistrie. (Chaucer, Line: 165).

A Frere ther was, a wantown and merye (Chaucer, Line: 208)

A Sergeant of the lawe, war and wys (Chaucer, Line: 309).

Sometimes, the portrait may begin with a detail that seems most striking to the narrator, such as:

A Good Wif was ther of Biside Bathe,

But she was som-del deaf, and that was scathe. (Chaucer, Lines: 445-46)

There are times when the narrator is so impressed with the person he is describing that he eulogises about him/her:

With us there was a Doctour of Phisik;

In all this world ne was ther noon hym lik. (Chaucer, Lines: 411-1)



The readers have to be watchful however, because this good impression may not be consistent, and the remaining portrait may prove that the statement was made ironically. On the other hand, the portrait may be consistently good as in the case of the Parson, devoid of any irony whatsoever:

*A good man was ther of religioun,
And was a Poure Persoun of a Toun;
But richie he was of hooly thoght and work;
He was also a lerned man, a clerk.* (Chaucer, Lines: 477-80)

At other times, absolutely unrelated detail may be juxtaposed as for example in the case of the Cook:

*But greet harm was it, as it thoughte me,
That on his shyne a mormal hadde he.
For blackmange, that made he with the beste.* (Chaucer, Lines: 385-7)

Chaucer merely observes and leaves it to us to make the connections. The implications of having a 'mormal' or a running sore would have been very obvious to Chaucer's readers. Thus, while the narrator has merely observed and reported it is the poet who insinuates in the detail that the Cook is a man given to gluttony in both drink and sex.

Thus we see that no two portraits are alike, there is no overtly discernible pattern in any one of them. What might have been a series of monotonous, repetitive descriptions turns out to be a gallery of vivid characters that come alive because of the distinctive genius of Chaucer. Each of the pilgrims who is described is revealed in such sharp and clear details that we feel personally acquainted with him or her as an individual. At the same time we recognize him as a representative not only of a social class but of a type of character that may be recognized in any country and in any age. This accounts for the perennial appeal of the *General Prologue*. Within the space allotted to each character, not a word is wasted, details of physical appearance, dress and equipment, social rank and moral character evoke the whole man or woman by powerful suggestive strokes. The haphazard manner of giving these details is deliberately planned to produce the effect of spontaneity that creates a sense of intimate acquaintance with each pilgrim.

Often readers have wondered whether Chaucer was describing real, actual people in these portraits? Was there a Tabard Inn at Southwark in Chaucer's day? Was it owned by a certain Harry Bailly, as the host in the *Prologue* is named? Was there such a Shipman, Friar, Franklin, and the rest. Was there a real Wife of Bath 'byg in armes'? The questions are



endless and various critics have tried to make connections between fact and fiction. A very interesting study by J.M. Manly, entitled *Some New Light on Chaucer*. (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1926), deals extensively with this aspect of the *Canterbury Tales*.

Yet this desire to find real-life equivalents for Chaucer's pilgrims emphasizes the realistic nature of the portraits. Chaucer might have borrowed ideas from his observations of real people but to think that he actually modelled his pilgrims on real flesh and blood figures, would be carrying matters a bit too far.

5.8 Irony

Another aspect, that needs special mention, is Chaucer's skilful use of irony which is so elusive that it is often missed by an unwatchful reader. Chaucer is pulling the mask off the fourteenth-century society, in his own special way. He does not use invective or lampoon as his contemporaries did. He treats his subjects in a tolerant, good-humoured, genial manner, making a consistent, pervasive, and subtle use of an irony which has earned the distinction of being called 'Chaucerian'. The framework of the pilgrimage in which all these worldings are placed, is a constant point of reference and works almost as a springboard for the ironical tone. These men and women, starting off in quest of Divine Love, strangely enough have no place for it in their hearts at this moment. All of them are in some way or other characterized by their attitude towards money. Whether it be an indifference to it as in the case of the four ideal portraits of the Knight, the Clerk, the Parson and the Ploughman, or a desire to acquire it by fair means or foul, as is the case with the rest of them.

Chaucer's clever use of the persona operates as a necessary functional device for the irony. As mentioned earlier, Chaucer, the pilgrim is presented as a naïve, gullible, unsuspecting observer who accepts things at face value. He approves whole heartedly of the Prioress's behaviour and so also of the Monk's disregard for discipline laid down by his orders. He has never seen such another Miller, Reeve, Manciple; there has never been another man so virtuous as the Friar; the Merchant is worthy, the Lawyer was excellent, the Wife of Bath is a 'worthy woman' and so he goes on about all of them. The explicit manifestation of evil in the figures of the Summoner and the Pardoner is however too blatant to befool even a simpleton like this pilgrim Chaucer. In these last two portraits therefore we find a downright condemnation of the wicked ways practised by both. For the rest of the portraits however, Chaucer the Pilgrim goes on observing details and believing whatever he sees, to be good. However, we must not forget that it is the poet Chaucer who is unmasking these worldlings by showing the discrepancy in the profession and action of each one of them. The Monk may prove to be a good master, but the moment we remember his placing in life, all the qualities



which the pilgrim Chaucer approves in him, now prove to be misplaced. The same applies to the Prioress, to the Lawyer, to the Physician and almost all the rest of them. At times the poet Chaucer creeps in unobtrusively in comments which juxtapose seemingly unrelated things, for example, he says of the Wife of Bath:

*She was a worthy womman al her lyve
Housbondes at chirche dore she hadde fyve* (Chaucer, Lines: 459-60)

What could be the connection between her worthiness and the number of husbands she had had? We are forced to question ourselves and thereby read between the lines. Sometimes a deft twist of meaning is given to the entire portrait by just one line appended to its end. For example, after having described the Physician as unparalleled in the world, Chaucer concludes the sketch thus:

*For gold in phisik is a cordial
Therfore he lovede gold in special.* (Chaucer, Lines: 443-44)

Irony often gives rise to humour, and we cannot help smiling when the pilgrim Chaucer quite innocently comments on the intelligence of the Manciple who could fool the thirty men-of-law for whom he works:

*Now is not that of god a ful fair grace
That swich a lewed mannes wit shal pace
The wisdom of an heepe of lerned men?* (Lines: 573-745)

Certainly we are not expected to believe that the cunningness of the Manciple is a grace of God. The naive narrator may speak approvingly but it is the poet who is making us aware of the sneaky ways of the Manciple. A moral yardstick is surely being applied here and we can catch the irony only if we read between the lines.

The readers are constantly subjected to a kind of double vision which by implication puts things in their correct perspective and we see the pilgrims in their true colours. The attitude of the poet, however, continues to have a tolerance for all human frailties, therefore the satire never even borders on the invective and the world remains cheerful.

5.9 The Debate about the Actual Number of Pilgrims

Before we move on to a discussion of individual pilgrims, I would like to point out two facts in the *General Prologue* that seem inconsistent with the initial plan. The first of these occurs in Line 164 in where Chaucer mentions three priests in attendance on the Prioress. Later when the Host speaks to the Nun's priest, it seems that instead of three there is only one.

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Moreover, if there are three priests then it upsets the whole calculation of ‘*nine and twenty*’ and it becomes instead 31:

Knight, squire, yeoman	3
Franklin	1
Prioress and her chaplain	2
Prioress’s priests	3
Clerk and parson	2
Monk, Friar	2
Summoner, Pardoner	2
Five Guildsmen and their Cook	6
Merchant, Manciple, Shipman	3
Milner, Reeve, Ploughman	3
Wife of Bath	1
Chaucer, the narrator	1

Thus the ‘three’ priests do not fit in this scheme. Therefore, either there is a mistake here or there is a change of plan.

The second inconsistency lies in the difference between the initially stated plan of the tales and the change it later undergoes. In the *General Prologue* the plan is stated quite simply. As the Host tells the company:

*That each of yor, to shorte with your weye
In this viage shal telle tales tweye
To Caunterburyward, I mean it so,
And Homeward he shal tellen othere two,* (Chaucer, Lines: 791-94).

If this plan is to be followed then it clearly implies that each pilgrim will be telling four tales. This means 116 in all if there are twenty-nine pilgrims. If the thirtieth member of the company i.e. Chaucer, also gets his share of tales then it would make it 120 in all. But here too the poet deviates from the plan. Later in the Prologue to the Parson’s tale, the Host tries to persuade him:

*Ne breke there nat oure pley,
For every man save thou hath told his tale,* (Chaucer, Parson’s Prologue Lines 24-25)



If the above statement is to be followed then it would mean that each pilgrim is required to tell only two tales, one while going to Canterbury and other while coming back. The unfinished nature of the tales prevents us from arriving at any conclusion regarding the whole plan. But one fact is clear, that the work, as it stands today, has no two tales allotted to one pilgrim. On the other hand, we do have the extra Canon's Yeoman's Tale. One can say the pilgrim Chaucer does relate two tales: the interrupted tale of Sir Thopas and the prose tale of Melibee. But we must remember that the prose tale of Melibee is told only after the Host disapproves of the tale of Sir Thopas and makes Chaucer leave it unfinished.

With the *General Prologue* in part, and with the *Canterbury Tales* on the whole, Chaucer ushered into the world of poetry, new subjects, and new methods of treatment. This was perhaps his greatest achievement because when he began to write, the adventures and romances of the knights and their ladies, had begun to lose their charm. Chaucer drew upon reality, upon people he met daily and who were familiar figures to everyone because they were English people and not figures drawn from French, Italian or Latin literature. Not only were the subjects new, Chaucer's method of treating them was new too. With him, comes the conversational note, into English poetry. His easy flowing metre succeeded in removing the monotony and complications which were there earlier in the octosyllabic couplets and long involved stanzas. Chaucer's seven-line stanza and the ten or eleven syllabled couplets were refreshing. His gentle humour and seemingly serious but jesting manner makes Chaucer a delight to read. As a teller of stories and as a painter of portrait in words, Chaucer remains unsurpassed even today.

Check Your Progress

1. How does Chaucer link together his collection of stories? What is this device called?
2. Briefly describe the plan that the pilgrims have in mind to pass their time.
3. Why does Chaucer create a gullible persona for himself?
4. Comment on the opening lines of the *General Prologue*.
5. Examine at least two portraits to comment on the techniques used by Chaucer to describe his pilgrims.
6. List a few ways in which Chaucer's irony works.



6. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF *THE GENERAL PROLOGUE*

6.1 The Beginning

6.1.1 The Opening Lines

Lines 1- 18

*When that April with his showers soote
The drought of March hath perced to the roote ...*

.....

*The hooly blissful martir for to seke
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke*

6.1.1.1 Detailed Paraphrase

When April with its sweet showers has pierced the drought of March to the root and every vein of the plants in such liquid or sap that has the power to bring about the flowering of the plants; when the West Wind/ Zephyr, also with its sweet breath has in every wood and field breathed life into the young plants and the young sun has run half its course in the zodiac sign of Aries, and the small birds are making melody, those that sleep all night with their eyes open because Nature prompts them in their hearts to do so, then people/folk long to go on pilgrimages and pilgrims wish to seek foreign shores, to distant shrines, known in various lands; and especially from every shire's end of England, to Canterbury they travel to seek the holy and blessed martyr who had helped them when they were sick.

6.1.1.2 Critical Comment

In these first eighteen lines of the General Prologue, Chaucer has built a very effective case in favour of a pilgrimage. He sets the scene in springtime – month of April to be exact, and structures the passage on a pattern of cause and effect – **when** certain conditions develop in the natural world **then** certain corresponding events take place in people's world. The regenerative power of spring that is felt in Nature and can be seen in the flowering plants and the singing birds, finds its equivalent in a desire in human beings for a regeneration that is not physical but spiritual. The logical sequence is built up in the first few lines using the words 'whan' and 'and' repeatedly, linking various examples to illustrate the pattern of cause and effect. Thus 'when' this happens and this and this too then this also happens the poet seems to be saying.



The long harsh winter is over and so also the deadness associated with it. The sweet showers of the month of April have stirred new life into the natural world. The sap or liquid in the veins of the plants, the flowers, the Westwind, the singing birds all together point to a world which is waking up from a deep winter slumber. The imagery is drawn from Nature quite effortlessly and places emphasis on life being renewed in the natural world. Equally effortless is the rhyming couplet which will be used by the poet in the entire work. The couplet holds the idea in two lines that rhyme and yet carries it over beyond the rhyme at times to include other relevant illustrations.

The sun is called young because it has just begun its journey into the twelve signs of the Zodiac. It is in the first sign of Aries. It is almost as though the sun too has just been reborn. This physical regeneration in the Natural world urges a corresponding spiritual regeneration in the world of people.

The holy blissful martyr is Saint Thomas 'a Beckett whose shrine at Canterbury was a popular spot for pilgrimages.

The first eighteen lines form one long sentence beginning with a cause and ends with a consequence. Whenthen Chaucer has quite skillfully drawn a parallel between physical regeneration in Nature and a metaphorical regeneration in the world of men. (Please refer to Section 5.6 for more details).

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 1 – 18
<i>Whan</i>	when	
<i>Shoures soote</i>	Sweet showers	
<i>droghte</i>	drought	
<i>perced</i>	pierced	
<i>roote</i>	root	
<i>veyne</i>	vein	
<i>Swich liquor</i>	Such liquid or moisture or sap	
<i>Of which vertu</i>	By virtue of which	
<i>Engendered is the</i>	The flower is generated or created	

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Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 1 – 18
<i>flour</i>		
<i>Zephirus</i>	The west wind	
<i>eeke</i>	also	
<i>breeth</i>	breath	
<i>Tendre croppes</i>	Tender/soft shoots of young plants	
<i>Yonge sonne</i>	The sun that has just begun its journey into the zodiac	
<i>Ram</i>	Ram is the sign of Aries that runs from mid-March to mid-April	
<i>Half cours yronne</i>	The sun has run half its course in the sign of Aries or the Ram. This means that the sun is in the second half of its course. i.e., in the month of April	
<i>Smale foweles</i>	Small birds	
<i>Maken melodye</i>	Make music	
<i>Slepen al the nyght</i>	Sleep all night	
<i>Open ye</i>	Open eyes	
<i>Priketh hem</i>	Pricks them or incites them	
<i>Hir corages</i>	Their hearts	
<i>palmeres</i>	pilgrims	
<i>seken</i>	seek	
<i>Straunge strondes</i>	Foreign lands/shores	
<i>Ferne halwes</i>	Distant shrines	
<i>kowthe</i>	known	
<i>Sondry londes</i>	Various /different lands	
<i>Every shire end</i>	Every country's end	



Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 1 – 18
<i>They wende</i>	Make their way	
<i>hooly</i>	holy	
<i>Blissful martir</i>	Blessed martyr (Saint Thomas a Beckett whose shrine is at Canterbury)	
<i>Hem hath holpen</i>	Had helped them	
<i>seeke</i>	sick	

6.1.2 The Narrator Enters

Lines 19 – 34

*Bifil that in that seson n a day
In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay ...*

.....

*And made forward erly for to ryse,
To take oure way ther as yow devyse*

6.1.2.1 Detailed Paraphrase

The first person speaker tells us that it so happened that one night as he lay at the Tabard Inn in Southwark ready to go on his pilgrimage to Canterbury with a very devout spirit, that same night about nine and twenty people came into that hostelry. It was chance that had brought such widely different people together in one group. They were all pilgrims and were also waiting to ride to Canterbury the next morning. The bedrooms and the stables of the Inn were spacious and comfortable and they were all accommodated in the best way. After a short while, when the sun had set, the narrator tells us that he had managed to speak with each one of them so that he was part of their group straightaway. They made an agreement to rise early next day and set off on their way.

6.1.2.2 Critical Comment

In these lines we are introduced to the narrator. We know now that we are going to see the events from the eyes of a first-person speaker. At this stage we can assume that it is the poet Chaucer who joins the group as a pilgrim himself. As the narrative progresses however, we

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realize that it is a persona that the poet has created for himself. The persona is that of a naïve and gullible observer, diametrically opposite to the discerning and skillful poet who has created him. The narrator is a sociable person because in the span of one single night he is able to mingle well with the group and becomes a part of it. He makes it amply clear to us that from now on he is going to narrate the events as they take place.

In the above lines we are given the exact location from where the pilgrimage will start-- Southwark which was a popular meeting place for the pilgrims in Chaucer's time. We are also informed about the exact destination to which they are all headed – namely Canterbury. Such vivid and concrete details are part of Chaucer's style. For contemporary listeners/readers it made for authenticity and makes it easier for us today to imagine the geographical context.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 19 – 34
<i>Bifil</i>	It so happened	
<i>Southwerk</i>	The district in London just south of London bridge on river Thames. Chaucer provides a concrete detail here with which his contemporary readers would be all too familiar.	
<i>Tabard</i>	A short armorial coat often embroidered. The inn bears this name and probably has a sign outside with a tabard on it.	
<i>wenden</i>	To go	
<i>As I lay</i>	While I was there	
<i>Ful devout corage</i>	With very devout spirit; [Chaucer is implying that he is a true pilgrim].	
<i>hostelrye</i>	inn	
<i>Nyne and twenty</i>	There is much debate about the number of pilgrims. See section 5.9 for details. If we count the pilgrim Chaucer and the Host too, there would be thirty-two pilgrims in all.	
<i>sondry</i>	Various sorts	
<i>By aventure</i>	By chance	
<i>Wolden ryde</i>	Wished to ride	



Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 19 – 34
<i>chambres</i>	bedrooms	
<i>wyde</i>	spacious	
<i>Esed ate beste</i>	Accommodated in the best way	
<i>Sonne was to reste</i>	The sun had set	
<i>Hem everichon</i>	Every one of them	
<i>Felaweship Anon</i>	Their company at once	
<i>Made forward</i>	Made an agreement	
<i>Erly for to ryse</i>	To rise early	
<i>Ther as I yow devyse</i>	In the way that I shall explain/describe to you.	

6.1.3 The Narrator Continues**Lines 35 – 42**

*But nathless, while I have tyme and space
Er that I ferther in this tale pace ...*

.....

*And eek in what array that they were inne;
And at a knight wol I first begin.*

6.1.3.1 Detailed Paraphrase

The first-person narrator continues. Now he lays out a plan. He says that while he has time and space and before he moves any further in this tale he is going to describe these pilgrims. He will tell us how they appeared to him. He will tell us who they were, what was their social rank and also how they were dressed. He decides to begin with the Knight.

6.1.3.2 Critical Comment

The narrator, whom we may also call the pilgrim-Chaucer, has laid out a plan according to which he is going to describe each and every pilgrim. He lists the things he is going to include in the descriptions – who they were, their rank or social standing in life and their clothing. Had the poet Chaucer stuck to the above plan we would have had a series of repetitive and monotonous portraits thus taking away from the interest of the work. As we

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proceed in the *Prologue* further we find that he deviates from his own plan and gives us descriptions that are all different. The above-mentioned details are, however, also included in the portraits. It thus makes for a lot of variety.

A distinction between the poet-Chaucer and the pilgrim-Chaucer has begun to emerge. The pilgrim-Chaucer is genial and friendly and at the same time extremely observant. However, he is not judgmental. He manages to talk to all the pilgrims and find out enough about them to give us a description of each one of them. Behind it all of course is the poet-Chaucer who constantly selects and determines what this persona will observe and how he will present it to the readers. Thus, there is always an underlying meaning in what is stated obviously. All is not what it seems and this makes for the famous Chaucerian irony that is constantly at work in the *General Prologue*. The narrator may innocently believe whatever the pilgrims tell him but each word is carefully chosen by the poet and is filtered through his intelligence. Each detail is included with a purpose and we have to be constantly on our guard to understand the real intent behind the words of the pilgrim Chaucer.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 34 – 42
<i>natheless</i>	nonetheless	
<i>Tyme and space</i>	Time and space	
<i>Me thyneketh</i>	I think	
<i>Acordaunt to resoun</i>	In accord with reason or according to reason	
<i>condicioun</i>	circumstances	
<i>Ech of hem</i>	Each of them	
<i>It semed me</i>	It seemed to me	
<i>Whiche they weren</i>	Who they were	
<i>What degree</i>	What social rank	
<i>eek</i>	also	
<i>array</i>	Clothing or dress	
<i>knyght</i>	knight	



6.2 The Pilgrims

Of the Company of nine and twenty ‘sondry folks’, Chaucer describes twenty-one pilgrims individually, five of them, the Guildsmen, he describes as a group and four of them (five if you count Chaucer himself) he only mentions but does not describe. Though he simply says that he has not put the pilgrims in any order of rank or degree, he does begin at the top with the Knight who is accompanied by his son the Squire and his attendant, the Yeoman.

Muriel Bowden’s *A Commentary on the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, has been referred to extensively in the following analysis of the pilgrims. A detailed reference of the same can be found in the list of suggested books for further reading.

6.2.1 The Knight

Lines 43 – 78

*A Knyght ther was, and that a worthy man
That fro the tyme that he first bigan ...*

.....
*For he was late ycome from his viage,
And wente for to do his pilgrimage .*

6.2.1.1 Detailed Paraphrase

Chaucer begins the portrait by telling us that there was a Knight who was a worthy man who from the time that he first began to ride out, loved chivalry, truth, honour, freedom, and courtesy. He had proved himself worthy in his lord’s wars and had fought wars in such far-off places that no man had gone farther than him. A long list of his expeditions and achievements follows. Chaucer tells us that the Knight had fought in Christian as well as heathen lands and was honoured for his worthiness.

Chaucer tells us that the Knight was ‘worthy’ and wise too. Of his manner he was as meek as a maid. He never spoke a rude word in all his life to any sort of person. He was a truly perfect gentle Knight. But to talk about his clothing Chaucer says that though his horse was good the Knight himself was not merrily dressed. He wore a tunic of coarse cloth all stained by the marks of his armour for he had recently come back from his expedition and came straightaway to do his pilgrimage.



6.2.1.2 Critical Comment

In this group of pilgrims the Knight occupies the highest social status. He is the first member of the Military group in the *Prologue*. He is a professional soldier and represents the world of chivalry. Chaucer, the narrator, begins his description with a general observation on his character as a whole, calling him a 'worthy' man. The word worthy occurs almost five times in the entire portrait and never once is it used ironically. The Knight personifies all the virtues associated with the nobility and has to be seen as an ideal figure. The narrator calls him a 'Verray parfit, gentil knyght' (72). To understand the concept of knighthood and also of chivalry, it is worthwhile to glance back to its origins. As Muriel Bowden explains, it was Pope Urban II who created the Christian ideal of the order of knighthood in 1095 when the first crusade was proclaimed. Men aspired to the high standards set by Urban. Henceforth, the knight was 'to be the champion of the church, the righteous and implacable enemy of the infidel, the compassionate protector of the weak and oppressed, the defender of all Right and Justice --- By the fourteenth century everyone knew how the true knight should conduct himself, and everyone knew how seldom he was encountered in the world of actuality. . .' (Bowden, 45).

Chaucer's Knight is a personification of all the above listed virtues and hence is called perfect by him in so many words. An impressive list of his campaigns (though not put in chronological order) nevertheless shows that the Knight has performed his role of a crusader well. Yet he is not just a soldier. Apart from valour his values include truth, honour, liberty and modesty. This true and perfect knight is also wise and has never shown 'vileyne' to any manner of human being. Occupying the position that he does, he inspires others to follow his example.

His clothing is simple. Further details reveal a lot about his professionalism and sincerity. He does not believe in ostentation unlike many other pilgrims Chaucer describes subsequently. The marks of his armour on his tunic reveal that he is an active soldier and at the same time sincere in his religious pursuit of spiritual regeneration. He rides a good horse, which is a necessity of his profession, yet his outward appearance is not smart which could only mean that he does not care for it. Nothing is ornate about him. Moreover, he has lost no time from the moment he returned from the wars, to come for this pilgrimage. In the whole company gathered here, perhaps he is the only one who has the religious object of the pilgrimage uppermost in his mind. He is widely travelled.



It should be noted that in the figure of the Knight Chaucer has completely refrained from satirizing the institution of chivalry which in the fourteenth century, was on its decline and had a very negative side to it. Instead, in the figure of the Knight he gives us an ideal representation of that order. The Knight is perhaps one of the few survivors of the old order.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 43 – 78
<i>worthy</i>	deserving	
<i>fro</i>	from	
<i>Riden out</i>	Ride out, go on campaigns	
<i>chivalrie</i>	chivalry	
<i>trouthe</i>	fidelity	
<i>fredom</i>	generosity	
<i>curteisie</i>	Courteous behaviour	
<i>werre</i>	war	
<i>therto</i>	moreover	
<i>ferre</i>	further	
<i>cristendom</i>	Clothing or dress	
<i>hethenesse</i>	Knight	
<i>Alisaundre</i>	Alexandria (Egypt)	
<i>wonne</i>	won	
<i>Ofte tyme</i>	Many a time	
<i>Bord bigonne</i>	Sat at the head of the table/ at a place of honour	
<i>Aboven alle nacions</i>	Above all nations	
<i>Pruce</i>	Prussia	
<i>Lettow</i>	Lithuania	
<i>reysed</i>	campaigned	

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Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 43 – 78
<i>Ruce</i>	Russia	
<i>So ofte of his degree</i>	So often of his rank	
<i>Gernade</i>	Grenada	
<i>seege</i>	siege	
<i>Hadde he be</i>	Had he been	
<i>Algezir</i>	Algeciras	
<i>Belmarye</i>	Benmarin (Southern Morocco)	
<i>Lyeyes</i>	Ayas in Armenia (modern Turkey)	
<i>Satalye</i>	Attalia	
<i>Grete See</i>	Mediterranean Sea	
<i>armee</i>	Military expeditions	
<i>Mortal batailles</i>	mortal combats/battles fought till death	
<i>Foughten for our feith</i>	Fought for our faith i.e. Christianity	
<i>Tramyssene</i>	Tlemecen (Western Algeria)	
<i>Lystes thries</i>	Tournament thrice	
<i>Ay slayn his foo</i>	Each time slain his foe	
<i>Ilke worthy knyght</i>	Same worthy knight	
<i>somtye</i>	At one time	
<i>Palatye</i>	Balat	
<i>agayn</i>	against	
<i>Everemoore</i>	Evermore/all the time	
<i>Sovereyn prys</i>	Outstanding reputation	



Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 43 – 78
wys	wise	
<i>His port</i>	His behaviour	
<i>Meeke as a mayde</i>	Humble or gentle as a maid	
<i>Vileynye</i>	Discourtesy / rude word	
<i>ne sayde</i>	never spoke	
<i>unto</i>	to	
<i>No maner wight</i>	Any sort of person	
<i>Parfit</i>	perfect	
<i>Tellen yow</i>	Tell you	
<i>hors</i>	horse	
<i>Nat gay</i>	Not gaily	
<i>fustian</i>	Coarse cotton	
<i>Wered a gypon</i>	Wore a tunic	
<i>Bismoterred</i>	stained	
<i>habergeon</i>	armour	
<i>Late ycome</i>	Very recently	
<i>From his viage</i>	From his expedition	
<i>Wente for to doon</i>	Went to do	

6.2.2 The Squire

Lines 79 – 100

*With him ther was his sone, a yong Squier,
A lovyere and a lusty bachelor ...*

.....

*Curteis he was, lowely, and sevysable,
And carf before his fader at the table .*



6.2.2.1 Detailed Paraphrase

Chaucer moves on to the second portrait in the gallery – that of the Squire. He tells us that accompanying the Knight was his young son, the Squire who was a lover and a lively bachelor and the first thing that strikes Chaucer about the appearance of this man is that his locks (hair) were curled so perfectly that it seemed as if they had been pressed in a curler. Chaucer guesses that he must have been around twenty years old. He was of moderate height and wonderfully agile and of great strength. He had been for a time on a cavalry expedition in Flanders, in Artois and in Picardy and he conducted himself well even in this short span of time in the hope that he would stand in his lady's good graces.

Moving on further while noticing another detail about the Squire's appearance, Chaucer tells us that his coat was embroidered as if it were a meadow, full of fresh flowers, white and red. All day he was singing or playing the flute and looked as fresh as is the month of May. He next describes his gown which was short with long and wide sleeves. We are told that the Squire knew how to sit on a horse and could ride it well. He also knew how to compose songs and could joust and dance as well as draw and write. He loved so passionately that at nighttime he slept no more than a nightingale. He was courteous, humble and willing to serve and also carved before his father at the table.

6.2.2.2 Critical Comment

The young Squire is next in line in social hierarchy. He is training to become a Knight but while his father's life is devoted to his religious and military obligations, the young son's life revolves around love. His desire to impress his lady love lies behind all that he does. Thus he can write lyrics, play music and even draw. In fact he is so much in love that he can hardly sleep at night. There is a wide difference between father and son. Where one is sober, mellowed, simple and dignified, the other, the Squire, is gay, high-spirited, fashionably dressed in bright and modish clothes. The simile used by Chaucer describes this young man in a nutshell - he is "as fresh as is the month of May" - a lusty bachelor. The word bachelor had more meaning attached to it than what we understand from it today. As Bowden explains: "when a Squire was ready to graduate to knighthood in the chivalric organization, he was called a "bachelor", and often the term continued in use for a recently made or young knight" (Bowden, p. 75).

The Squire is smart, handsomely dressed, and variously accomplished in singing, dancing, jousting for his lady, writing poetry and so on. His physical description measures up to the description of any hero of the romances in vogue. He is of great strength', having a



proportionate physique, wonderfully agile and worthy to be received in the order of chivalry. The virtue of humility also finds proper manifestation in this bright and gay figure:

*Cuteis he was, lowely, and servysable
And carf biforn his fader at the table.* (Lines: 99-100)

To carve the roast is one of the frequently mentioned obligations of a squire. The art of carving was a much-prized art in the Middle Ages and had various techniques which were difficult to master.

The Squire's Military exploits are nearer home as he would have only recently begun his fighting career.

The only area where one can detect a slight hint of the characteristic Chaucerian irony, is in the superfluities of dress of the Squire as against the simplicity of the Knight. Military sports such as jousting and tournaments had also come under some criticism because of the unnecessary deaths that resulted from them.. Chaucer merely mentions the facts yet the fourteenth century reader, and we with a little knowledge of the age can read much between the lines.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 79 – 100
<i>sone</i>	son	
<i>lovyere</i>	lover	
<i>bachelor</i>	a young man training to become a knight	
<i>lokkes crulle</i>	locks curled	
<i>leyd in presse</i>	laid in the pressing machine	
<i>evene lengthe</i>	average height	
<i>wonderly delyvere</i>	wonderfully agile	
<i>greet strengthe</i>	great strength	
<i>somtyme</i>	sometime	
<i>chyvachie</i>	Cavalry expedition	

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Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 79 – 100
<i>Flaundres, in Artois, and Pycardie</i>	In Flanders, Artois and Picardy – as compared to his father's extensive expeditions, the Squire's exploits have been closer to home - only to France and northern Europe.	
<i>born hym weel</i>	conducted himself well	
<i>So litel space</i>	So little space of time	
<i>Stonden in his lady grace</i>	Stand in his lady's good graces or favour	
<i>embrouded</i>	embroidered	
<i>meede</i>	meadow	
<i>Whyte and reede</i>	White and red	
<i>syngynge</i>	singing	
<i>floytynge</i>	Fluting or playing the flute	
<i>short waswyde</i>	the short coat with long wide sleeves was fashionable at the time	
<i>wel endite</i>	could write lyrics for his songs	
<i>juste and eek daunce</i>	joust and also dance	
<i>weel putreye</i>	draw well	
<i>nyghtertale</i>	Nighttime	
<i>lowely</i>	modest	
<i>servysable</i>	Willing to serve	
<i>carf</i>	carved -- Being in the service of his father he performed the duty of carving the meat before him	
<i>fader</i>	father	



6.2.3 The Yeoman

Lines 101 – 117

*A Yeman hadde he and servantz namo
At that tyme, for hym liste so, ...*

.....

*An horn he bar, the bawdryk was of grene
A forster was he, smoothly, as I gesse .*

6.2.3.1 Detailed Paraphrase

The third portrait that completes the Military Group in the pilgrims' gallery is that of the Yeoman. Chaucer tells us that the Knight had a Yeoman and no more servants. In other words, the Yeoman too was in service of the Knight and at that time it pleased him to ride with him in this manner. He was clothed in a coat and hood of green and carried a sheaf of peacock arrows under his belt very properly. He knew well how to take care of his equipment and none of his arrows fell short of their target because of drooping feathers. In his hand he carried a mighty bow. His hair was closely cropped and he had a brown face. He knew the skills of woodcraft. Upon his arm he wore a bracer or an armguard to protect his arm against the bowstring, and on one side he carried a sword and a shield while on the other an elegant dagger which was well ornamented and as sharp as the point of a spear; he wore a bright silver medal on his breast, representing St. Christopher. He carried a horn and the shoulder strap was green. Chaucer guesses that he must be a forester.

6.2.3.2 Critical Comment

The Yeoman is the second attendant upon the Knight, after the young Squire. In Chaucer's age a yeoman usually meant an attendant or assistant to an official. The modern meaning of small landowner came into use only in the fifteenth century. We are told very little about his physical appearance – only that he has a brown face and closely cropped hair, indicating the outdoor nature of his profession. Rest of the emphasis falls on his equipment and we learn a lot about the yeoman's professional skill thereby. Chaucer seems to be all admiration for this disciplined, and efficient man who could even 'dress his takel yeomanly' (106). With his bow and arrows and the sword the shield and the dagger, he is well equipped not only as a forester or a game keeper but also as a fit attendant to the Knight.

The horn, which was an essential equipment for a forester, is worn by the Yeoman, supported by the 'bawdryk' or belt worn diagonally across the body. The gleaming silver

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image of St. Christopher that he wears was not only the patron saint of foresters but also of all artisan classes, and was supposed to guard against accident.

There is very little satire in this portrait but it recalls an important addition to the variety of arms used in war. The invention of the long bow had revolutionized the English warfare. The long range of this bow had even posed a challenge to the mounted soldiers e.g. the Knights and the Squires. With its help, the soldier on foot could shoot down from a greater distance and could kill even a man mounted on a horse. In fact, the whole hierarchy of the army had been challenged by the introduction of this long bow.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 101 – 117
<i>Servantz namo</i>	Servants no more	
<i>Hym liste ride so</i>	It pleased him to travel in this manner	
<i>cote</i>	coat	
<i>Pecok arwes</i>	Peacock arrows	
<i>Bar ful thriftily</i>	Carried very properly	
<i>Dresse his takel yemanly</i>	Cared for his equipment as a yeoman should	
<i>Arwes drouped noght</i>	Arrows did not fall short	
<i>Fetheres lowe</i>	Drooping feathers	
<i>Baar a mighty bowe</i>	Carried a mighty bow.	
<i>Not heed</i>	Closely cropped hair	
<i>Broun visage</i>	Brown face	
<i>bracer</i>	armguard	
<i>Swerd and a bokeler</i>	Sword and a shield	
<i>Harneised wel</i>	Well mounted	
<i>Christopher</i>	St Christopher was the patron saint of foresters and was supposed to ward off against accidents	
<i>bawdryk</i>	Shoulder strap or belt	



Check Your Progress

1. Why do you think Chaucer begins describing the pilgrims with the portrait of the Knight.
2. How is the Knight's portrait an ideal one?
3. Describe the Squire's attire in your own words. What does it tell us about him?
4. What are the duties of a yeoman?
5. Why is there not much criticism of the three figures representing the chivalric world here. Give reasons for your answer.

6.2.4 The Prioress

Lines 118 – 162

*Ther was also a Nonne, a Prioress,
That of her smylyng was ful simple and coy; ...*

.....
*On which ther was first write a crowned A,
And after Amor vincit omnia .*

6.2.4.1 Detailed Paraphrase

There was also a nun, says Chaucer, a Prioress, who was very simple and modest, and her greatest oath was by Saint Loy and her name was Madame Eglantine. She sang the divine service very well intoning in her nose in a graceful manner. She also spoke French very well and elegantly in the accent of the school of Stratford at the Bow, because she is not familiar with the French spoken in Paris. At meals she conducted herself well for she had excellent table manners and never let a morsel fall from her lips nor did she wet her fingers in the sauce. She knew well how to carry a morsel to her mouth and be careful that not a drop fell upon her breast. Her greatest pleasure in life was adhering to good manners and etiquette. She wiped her upper lip so clean that she left no greasy marks on her cup after she had drunk from it. She reached out for her food in a very seemly manner. Surely says Chaucer, she was of excellent behaviour and very pleasant and amiable in her manner. She took pains to imitate the manners of the court and to be considered worthy of reverence.



But to speak of her conscience or sensibility, she was so charitable and so compassionate that she would weep if she saw a mouse caught in a trap and if it were dead or bleeding. She had some small dogs that she fed with roasted meat or milk and white bread. But she wept bitterly if one of them were dead or if someone hit it smartly with a stick. Then she was all full of feeling and tender heart.

Her wimple was pleated in a very becoming manner, her nose was well formed, and her eyes were grey as glass, her mouth was very small and soft and red and she also had a fair forehead which Chaucer thinks was almost a span broad and he also adds that she had a good figure.

Her cloak was very well made, and she wore around her arm a string of coral beads with large green gaudies in between and from it hung a brooch of gold with the letter 'A' written on it followed by *Amor Vincet Omnia* "Love conquers all".

6.2.4.2 Critical Comment

The Prioress belongs to the second group of pilgrims, that along with her includes the Monk and the Friar. These three are all members of the regular orders of the Church as opposed to the seculars e.g. the bishops, priests, deacons etc. who are involved in the day-to-day administration of the Church. The Prioress heads a convent and since nuns in Chaucer's day were mostly drawn from the upper classes, it is fitting that her group should follow that of the Knight. Let us now briefly take a look at the making of these nuns to understand better the description of our Prioress.

It was almost always the daughters with no money to their name, that were forced to choose the convent as the only alternative to marriage. There were not many professions available for women of such placing in society. Governesses came into being much later. As they could bring no dowry with them, such gentlewomen could never hope to marry. In fact they were worse off than the women of the lower class who had their invaluable services of physical labour, to offer as their dowry. So there were almost never any women of the lower class choosing the nunnery. Because of their ability for manual labour, these women were never a burden on their family even if they remained unmarried. The dowerless gentlewomen on the other hand could see no other solution to this problem except to step into a convent. Thus we can safely assume that Chaucer's "Lady Prioress" does in fact have an aristocratic background and as we examine her portrait, she proves to fit the bill perfectly. The irony and the underlying criticism in this portrait emerges from the discrepancy that lies between the expectations of a profession and the actual behaviour which falls sadly short of it.



As the pilgrim Chaucer narrates the various attributes of this pretty Prioress, it seems he is approving of her whole-heartedly. But the pointers are there in things never said, assertions not made. So when he tells us approvingly of her smile which was ‘ful symple and coy’ (119), her gentle oath ‘by St. Loy’; her name Madame Eglantyne, her nasal accent, her fetish French etc., we may get taken in and start believing that she is indeed a fine nun. But the moment we remember her placing and profession in life, we are checked in our responses and realize how much Chaucer, the poet, has revealed just by making the pilgrim Chaucer report external facts. Her physical features as well as her name are all characteristic of the courtly heroines.

*Ful semyly hir wympul phynched was .
Hire nose tretys, her eyen greye as glas,
Hir mouth ful smal and therto softe and reed;
But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed;
It was almost a spanne brood I trowe;
For, hardily, she was not undergrowe. (Lines: 151-56).*

On the face of it, Chaucer is merely listing the details of the Prioress’s physical appearance. She is indeed a beautiful lady, with her shapely nose, grey eyes, small soft red mouth, broad forehead and a full figure! but Chaucerian irony is doing its work subtly and unobtrusively even in these lines. When we recall that Madam Eglantyne’s fair broad forehead should, as a rule, have been covered in company; that her full figure which draws a remarkably restrained comment from the pilgrim Chaucer, should have been hidden in her shapeless clothes, we can notice the sharp wit which is constantly satirizing this charming Nun. The satire however is sympathetic and never compromises the dignity of the Prioress.

The description goes on in the same vein and Chaucer tells us of her affected French, her exquisite table manners, her tender heart that bleeds for the animals rather than her fellow beings, her concern with her appearance. Even her oath of St. Loy reminds us that nuns are not supposed to swear. We can see how the humour and the irony can be located in the incongruity between profession and action. The Prioress endeavours to be a lady at all times rather than be a nun. All the physical characteristics which would have been appealing in a lady of aristocratic standing are here misplaced in a prioress of the convent. Nuns were forbidden to keep pets, yet she has ‘smale hounde’ whom she feeds with roasted meat and milk. Though, the inscription on her broach is ‘Amor Vincet Omnia’ meaning ‘Love conquers all’ we do wonder how she interprets it? Is it sacred love or profane. Though

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Chaucer is tolerant of the Prioress's feminine foibles, yet he cannot help an explicit criticism of her conscience that bleeds for a dead mouse but not for the sufferings of her fellow being. Had it not been stated in the first line itself, that this lady is 'a Nonne, a Prioress' (118), we might have been misled into approving of her. This beautiful, charming, romantic, and worldly figure is far removed from what she is supposed to be. It is her small weaknesses however that individualize this Prioress. In this entire description Chaucer is also indirectly criticizing the social and economic circumstances that were forcing such women to take to the Nunnery.

The Prioress is accompanied by another Nun, a chaplain, and three priests. These four pilgrims are just mentioned and not described individually. (Please refer to section 3.0 for the controversy about the number of priests accompanying the Prioress).

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 118 – 162
<i>prioress</i>	The female head of a nunnery	
<i>symple</i>	simple	
<i>coy</i>	modest	
<i>gretteste</i>	greatest	
<i>ooth</i>	oath	
<i>but</i>	only	
<i>By Seinte Loy</i>	By Saint Loy – St. Eloi, Eleggus, patron saint of goldsmiths . The Prioress should not be swearing at all but even when she swears she chooses a very mild oath.	
<i>cleped</i>	called	
<i>Eglentyne</i>	Rose briar. A name suited to the romances	
<i>Ful weel</i>	Very well	
<i>soong</i>	sung	
<i>Entuned in hir nose</i>	Intoned through her nose	
<i>Ful semely</i>	Very becomingly	



Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 118 – 162
<i>Spak ful faire and fetisly</i>	Spoke very well and gracefully	
<i>scole</i>	school	
<i>Stratford ate Bow</i>	Location of a Benedictine convent, at Stratford Bromley by Bow near Middlesex, London.	
<i>Frensh of . . hire unknowne</i>	French of Paris was unknown to her.	
<i>At mete</i>	At table /meals	
<i>Wel ytaught</i>	Well taught	
<i>With alle</i>	indeed	
<i>leet</i>	let	
<i>Ne wette hir fyngres</i>	Nor wet her fingers	
<i>In curteisie was set</i>	Her courtly manners	
<i>Ful muchel hir lest</i>	Very much her pleasure	
<i>coppe</i>	cup	
<i>Ful semely</i>	In a very decorous manner	
<i>After hir mete she raughte</i>	Reached for her food	
<i>sikerly</i>	Surely, certainly	
<i>Greet desport</i>	Full of geniality	
<i>Amyable of port</i>	Amiable in her behavior	
<i>Peyened hir</i>	She took pains	
<i>Countrefete cheere</i>	Imitate the manner	
<i>estatlich</i>	dignified	

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Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 118 – 162
<i>Digne of reverence</i>	To be considered worthy of respect	
<i>conscience</i>	sensibility	
<i>pitous</i>	Full of pity	
<i>Of smale hounds . . . fed</i>	She had small pet dogs whom she fed. The line comes as an anticlimax. The narrator begins to talk of her sensibility, her charity and her pity but instead of all of it being for her fellow human beings it is for her pet dogs.	
<i>Wastel breed</i>	White bread	
<i>Soore wepte</i>	Wept sorely	
<i>Oon of hem</i>	One of them	
<i>Smoot it</i>	Smote/beat it	
<i>Yerde smaerte</i>	Smartly with a stick	
<i>Ful semyly hir Wypul pynched was</i>	Het wimple (covering for the neck) was pleated in a very seemly manner	
<i>Nose tretys</i>	Nose was well formed	
<i>Eyen greye as glas</i>	Eyes gray as glass	
<i>sikerly</i>	Indeed	
<i>A spanne brood, I trowe</i>	It was almost a span broad (about nine inches measuring from the thumb to the little finger) I believe. Chaucer is being critical here because nuns were supposed to cover their forehead and not reveal it in the latest fashion.	
<i>hardily</i>	certainly	
<i>cloke</i>	cloak	
<i>I was war</i>	I was aware	
<i>A peire of bedes</i>	Set of beads	
<i>Gauded al with grene</i>	In a rosary every eleventh bead was of a larger size and was called 'gaudy' Here these gaudies are green in colour. While telling the	



Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 118 – 162
	rosary, the gaudies remind the user to say an 'our Father' or a 'Hail Mary'.	
<i>A brooch of gold</i>	Nuns were not supposed to wear accessories like brooches and rings. Once again Chaucer is being ironical while observing and merely reporting facts.	
<i>Ful sheene</i>	Very bright	
<i>a crowned A</i>	An A with a crown. A could stand for 'Amor'	
<i>Amor vincit omnia</i>	'Love conquers all' The love referred to here is divine love.	
<i>chapeleyne</i>	assistant	
<i>Preestes thre</i>	Three priests	

Check Your Progress

1. What were the reasons for a person like the Prioress joining the nunnery.
2. Bring out the irony in the portrait of the Prioress.
3. How do we know that Chaucer is being critical of the Prioress?

6.2.5 The Monk**Lines 165 – 207**

*A Monk ther was, a fair for the maistrie,
An outridere, that lovede venerie, ...*

.....

*A fat swan loved he best of any roost.
His palfry was as broun as is a berry.*

6.2.5.1 Detailed Paraphrase

There was a Monk says Chaucer, who was an extremely fine one at that and he was an outrider and loved hunting. He was a manly man and thus qualified enough to be an abbot. He had many fine horses in his stable and when he rode people could hear his bridle bells



jingling in the whistling wind as clear and as loud as do the chapel bells. The rule of Saint Maurus or of Saint Benedict was not followed by this Monk because it was old and somewhat strict. He let the old things pass away and followed the more relaxed or liberal customs of modern times. He gave not a plucked hen for the text that says that hunters are not holy men, nor that a monk out of his cloister is like the fish out of water. This same text he considered not worth an oyster and the narrator agrees with him and says his opinion was good. Why should a man study and make himself mad by always poring over books in his cloister or work with his hands and labour as Augustine bid? How shall the world be served? Let Augustine have the hard labour reserved for him. Therefore he was indeed a good horseman: He had greyhounds as swift as birds in flight; Of tracking and hunting the hare was all his pleasure and he would by no means stop himself from doing it.

Continuing in first person Chaucer the narrator observes that the sleeves of the Monk's coat were lined with fur and that too finest in the land and to fasten his hood under his chin he had a very finely crafted pin made of gold in the shape of an elaborate love knot. His head was bald and shone like glass as did his face like it had been rubbed with oil. He was quite plump and his eyes were prominent and rolling in his head and gleamed like a furnace of lead. His boots were supple and his horse in excellent condition. Now certainly we can say that he was a handsome church official. He was not pale as a tormented ghost. A fat swan loved he best of any roast. His horse was a brown as is a berry.

6.2.5.2 Critical Comment

'A Monk there was' begins Chaucer, and we would expect a serious, uninteresting religious old man vowed to a life of poverty, obedience and chastity as was expected of monastic orders. What we see in fact is a flouting of all these vows thus making for an exposure on Chaucer's part of the reality behind the façade. Here we have a figure full of life, who more than his religious duties 'lovede venerie' i.e. hunting – and Chaucer's contemporary readers knew that hunting was forbidden to Monks. He is an 'outrider', a manly man who loves to ride out on his 'brown palfrey' even though his 'old and somdel streit' rules forbade a monk to leave his cloister. This hunting Monk however is a strong virile man, and when he goes riding, men can hear his hunting bells jingling in the distance, clear and loud 'as dooth the chapel belle.' (171)

Notice how in this seemingly innocent description, a reminder of the Monk's correct placing in life has been implied in the reference to the chapel bells and our response is checked and qualified.



The pilgrim Chaucer approves of this Monk who has radical views about the outdated monastic observances:

*This ilke Monk leet olde thynges pace,
And held asier the newe world the space. (Line: 175-6)*

He does not care for the text which says that hunters cannot be holy men or that a monk out of cloister is like a fish out of water. It is a stroke of devastating irony which brings the whole fabric tumbling down when the pilgrim Chaucer agrees with the Monk's views: 'And I seyde his opinioun was good.' (183) and proceeds to argue the case of the Monk. Why should he study and force himself to always be pouring over a book, or toil with his hands and perform physical labour as Saint Austen bid? Why should he stick to his cloister and observe the dull routine of prayer, study, fasting and labour? Ironically, while the pilgrim Chaucer argues in favour of the Monk, the poet Chaucer has listed the actual duties which should be performed by him and so lays bare the discrepancy between profession and action once again. Our Monk loves the outdoor life and instead of having the pale looks of a man always confined indoors and put to rigours of fasting, he is: '*a Lord ful fat and in good poynt;*' (200) He has no qualms about gratifying his taste for fine clothes, choice of food, good horses etc:

*His bootes souple, his hors in greet estaat
Now certainly he was a fair frulaat.
He was not pale, as a forpyned goost:
A fat swan loved he best of any roost. (Line: 203-6)*

He is a perfect picture of a successful man who thoroughly enjoys good life. His expensive clothes and his habits show him to be a worldly man. It should be noted however that this figure changes character when he comes to tell his tale and we have instead a sober, serious man who seems exceedingly bookish. Chaucer chooses to be inconsistent once again.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 165 – 207
<i>A fair for the maistrie</i>	A surprisingly fine one	
<i>outrydere</i>	One who looks after the outlying properties belonging to a large monastic order	
<i>Lovede venerie</i>	Loved hunting	

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Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 165 – 207
<i>To be an abbot able</i>	To be a fine abbot	
<i>deyntee</i>	fine	
<i>rood</i>	rode	
<i>Brydel heere</i>	Bridle hear	
<i>gynglen</i>	jingling	
<i>Kepre of the celle</i>	In charge of the house	
<i>reule</i>	Rule (here monastic rule)	
<i>Seint Maure</i>	Saint Maurus, a disciple of St. Benedict	
<i>Seint Beneit</i>	Saint Benedict who was the founder of Western monasticism	
<i>Somdel streit</i>	Somewhat strict	
<i>This ilke</i>	This same	
<i>Leet old thynges pace</i>	Let old things pass away	
<i>Heeld . . . space</i>	Upheld the freedom of modern times	
<i>yaf</i>	gave	
<i>A pulled hen</i>	A plucked hen that is worthless	
<i>recchelees</i>	careless/heedless (with respect to his duties as a monk)	
<i>cloystre</i>	monastery	
<i>Thilke text</i>	Same text	
<i>swynken</i>	labour	
<i>Austyn bit</i>	St. Augustine bid or commanded that men of religion should do physical labour	
<i>prikasour</i>	A hunter on horseback who follows the path of the hare by its pricks or footprints	



Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 165 – 207
<i>Prikyng and of huntiying</i>	Tracking and hunting	
<i>Was al his lust</i>	Was all his pleasure	
<i>I seigh</i>	I said	
<i>purfled</i>	Lined or trimmed at the edge (another reference to the monk's materialistic nature)	
<i>grys</i>	Grey squirrel fur	
<i>Fyneste of a lond</i>	Finest of the land	
<i>festne</i>	fasten	
<i>ywroght</i>	Wrought or made	
<i>Curious pin</i>	extraordinary	
<i>Love-knotte</i>	Brooch in the shape of a knot	
<i>Gretter ende</i>	larger end	
<i>balled</i>	bald	
<i>Shoon as any glas</i>	Shone as any glass	
<i>enoynt</i>	anoint	
<i>His eyen stepe and rollynge in his heed</i>	His eyes were prominent and rolling in his head	
<i>Stemed as a</i>	Gleamed like a	
<i>Forneys of a leed</i>	Furnace under a cauldron	
<i>Greet estaat</i>	Excellent state or condition	
<i>Fair prelaat</i>	Fine cleric	
<i>Forpynd goost</i>	Starving and suffering ghost	
<i>Palfrey</i>	horse	
<i>Broun as a berye</i>	Brown as a berry	



Check Your Progress

1. What are the rules that Chaucer's Monk is flouting?
2. How do we know that the poet Chaucer is being critical of the Monk even when the pilgrim Chaucer is approving of whatever he does.
3. Why are the details of the Monk's dress important? What do they tell us about him?

6.2.6 The Friar

Lines 208 – 269

*A Frere ther was, a wantowne and a merye,
A lymytour, a ful solempne man. ...*

.....

*As doon the sterres in the frosty night.
This worthy lymytour was cleped Huberd.*

6.2.6.1 Detailed Paraphrase

There was a Friar, a wanton and merry one, a limiter, a very solemn man. In all the four orders of the friars there was no one that knows so much of flattering talk and elegant speech. He had made many a marriage of young women at his own cost. Of his Order he was a noble supporter. He was very well beloved and on good terms with Franklins everywhere in his country, and also with worthy women of the town; for he had the power of confession, as he said himself more than a parish priest, for his Order gave him a license to do so. Very sweetly he heard confession and pleasant was his absolution. He was an easy man to give penance there where he knew he would get a good donation. For to give to a poor order (of friars) is a sign that a man has confessed truly; if a man gave then the friar dared to assert that he knew the man was repentant; For many a man is so hard in his heart that he cannot weep even though he suffers painfully. Therefore, instead of weeping and prayers, one may give silver to the poor friars.

His hood was stuffed full of knives and pins to give to fair wives. And certainly he had a merry voice. He knew well how to sing and play on a rote (string instrument). Of singing ballads he absolutely took the prize. His neck was white as the lily flower'



furthermore he was strong as a champion. He knew the taverns well in every town and also every innkeeper and barmaid better than he knew a leper or a beggarwoman.; for a worthy man as he it was not suitable due to his position to have acquaintance with sick lepers. It is not respectable; it may not be profitable to deal with such poor people. But all with rich people and sellers of victuals. And especially, wherever a profit was to be made, he was courteous and humble.

There was no man anywhere so capable as him. He was the best beggar in his house. And gave a certain fee for his grant that none of his brothers (fellow friars) came to his begging area. For though a widow did not have a shoe, so pleasant was his 'In principio' that he would get a farthing from her before he went. His profit or income (from begging) was much more than the rent he paid to his Order.

He could flirt and frolic as if he were a young puppy. He knew how to help settle disputes on love days for there he was not like a cloistered monk with a threadbare cloak like a poor scholar but he was like a Master of Arts or a pope. His short cloak was woollen and rounded as a bell fresh from the press. In his affectation he lisped somewhat to make his English sweet upon his tongue; his eyes twinkled in his head exactly as do the stars on a frosty night. This worthy friar was called Huberd.

6.2.6.2 Critical Comment

The third member of the first group of ecclesiastical characters is the Friar who besides being worldly, is also wicked. His portrait is the lengthiest in the *Prologue* as it has sixty-two lines to it. In addition, he is one of the most strongly individualized portraits which is at the same time typical. Apart from the Prioress, he is the only other member of the company who is named in the *General Prologue*. Brother Hubert, as he is called by Chaucer, may have had some actual real-life counterpart which could have led Chaucer to name him so early in the work. Apart from this however, the name has not appeared in any records and there is nothing in it to support the Friar's nature as there was in the case of the Prioress.

For a full understanding of this character, we should turn back to history, to the beginnings of the mendicant Orders some two hundred years before Chaucer's time. Bowden explains:

When Chaucer was writing, four great orders of friars had long been established in England. The friars were at first religious men who were dedicated to active service in the world, in contradiction to the monks who were dedicated to cloistered contemplation. The Dominicans, founded by St-Dominic in Spain in the early



thirteenth century, were the first in England, coming there in the year 1221. Because they were organized primarily to combat heresy through preaching, the Dominicans were often called the Preaching Friars;; they were also sometimes called either Black Friars, because of their garb, or Jacobins, because of the situation of a House of theirs in Paris on the Rue St. Jacques. The Fransiscans, founded by St. Frances in Italy about the same time as the Dominicans, came to England in the Year 1224. Because St. Francis placed great emphasis on humility and poverty, the Fransiscans were often called the Minor Friars or Minorities; they were also sometimes called the Grey Friars because of their grab. The third order of friars to come to England was that of the Carmelites, or white Friars, in 1245. The Carmelites laid pretentious claims to having been instituted by Elijah, but their rule was not formulated until the thirteenth century. Finally, the Augustine or Austin Friars established themselves in England sometime after 1256 when they were formally recognized. The Austin Friars said their true founder was the fifth-century, St. Augustine of Hippo. But by the fourteenth century any one of these four orders differed from any other, only in name and dress, for all had come to be dominated, at least in what they professed, by the ideals of St. Francis, and all were classed together as “Mendicants” because they theoretically “begged their support from the world.” (Bowden, p. 119-20)

By Chaucer’s time however, this ‘begging’ which was permitted only as a necessity, became the exceedingly profitable business of the Order leading to much corruption. Chaucer’s Friar is a typical representative in that sense. He is a ‘lymytour’ which in the fourteenth century, signified a begging friar to whom was assigned a certain district or limit within which he had the right, sometimes the sole right, to beg.

The limiters were notorious for their illicit, immoral relation with women and Chaucer comments on this aspect when he says:

He hadde maad ful many a marriage

Of Youge wommen at his owene cost. (Lines: 212-13)

We are not to suppose even for one moment, that the Friar’s intentions behind getting these girls married were disinterested and good. In all probability, these young girls had first been seduced by him and had been his mistresses. Chaucer gives us a detailed account of his seductive powers: his ‘typet’ (long pouch) is always full of the little trinkets that young women love; he can delight them with ‘a murye note’ (235) when he sings as he plays on the ‘rote’ (a small harp), His ‘yeddynges’ or popular songs, were good enough to merit a prize according to the narrator. In addition to this he is a strong, virile man, having the strength of a



champion and a pleasing appearance with a neck as white as the lily. The poet Chaucer here juxtaposes two absolutely dissimilar images -- strength of a champion and the delicateness of a lily, probably with an intention of suggesting the comfortable, luxurious style of the Friar's life. The physical description befits such a lifestyle:

*But he was lyk a maister or a pope;
Of double worstede was his semy cope,
That rounded as a belle out of the presse. (Lines: 261-63)*

His lisping, his sweet English, his harpings and his eyes that twinkled like stars on a frosty night, all serve to attract the women towards him for the evil gratification of his carnal desires.

Our Friar is a frequent visitor to the taverns of every town and knows well each innkeeper and every barmaid better than he knows the poor lepers of his area. Once again the contrast implies a criticism. He certainly does not know or even care to know about the people he should be caring for. In a tongue-in-cheek manner the poet Chaucer makes the narrator agree that such a worthy man as the Friar should not be having any acquaintance with the lepers. Therefore he deals only with the rich and is courteous and humble towards them.

In a characteristic style the narrator praises the begging powers of Brother Hubert. Notice the subtle and pervasive irony.

*Ther was no man nowhere so vertuous.
He was the beste beggere in his hous;
For thogh a wyde hadde noght a sho
So plesaunt was his In Principio,
Yet wolde he have a ferthyng er he wente::
His purchas was wel bettre than his rente. (251-6)*

The seemingly innocent account begins with an assertion of the Friar's virtue. What follows however further exposes this 'virtue' for what it is because the Friar never hesitates to draw out a penny even from a poor widow who has no shoes on her feet. Chaucer, the pilgrim, is all praise for his begging abilities in choosing to include this detail the poet Chaucer exposes the wickedness of the deed.

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To increase his earnings, the Friar has found another easy way out. He takes money from the penitent in order to absolve them of their sins:

*For many a man so harde is of his herte
He may not wepe although him soore smerte,
Therefore in stede of wepyng and preyer
Men moote yeve silver to the poure freres.* (Lines: 229-32)

The apparently logical argument is stood on its head because we cannot grant the initial premise itself. What kind of penitence is it which fails to wring out prayers and tears. Men have found a comfortable way out and the Friars continue to line their own pockets. The poet Chaucer is here exposing the evil practice of such an absolution that had become quite common in his times. This is the first portrait where we see a complete lack of sympathy on Chaucer's part. The Friar comes across as a complete scoundrel. Yet the poet's vision is too humane to condemn him outright. We get a glimpse of it in the vivid and individualizing detail of his eyes that twinkle like stars on a frosty night as the Friar goes about singing his love ditties.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 208 – 269
<i>Wantowne</i>	Lively, playful	
<i>merye</i>	merry	
<i>lymytour</i>	Licensed to beg in a limited area	
<i>solempne</i>	Pompous, impressive	
<i>Orders four</i>	The four orders of the friars: The Franciscans (the Grey Friars), the Dominicans (The Black friars), The Carmelites (White Friars) and the Austin Friars.	
<i>Noon that kan</i>	None that can	
<i>muchel</i>	much	
<i>daliaunce</i>	Flattery that is flirtatious	
<i>His ordre</i>	His order of Friars	
<i>Noble post</i>	Noble pillar	
<i>frankeleyns</i>	Householders, landowners	



Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 208 – 269
<i>contree</i>	district	
<i>Power of confessioun</i>	The Friar claimed to have been given the power to hear people's confession and absolve them of their sins	
<i>Moore than a curat</i>	More than a parish priest	
<i>He was licenciāt</i>	He was licensed	
<i>Herde he</i>	Heard he	
<i>absolucioun</i>	absolution	
<i>Good pitaunce</i>	Good donation	
<i>Povre ordre</i>	The order of the begging friars	
<i>yive</i>	give	
<i>Wel yshrive</i>	Shriven or absolved of sin	
<i>dorste</i>	dared	
<i>Make avaunt</i>	assert	
<i>wiste</i>	knew	
<i>Soore smerte</i>	Deeply pained	
<i>moote</i>	may	
<i>tipet</i>	long pocket in a cape	
<i>Farsed ful</i>	Stuffed full	
<i>Yeven</i>	give	
<i>Murye note</i>	Pleasant voice	
<i>rote</i>	String instrument	
<i>yeddings</i>	Songs, ballads	
<i>Flour-de-lys</i>	lily	
<i>tappestere</i>	barmaid	
<i>lazar</i>	leper	
<i>beggestere</i>	beggar	

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Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 208 – 269
<i>swich</i>	such	
<i>Accorded nat</i>	Accorded not, did not suit him	
<i>facultee</i>	position	
<i>sike</i>	sick	
<i>It is nat honest</i>	It is not respectable	
<i>It may nat avaunce</i>	It may not be advantageous to him	
<i>delen</i>	Deal with	
<i>Swich poraille</i>	Such poor people	
<i>vitaille</i>	food	
<i>Over al, ther as</i>	Above all, wherever	
<i>Lowely of servys</i>	Humble in offering his service	
<i>Certeyne ferme</i>	Certain rent	
<i>graunt</i>	Licence (to beg)	
<i>In his haunt</i>	In his area or territory	
<i>sho</i>	shoe	
<i>ferthing</i>	farthing	
<i>er</i>	Before	
<i>His purchas ... rente</i>	His gain or profit was much more than the rent he paid to his Order	
<i>rage</i>	frolic	
<i>Right a whelp</i>	Like a puppy or young dog	
<i>Love days</i>	Days set aside for out of court settlement of disputes. This was done through arbitration by the clergy.	
<i>Cloisterer</i>	One who lives in a cloister like a monk	
<i>cope</i>	cloak	
<i>maister</i>	Master of Arts	
<i>Double worsted</i>	woollen	



Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 208 – 269
<i>Semi-cope</i>	Half cloak	
<i>Belle out of the presse</i>	Curved out like a bell out of a press or mould	
<i>lipped</i>	Lipped	
<i>wantownesse</i>	Out of affectation	
<i>In his heed aright</i>	In his head certainly	
<i>doon</i>	do	
<i>sterres</i>	stars	
<i>cleped</i>	called	

Check Your Progress

1. What was the job of a friar in Chaucer's times? How did they earn their living?
2. How does Chaucer individualize the portrait?
3. Give two examples from the portrait to bring out Chaucer's underlying criticism of the Friar.
4. How is Chaucer exposing the evil practices of the Church in his times?

6.2.7 The Merchant**Lines 270 – 284**

A Marchant was ther with a forked berd

In mottelee, and hye on horse he sat ...

.....

For sothe he was a worthy man with alle

But sooth to seyn, I not how men hym calle..



6.2.7.1 Detailed Paraphrase

There was a Merchant with a forked beard wearing multi-coloured clothes and he sat proudly on his horse. Upon his head he wore a Flemish beaver hat, and his boots were buckled handsomely and elegantly. He spoke out his opinions quite impressively always pronouncing the increase of his profits. He wanted the sea to be guarded at all costs Between Middleborough and Orwell. He knew well how to deal in foreign exchange. This worthy man, says Chaucer, used his wit very well for no one could make out that he was in debt, he was so dignified in his conduct with his buying and selling and his money lending. Truly he was a worthy man indeed, but to tell the truth Chaucer says, he did not know what he was called.

6.2.7.2 Critical Comment

The Merchant is probably the wealthiest member of the rapidly rising middle class of fourteenth century England. With his portrait begins that group of pilgrims which consists of people who are all characterized by their attitude to material possessions. Though numerous and varied, difficult to classify as one group, they nevertheless share a love for money. The fashionably dressed Merchant, heads the list. Chaucer calls him a 'worthy' man but the word does not carry moral connotations here. The merchant is not worthy in the same sense as the Knight was. The word is intended to imply criticism here for this man who is so blatantly dishonest and devious.

The pilgrim Chaucer does call him 'worthy' but the last line of the portrait almost seems to convey contempt for the merchant class:

But, sooth to seyn, I noot how men hym calle. (Line: 284)

He does not even give him a fictitious name: Of course, the reasons may have been prudent but the offhand manner in which Chaucer says it, implies indifference and contempt more. The omission of his name has been interpreted as deliberate on the poet's part indicating the condescending attitude that the courtly figures had towards the rising middle classes and we must remember that Chaucer was a court poet. The portrait however is a typical representation of a wealthy section of fourteenth century society. Bowden points out another probable reason for omitting his name:

“Medieval merchants, those men engaged in the whole-sale traffic of wool, hides, cloth, iron and tin, were also bankers and moneylenders of the nation. Chaucer might easily have had dealings with such a man and would probably have thought twice



before ridiculing a merchant and then identifying him. Rich and poor, proud and humble, even the king himself, all felt the power of the men who exploited the wealth of England, and now indirectly controlled the national purse strings. Merchants in the later Middle Ages enjoyed a social position which for all that it was tacitly and sometimes impermanently held, exceeded that of many a noble” (Bowden, p. 146).

Chaucer describes the physical attributes first. This man with a forked beard, is dressed in motley i.e. cloth woven with a figured design and often having many colours. He sits high and dignified on his horse wearing a beaver hat on his head with his boots clasped neatly. He is anxious, just as all merchants were, that his trade route, the sea, should be guarded at all costs. Especially the sea between the two posts of “Middelburgh and Orewelle.” His anxiety is all the more relevant because at this particular time there was a constant threat of a French or Flemish invasion.

Defying all civil laws, the Merchant deals in foreign exchange speculation and sells French ‘sheeldes’ (crowns) for a profit. He quite wittily hides the lamentable fact that he is in debt so that he can live in luxury instead of paying the creditors. Quite typical again is his “Chevyssaunce” or lending money for a price. The word however has connotations of dishonesty attached to it because it had now become a custom that the Merchants would charge from the borrower, more money than was actually lent. Their argument was of course valid. Had they invested the same money in a business deal they would have stood to gain and made a profit. Having lent the money they forego this opportunity of earning some more. So why should they not charge interest. We as modern readers are quite accustomed to this system of borrowing and lending on interest, but the fourteenth century condemned it as usury.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 270 – 284
<i>berd</i>	beard	
<i>mottelee</i>	Cloth with multi-colored pattern	
<i>hye</i>	high	
<i>Flaundryssh</i>	Flemish	
<i>bever</i>	beaver	

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Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 270 – 284
<i>clasped</i>	buckled	
<i>fetisly</i>	handsomely	
<i>resons</i>	opinions	
<i>spak</i>	spoke	
<i>sownynge</i>	declaring	
<i>Th'encrees of his wynnyng</i>	The increase of his profits	
<i>He wolde the see. . . Orewelle</i>	He wanted that the sea between Middleburg and Orewelle be guarded against pirates at all costs	
<i>eschaunge</i>	Foreign exchange	
<i>Sheeldes</i>	French coins	
<i>Ful wel his wi bisette</i>	Used his wit/intelligence very well	
<i>Wiste no wight</i>	Knew no person	
<i>dette</i>	debt	
<i>estatly</i>	dignified	
<i>governaunce</i>	conduct	
<i>bargaynes</i>	bargains	
<i>chevyssaunce</i>	Money lending	
<i>sothe</i>	truly	
<i>seyn</i>	say	
<i>noot</i>	Know not	



Check Your Progress

1. What is the difference in the use of the word 'worthy' for the Knight on the one hand and for the Merchant on the other, by Chaucer?
2. Which class of medieval society does the Merchant represent in the gallery of portraits?
3. Is Chaucer critical of this character? Why?

6.2.8 The Clerk

Lines 285 – 308

*A Clerk ther was of Oxenford also,
That unto logyk hadde long ygo. ...*

*Sownynge in moral vertu was his speche
And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teach.*

6.2.8.1 Detailed Paraphrase

There was also a Clerk from Oxford who had begun his study of logic long ago. His horse was as thin as a rake and he too was not very fat I affirm, says the narrator. He looked emaciated and moreover sober. His short overcoat was very threadbare for he had not yet obtained an ecclesiastical living, nor was he worldly enough to take up a secular employment. For he would rather have at the head of his bed, twenty books bound in black or red, of Aristotle and his philosophy, than having rich clothes or a fiddle or a gay psaltery. Even though he was a philosopher he had but little gold in his coffer. Whatever he could get from his friends he spent it all on books and on learning. He prayed diligently for the souls of those that gave him the means to attend the schools. He took most care and paid most attention to his studies. He did not speak one word more than was necessary and that too was said with due respect and formality and was short and quick and full of high content. His speech was consonant with moral virtue and he would gladly learn and happily teach.



6.2.8.2 Critical Comment

The Clerk of ‘Oxenford’ is the second ideal portrait after the Knight’s. The term ‘Clerk’ was applied to any ecclesiastical student and Chaucer’s Clerk has devoted his time to the study of ‘Logic which was the principal subject in the Arts course at all medieval universities. He is poor, thread-bare, being thin himself and mounted on a horse which is as thin as a rake. The reason for his poverty is his inability to have procured a benefice for himself. “The benefice, as contrasted with a secular post, may be defined as an ecclesiastical living, it demanded that the recipient be in orders, particularly in English universities, where the impoverished student was to be maintained by the authorities only until such time as he secured a living” (Bowden, p. 155). Moreover, Chaucer’s Clerk is not worldly enough to earn his living through some secular employment. The last sentence of the portrait does indicate that he takes up teaching or tutoring to supplement his meagre means. Whatever money he earns or receives as gift, he spends on books of which he possesses a few:

Twenty bookes, clad in blak or reed, .

Of Aristotle and his philosophie, (Lines: 294-5)

If you go back to section 1.0 you will remember that books were quite a luxury in fourteenth century England and were considered to be prized possessions valuable enough to be bequeathed in wills. Possessing twenty books does make a man rich-but not in a material sense. The Clerk likes to gratify his taste for books and learning rather than spend on “*robes riche; or fithle, or gay sautrie*” (296).

Though he was a philosopher he had little gold in his coffer -a pun intended on the word philosopher. In Chaucer’s time the word philosopher could also be used for an alchemist who had collectively claimed that they could transform all metals into gold. But certainly our clerk does not have any gold as his appearance itself suggests. He is a man of few words but whenever he speaks it is with decorum and reverence. Though his words are short and quick they are full of meaning “of hy sentence” and “sownynge in moral vertue”. (306-7), The Clerk is grateful to his friends who lend him money, and in return he prays fervently for their souls. He is a true scholar, devoted to learning and sacrifices all material pleasures for knowledge.

Chaucer here gives us an ideal portrait rather than a realistic one. The facts do not bear out the truth of this character. Clerks in Chaucer’s time were notorious for their crimes of violence and would often disturb the peace of their neighbourhood by indulging in fights armed with swords, bucklers, bows, arrows and other such weapons. There is enough



evidence in the records to prove this. But Chaucer chooses to give us a picture of a true philosopher, a true earnest scholar. There is not a hint of irony and the poet Chaucer as well as the pilgrim Chaucer, both approve of him whole-heartedly.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 285 – 308
<i>clerk</i>	A university student	
<i>Oxenford</i>	Oxford	
<i>logyk</i>	logic	
<i>Longe ygo</i>	Long before	
<i>leene</i>	Lean, thin	
<i>Nas right fat</i>	Was not very fat	
<i>I undertake</i>	I swear	
<i>holwe</i>	hollow	
<i>Therto sobrelly</i>	Also soberly	
<i>thredbare</i>	frayed	
<i>Overeste courtepy</i>	Topmost short cloak	
<i>Getten hym</i>	Got him	
<i>No benefice</i>	No living (from the Church)	
<i>To have office</i>	To have secular/administrative employment	
<i>Was levere</i>	Would rather	
<i>Beddes heed</i>	At the head of the bed	
<i>Twenty bookes</i>	Twenty books would cost a lot and the Clerk would love to possess them than any wealth	
<i>Clad in blak or reed</i>	Bound in black or red	
<i>Aristotle</i>	Greek philosopher	
<i>fithle</i>	fiddle	

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Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 285 – 308
<i>sautrye</i>	Psaltery – a string instrument	
<i>Al be . . . litel gold in his cofre</i>	Although he was a philosopher he had little gold in his coffer. There is a pun here on the word philosopher because philosopher's stone was believed to turn whatever it touched into gold but our philosopher possesses no gold at all.	
<i>Freendes hente</i>	Get from his friends	
<i>bisily</i>	Diligently, earnestly	
<i>Wherewith</i>	Wherewithal/ the means	
<i>scoleye</i>	study	
<i>cure</i>	care	
<i>Night o word</i>	Not a word	
<i>Moore than was neede</i>	More than was necessary	
<i>seyd</i>	said	
<i>In forme</i>	Due formality/proper manner	
<i>In reverence</i>	With respect	
<i>quyk</i>	concise	
<i>Ful of hy sentence</i>	Full of elevated content or high meaning]	
<i>Sownynge in</i>	leaning towards	

Check Your Progress

1. Is the Clerk's portrait an ideal one?
2. What is the significance of the fact that the Clerk owns many books.
3. Explain the pun on the word 'philosopher' in lines-----



6.2.9 The Sergeant of the Lawe

Lines 309 – 330

*A Sergeant of the Lawe, war and wys
That often hadde been at the Parvys,*

.....

*Girt with a ceint of silk, with barres smale;
Of his array telle I no lenger tale.*

6.2.9.1 Detailed Paraphrase

A Sergeant of the Law was also there who was wary and prudent and had often been at the Parvis or the porch of St Paul's cathedral, very rich in excellence. He was discreet and dignified – at least he seemed to be so since his words were so wise. He was often a judge in the local courts, by letter of appointment and with full commission. For his knowledge and his high renown (reputation), he had many a fees and robes given to him by his clients. There was nowhere such a great purchaser of land. In fact all was unrestricted possession to him, his purchasing could not be invalidated. There was nowhere so busy a man as he and yet he seemed busier than he was. He knew how to express in legal terms all the cases and decisions that had occurred since the time of King William (almost three hundred years ago). Furthermore, he knew how to draw up a legal document so that no one could find a flaw in his writing. He knew every statute by heart. He rode simply in a multi patterned coat tied with a belt of silk with small stripes. Chaucer stops here saying he can tell us no more about his clothing.

6.2.9.2 Comment

To understand what is meant by a Sergeant of the Law, we will have to go back to history. To quote from Bowden once again:

A man of Law" could be any insignificant lawyer, but a sergeant of the law, was, in Chaucer's time and for nearly five hundred years afterwards, one of a superior order of barristers, men from whom were chosen all the common law judges until 1873 (Bowden, p. 165)

Let us now see whether Chaucer's Sergeant of the Law measures up to the above sketch or not. The first two adjectives used for him are 'war and wys' i.e. wary and prudent, but this time Chaucer does not associate prudence or wisdom, with worthiness, as he had done in the case of the Knight who was wise as well as worthy. Here, the lawyer's prudence borders



more on cunning. His professional career, which is later described in some detail, bears proof to the fact.

‘Parvys’ or ‘parvis’ has been described as “the enclosed area or court in front of a building, especially of a cathedral or a church, in some cases surrounded as a cloister with colonnades or porticoes” as was the parvis of St. Paul’s in London” (Bowden, p. 166-7). Chaucer’s Sergeant is seen often at the Parvys, which means that he is probably often seen at the investiture ceremonies performing the duty of introducing the newly created sergeants. Therefore, this Sergeant of the Law is important enough to be entrusted with this duty.

The Sergeant is discreet and ‘of great reverence’ (312) but Chaucer checks our responses here by inserting a qualification: “*He semed swich, his wordes weren so wise*” (313). Meaning thereby that his words were so wise that he seemed worthy of reverence, but as far as his character is concerned, Chaucer chooses not to answer for it. The clever use of the word ‘semed’ at once implies a difference between appearance and reality. One can easily read between the lines and notice that Chaucer is being quite critical of this man. Yet the Sergeant’s importance is undiminished. He has been a justice in assizes both by ‘patent’ and by pleyne commission’ (315). A brief explanation is needed here. The assizes were “sessions held periodically in each country of England for the purpose of administering civil and criminal justice by judges acting under special commissions. The term “by patente” indicates that the justice ‘in assize’ bore an open letter of appointment from the king, “by pleyne commission” indicates that the justice bore a letter giving him jurisdiction in all kinds of cases.” (Bowden, p. 167).

Chaucer proceeds to tell us that he fully deserves his eminent position for so far as his knowledge of the law is concerned there was nobody who could beat him. He knows of all the cases and judgements right from the time of King William. He knows every statute by heart and there is not a person on earth who can find faults with his writing. Because of his vast knowledge and his success in the cases he fights, he is paid handsomely by his clients. He has often received a full set of clothing (“robes”) as payment for his services. When it comes to his own purchases and investments, he is so shrewd at it that he can even buy a piece of land with defective title (“infect”) and quite smoothly by-pass all restrictions and hold it with a clear title. (in “fee symple”). By buying land he is slowly turning himself into a landowner. In feudal England it was not easy to buy land since it was often given by the king for services rendered and could not be bought and sold. The Sergeant however was crafty enough to buy land that was freehold so that it stayed with him and his heirs forever. He can



turn things to his advantage by writing out the documents in a way that nobody can find fault with them.

The pilgrim Chaucer is impressed by this learned and efficient lawyer who would be much sought after for his services. It goes without saying that he must be a very busy man. The skilful use of the word ‘semed’ points at the ironic undertone of the whole sketch:

Nowher so busy a man as he ther nas

And yet he semed bisier than he was. (Lines; 321-2).

In his characteristic ironic manner Chaucer the poet exposes the pretentious nature of this man who seemed to be busier than he actually was in his pomposity and self-importance .

He is not pompous in his dress though. Chaucer points out that he is dressed... ‘*but hoomly in medlee cote, Girt with a ceint of silk with barres smale*’. (328-329).

The silk belt with its pattern of small checks (barres smale’) is a graphic detail and stands out in the description individualizing the Sergeant.

What marks this particular portrait, is the constant difference between appearance and reality. The discerning poet can see through the façade which has impressed the simpleton of a persona that he is using, the pilgrim Chaucer. The poet’s irony here unmasks the Sergeant of the Law as being a thoroughly materialistic man. Even his success is measured only in material terms. Therefore every statement is double edged. Outwardly Chaucer is praising this busy and successful man. He may even have a grudging respect for his experience and his knowledge and skill. But there is an unmistakable undercurrent of criticism for this lawyer who has no moral yardstick for his own character and for whom making money is his top most priority.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 309 – 330
<i>War and wys</i>	Wary/alert and wise	
<i>Parvys</i>	The porch at St. Paul’s cathedral which was a point of meeting for the lawyers	
<i>Greet reverence</i>	Great dignity	
<i>Semed swich</i>	Seemed such	

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Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 309 – 330
<i>assise</i>	Local courts - assizes	
<i>By patente</i>	By letter of authority from the King	
<i>Pleyn commissioun</i>	Full jurisdiction	
<i>His science</i>	His knowledge	
<i>Fees and robes</i>	Cash and kind	
<i>purchasour</i>	Buyer of land	
<i>Al was fee symple</i>	All was freehold/unrestricted ownership	
<i>bisy</i>	busy	
<i>caas</i>	cases	
<i>doomes</i>	judgements	
<i>Were fall</i>	Had occurred	
<i>therto</i>	moreover	
<i>Endite and make a thyng</i>	Draw up a legal document	
<i>No wight</i>	No one	
<i>Pynche at his writyng</i>	Find a flaw in his writing	
<i>Koude he pleyn by rote</i>	Knew he completely by heart	
<i>hoomly</i>	simply	
<i>Medlee cote</i>	Multi patterned coat	
<i>ceint</i>	belt	
<i>Barres smale</i>	Small stripes	



Check Your Progress

1. What is the profession of the Sergeant of the law?
2. How do we know that the Sergeant is good at his profession?
3. Explain what is meant what Chaucer means when he tells us that he has been a justice in assizes both by 'patent' and by pleyne commission'.
4. Bring out the irony in the following lines: '*Nowher so busy a man as he ther nas/ And yet he semed bisier than he was.*'
5. Describe the Sergeant's physical appearance in your own words.

6.2.10 The Franklin

Lines 331 – 360

A Franklin ther was in his compaignye

Whit was his berd as is the dayesye. ...

.....

A shirreve hadde he been, and a contour

Was nowher swich a worthy vavasour..

6.2.10.1 Detailed Paraphrase

There was a Franklin in the company of the Sergeant of Law and his beard was as white as is a daisy. Of his complexion (temperament) he was cheerful. In the morning he loved to have bread dipped in wine. His habit was always to live happily, for he was the son of (follower of) Epicurus who held the opinion that living for pleasure was the path to happiness. He was a householder and that too a great one. In his district he was like St. Julian who was the patron saint of hospitality. His bread, his ale, was always of the same good quality; nowhere was there a man who was so well stocked with wine.

His house was never without baked pies and the fish and meat was so plentiful that in his house it snowed with food and drink. Of all the dainty food that men could think about according to the various seasons of the year, he made for variety in his midday meal and supper. He had many fat partridges in his coop and many breams and pikes in his fishpond. His cook was in trouble unless his sauce was hot and spicy and his cooking gear or



equipment was ready. His table was always laid out in the hall and stood ready covered with a tablecloth.

He presided as lord (Justice of the Peace) at sessions of the country courts and was also Member of Parliament many times. A dagger and a purse of silk hung from his girdle/belt as white as morning milk. He had been a sheriff and an auditor or accountant of his shire. Nowhere was there such a worthy landowner.

6.2.10.2 Comment

‘A Frankeleyn was in his compaignye.’ (331) - begins Chaucer, and the detail which probably strikes him first of all about this interesting character is his white beard and sanguine complexion:

Whit was his berd as is a dayesye.

Of his complexioun he was sangwyn; (Lines: 332-33).

Imagine a flawlessly white beard around a well-fed, rotund, face! Makes quite an impression, so does the rest of the description about ‘this fun-loving character who because of his delight in life is called Epicurus’s own Son. (Epicurus, we are all aware, was a Greek philosopher who laid down the doctrine that pleasure is the chief good). Chaucer’s use of the word ‘sanguine’ has more implications than we as modern readers can understand. In his times, a sanguine complexion i.e. a ruddy face, was only a part of the meaning of the whole term. As Bowden explains: “the medieval physiologist classified human beings according to four temperaments, determined by the supposed preponderance of one or more fluids (“humours”) in the individual’s body” (Bowden, p. 174). The other three rival humours were *melancholy*, *choleric* and *phlegmatic*. The sanguine complexion meant a combination of the hot and moist humours and produced a large desire and capacity for all kinds of self-indulgence. The first of these pleasure-seeking habits is mentioned by Chaucer, when he observes that the Franklin loves ‘*by the morwe a sop in wyn*’ (335).

The Franklin’s self-gratification, his love for good wine and food make him a very good householder. And he is so famous for his hospitality that he is called the “Saint Julian” of his ‘contree.’ (Saint Julian was the Saint of hospitality). His bread, his wine were always of the best quality, in fact, Chaucer, the pilgrim, is so impressed that he says he has never seen a better stocked man. Chaucer clearly admires his organizational skills and also his concern for quality. His fishponds are well stocked with fish as well as his pens with fowl that are fattened properly. His cook too is always kept on his toes and has to maintain certain standards.



The Franklin's considerable intelligence and skill that goes into maintaining his household are also evident in the various duties he has taken up and performed well. We are informed about the position he occupies in his community. Franklins in fourteenth Century England were wealthy landowners of the gentry class. Chaucer's Franklin, in addition to being wealthy, has even held various important public offices. We are given an impressive list:

*At session ther was he lord and sire;
Ful ofte tyme he was knyght of the shire. . .*

*.....
A shirreve hadd he been, and a countour;
Was nowher such a worthy vavasour. (Lines: 355-360)*

The narrator seems to be thoroughly impressed by this man who has acted as Justice of the Peace, has often been a Member of the Parliament, he has even been a sheriff and a pleader in court ("contour"). All these positions were responsible positions and Chaucer's Franklin seems to have fulfilled his responsibilities quite well. He is not only generous and fun loving but serious and responsible at the same time. Chaucer the narrator, is so overwhelmed that he describes him in hyperbolic terms and ends the description by observing that '*was nowher swich a worthy vavasour*'. (360). 'Vavasour' is a term that was synonymously used with 'franklin' both terms meaning a landowner. Knowing full well by now how the meaning and interpretation of a word is used flexibly when applied to different characters by Chaucer, we must understand that he is not assessing him morally when he calls him 'worthy'. The Franklin's 'worthiness' lies in the way he has been successful in life and in his various offices.

We are told almost nothing of the Franklin's dress. Probably because he was clad in the uninteresting ordinary clothes of a country gentleman, but of course, Chaucer's roving eye does catch the glint of the "*anlaas*" and the beauty of the "*gipser*" both of which hang from the girdle. The Franklin's "*gipser*" or pouch, is of silk and is "*whit as more milk*" thus striking against a gown which was probably of a dark shade. The "*anlaas*" was a large hunting dagger having a broad blade, sharp at both ends, and tapering to a point. Both these items mentioned here were worn either by wealthy civilians, or distinguished men of law. When Chaucer observes that the Franklin has both these items on his person, he is making a further connection between him and the gentry.

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At the end of this description we may feel that for a change Chaucer the poet, has stopped being critical. Here is a portrait of a genial, hospitable man who shares his table with everyone. So far so good. But what about the detailed account of the variety of food prepared, consumed and many times probably thrown away at the house of the Franklin? Chaucer here is obliquely protesting against the sheer wastage implied in the expensive food habits of this man, detailed for the readers.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 331 – 360
<i>Frankleyn</i>	The Franklins were country gentlemen who were landowners. They were free men who held land directly from the King as against the Knights who were given land for military services rendered to the Crown.	
<i>compaignye</i>	Company. The franklin rides in company with the Sergeant at Law who is a purchaser of land thus another landowner	
<i>Whit was his berd</i>	White was his beard	
<i>dayesye</i>	daisy	
<i>complecioun</i>	temperament. There were four complexions: melancholy, choleric, phlegmatic and sanguine. These were determined by a combination of 'humours' (hot, cold, moist and dry coming from the four fluids of the body phlegm, black bile choler (yellow bile) and blood. In	
<i>sangwyn</i>	The sanguine temperament was determined by blood and hence the ruddy face and the generous and fun-loving nature of the Franklin.	
<i>By the morwe</i>	In the morning	
<i>Sop in wyn</i>	Bread soaked in wine	
<i>delit</i>	Delight/pleasure	
<i>wone</i>	habit	
<i>Epicurus</i>	Greek philosopher who advocated a life of pleasure	
<i>Verray parfit</i> <i>felicitee</i>	Truly perfect happiness	
<i>greet</i>	great	



Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 331 – 360
<i>Seint Julian</i>	Saint Julian, a legendary saint famous for his hospitality	
<i>contree</i>	district	
<i>breed</i>	bread	
<i>Always after oon</i>	Always of the same (fine) quality	
<i>envyned</i>	Well stocked with wine	
<i>Bake mete</i>	Baked pies	
<i>Fish and flesssh</i>	Fish and meat	
<i>Mete and drynke</i>	Food and drink	
<i>Alle deytees</i>	All the delicacies	
<i>sondry</i>	various	
<i>Changed he</i>	He made for variety	
<i>muwe</i>	coop	
<i>Breem and many a luce</i>	Bream and many a pike (both words meaning types of fish)	
<i>stuwe</i>	Fish pond	
<i>Poynaunt</i>	tangy	
<i>Redy al his geere</i>	Ready all his equipment	
<i>Table dormant</i>	Opened and laid out not folded and stood up against the wall	
<i>Redy covered</i>	Covered with tablecloth	
<i>sessiouns</i>	Sessions of the district courts	
<i>Knyght of the shire</i>	Member of Parliament for the country	
<i>anlaas</i>	dagger	
<i>Gipser</i>	purse	
<i>Heeng at his girdel</i>	Hung at the belt	
<i>Whit as morne milk</i>	White as morning milk	



Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 331 – 360
shrieve	sheriff	
Contour	Auditor or accountant	
vavasour	landowner	

Check Your Progress

1. Describe the physical appearance of the Franklin in your own words including all the details.
2. What did the profession of a Franklin entail?
3. What is implied by the use of the word 'sangwyn' by Chaucer in his description of the Franklin.
4. To which class does the Franklin belong? Give reasons for your answer.
5. Is Chaucer being at all critical of the Franklin or does he approve of everything about him?

6.2.11 The Five Guildsmen

Lines 361 – 378

*An Haberrdasshere and a Carpenter
A webbe, a Dyere, and a Tapycer ...*

*And goon to vigilies al before
And have a mantel roilliche ybore*

6.2.11.1 Detailed Paraphrase

This is the portrait of the five guildsmen who are grouped together by Chaucer. He tells us that there was a retailer of small goods, a carpenter, a weaver, a dyer and a tapestry maker and they were all clothed in one kind of livery or uniform which was of a serious brotherhood. Their gear or equipment was freshly trimmed, and their knives were not mounted with brass but entirely with silver. Their belts and their purses were wrought very



neatly and well. Each of them seems a dependable citizen to sit on a dais in the guildhall. Every one of them was suitable to be an alderman for the wisdom that he had. For they had enough property and income and also their wives would well agree to it or otherwise certainly they would be to blame. It is very well to be called ‘madame’ and go before everyone to feasts on the eve of the guild festivals and have their veil be carried like a queen.

6.2.11.2 Critical Comment

A Haberdasher, a Carpenter, a Weaver, a Dyer and a Tapestry maker- these five men belonging to different professions, are collectively, referred to as the five guildsmen. They are all dressed in one kind of clothes and belong to one “*greet fraternitee*” (364). A word of explanation is needed before we go any further. Alfred W. Pollard, in his edition of *The Prologue* writes:

The Fraternities or guilds of the fourteenth century, were of two kinds, those whose objects were purely religious and social, and those of which each was restricted to members of a particular craft or trade, for which they made regulations. These five pilgrims apparently also belonged to their craft guilds, but as they were of five different occupations, the fraternity, of which they all wore the living, was obviously only social and religious. (p. 65-66)

Thus these five men, probably belonging to the same parish, therefore wearing the same livery, provide an opportunity for mentioning the various different areas that the rising middle-classes were taking up as profession. The Haberdasher, originally meaning a cloth-merchant, dealt in other different kinds of goods, eg. hats, ribbons, spectacles, caps, threads, pins etc. The carpenter, the weaver, the dyer and the tapestry maker all have their profession described in the name itself. One important fact that the pilgrim Chaucer notes about these guildsmen, is their show of wealth. Not only are their clothes fresh and new and adorned with some kind of decoration, but more importantly, their knives were mounted not with brass but silver:

*Hir knyves were chaped noght with bras,
But al with silver, wroght ful clene and weel.* (Lines: 366-67)

You may recall that in section 1.5 the important relevance of the above statement has already been discussed. The sumptuary laws were laws that were formulated to control the excesses in diet and apparel in Chaucer’s time and these laws forbade any tradesmen or mechanics to carry silver-mounted knives. Hence Chaucer’s guildsmen are breaking a law as well as



flaunting their wealth by having their knives tipped with silver. The rest of their description only emphasises their riches:

*Wel semed ech of hem a fair burgess
To sitten in a yeldehalle, on a deys.
Everich for the wisdom that he kan
Was shaply for to been an alderman, (Lines: 369-372)*

Chaucer the pilgrim here makes a tall claim for these five guildsmen. He finds each of them worthy to sit on a dais in a guild hall, thereby implying that they are all fit to be the Mayor or the Alderman as these were the only people who sat on the dais. The point is re-emphasized in line 371-2 and the reason given is their knowledge and wisdom. If these are not enough for a claim to a political office then the subsequent lines inform us that they possess the necessary property and income:

For catel hadde they ynogh and rente (Line: 373).

The four concluding lines of this group character sketch are surprisingly concerned with the wives of these five guildsmen. It is amusing to note that Chaucer here paints a true picture of the social climbers in any age, at any time, at any place. First of all he says that the wives would readily agree with him when he claims that these five men are worthy of a high political office. If they fail to do so then they are certainly to be blamed. They find it delightful to be addressed as 'Madame' and love to go to the guild festivals ('vigilies') where they precede everyone else and make a royal entrance by having their mantel carried for them. Pretentious and affected, these ladies are aspiring for a much higher place in the social ladder than the one that fourteenth century society intended for them. The satire though mild is unmistakably present. We know only too well that such social climbers can be found in any place at any point in time. The external trappings may differ but the need to boast about their riches and their social position remains the same. Such insights into human nature make for Chaucer's perennial appeal.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 361 – 378
<i>haberdasher</i>	Cloth merchant or retailer of sewing materials or hats and ribbons	
<i>Alle in o lyveree</i>	All in one uniform	
<i>Greet fraternitee</i>	Great fraternity. The fraternity here is social or religious because professionally they do not belong to the same guild. In other words,	



Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 361 – 378
	they are from different professions.	
<i>Gere apiked</i>	Equipment trimmed	
<i>Chaped noght with bras. . . silver</i>	Not trimmed with brass but with silver. This is a sign of their social status due to their newly acquired wealth.	
<i>everydeel</i>	Every bit	
<i>Fair burgeys</i>	Good citizen	
<i>yeldehalle</i>	guildhall	
<i>On a deys</i>	dais	
<i>everich</i>	everyone	
<i>kan</i>	knows	
<i>Was shaply</i>	Was suitable	
<i>Was shapely . . . been an alderman</i>	They were fit enough to be an alderman or the head of a guild	
<i>For catel hadde . . . rente</i>	For they had enough property and income	
<i>Wel assente</i>	Well agree	
<i>ycleped</i>	Be called	
<i>vigilies</i>	Ceremonies held on the eve of feast days	
<i>Al bfore</i>	Before everyone	
<i>mantel</i>	The long veil or train of the gown	
<i>roialliche</i>	royally	
<i>ybore</i>	carried	



Check Your Progress

1. Which class of society do the five Guildsmen represent?
2. What does Chaucer mean when he says that they belonged to one fraternity?
3. Why are the Guildsmen carrying silver tipped knives? What is the significance of this?
4. What is Chaucer criticizing in these five Guildsmen?

6.2.12 The Cook

Lines 379 – 387

*A Cook they had with them for the nones
To boil the chiknes with the marybones. ...*

*.....
That on his shyne a mormal hadde he.
Or blankmanger, that made he with the beste.*

6.2.12.1 Detailed Paraphrase

The Guildsmen have a Cook with them for the occasion, to boil the chickens with their marrow bones, and flavour them with a tangy powder and spices. He knew well how to judge a draught of London ale and he also knew how to roast and boil and broil and fry, make a stew and bake a pie. But it seemed to me says the narrator, that it was a great harm that he had an open sore on his shin. But as far as white pudding goes, he made it the best.

6.2.12.2 Critical Comment

The Cook forms a part of the group of the Five Guildsmen, but interestingly he is singled out and described as an individual. It is another sign of affectation on the part of the Guildsmen, to have a Cook with them:

To boille the chiknes with the marybones,

And poudre-marchant tart and galyngdale. (Lines: 380--81)

By any standards, the Cook is good at his job. He can recognize a draught of London ale which was famous by Chaucer's time. He could roast and boil and broil and fry and could make a good stew ("montreux") as well as bake a pie.



So far, the only disqualifying comment is in the hint that the Cook is probably a strong drinker as he is said to be familiar with London ale- the most potent of the prevalent alcoholic beverages. But what follows after this description further disparages the Cook's character though only by implication. The pilgrim Chaucer, who is obviously impressed by the Cook's skill in the culinary art, feels it to be a pity that such a good Cook should have a 'mormal' a running sore on his shin:

But greet harm was it, as it thoughte me,

That on his shyne a mormal hadde he. (Lines: 385-86).

To understand the wider implications of this observation one needs to go back to an explanation of the word 'mormal'. According to Professor Curry this ulcer is to be identified with *Malum mortuum* of the medieval medical treatise. The causes of this disease are summed up thus: 'uncleanly personal habit' "the eating of melancholic foods and the drinking of strong wines," and "disgraceful association with diseased and filthy women" (Bowden, p. 185-86) Thus what may appear to be a casual observation at first sight, is in fact a devastatingly revealing statement that exposes the Cook to be an unpleasant character. Yet Chaucer ends the sketch by reminding us once again of his skill at his profession:

For blankmanger, that made he with the beste, (Lines: 387).

The recollection of that ugly sore on the Cook's shin is too strong, however, to be replaced by the description of the delicious blancmange pudding that seems to be the Cook's speciality. It is Chaucer's skilful art of characterization that has exposed the Cook's immoral propensities through just one observation.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 379 – 387
<i>For the nones</i>	For the occasion	
<i>chiknes</i>	chickens	
<i>marybones</i>	marrowbones	
<i>Poudre-marchant</i>	Flavouring powders or mixture of spices	
<i>tart</i>	sharp	
<i>galyngale</i>	Similar to ginger	

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Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 379 – 387
<i>knowe</i>	Recognize	
<i>Rooste</i>	roast	
<i>sethe</i>	boil	
<i>broille</i>	broil	
<i>frye</i>	fry	
<i>Maken mortreux</i>	Make stew	
<i>pye</i>	pie	
<i>shyne</i>	shin	
<i>mormal</i>	Open or running sore	
<i>blankmanger</i>	blancmange pudding (<i>blanc</i> means white and <i>mange</i> means dessert. It is made with rice, milk and sugar)	
<i>beste</i>	Best quality	

Check Your Progress

1. Who is the Cook employed by in this company of pilgrims?
2. What does the Cook have on his shin/ What does this tell us about his habits?
3. What is Chaucer's reason behind telling us that the Cook makes the blancmange pudding very well? Why is the image disgusting?

6.2.13 The Shipman

Lines 388 – 410

*A Shipman was ther, wonyne fer by weste;
For aught I woot, he was of Dertemouthe. ...*

.....



And every cryke in Britaigne and in Spayne.

His barge ycleped was the Maudelayne.

6.2.13.1 Detailed Paraphrase

A Shipman was there dwelling far in the West; for all I know, says the narrator, he was from Dartmouth. He rode upon a carthorse as best as he could in a gown of woollen cloth that reached to the knee. He had a dagger hanging on a cord that went about his neck and down under his arm. The hot summer had made his hue all brown and certainly he was a good fellow. He had drawn many a draft of wine while coming from Bordeaux while the merchant slept. He cared little for a clear conscience. If he fought and had the upper hand (with pirates) then he sent his prisoners home by water to every country. But to talk of his skill – he could reckon well or knew well his tides, his currents, and all the dangers around him. He knew well his harbours and the positions of the moon and his navigation and Chaucer the narrator says that there was no one like him from Hull to Cartagena. He was strong and prudent in taking risks; His beard had been shaken by many a storm. He knew all the harbours as they were from Gotland to the cape of Finistree, and every stream in Brittany and in Spain. His ship was called the Maudelayne.

6.2.13.2 Critical Comment

The presence of a Shipman in this group is quite significant because he is a representative of that class of English society that had made England a known and feared rival contender for trade by sea. The sea had been used by England as a trade route since the reign of Edward III. The life of these sea merchants was one of hardihood and daring. Piracy was common on the sea and at any time any trading ship could come under attack of a foreign vessel. Therefore an armed shipman was a common sight for contemporary public. Chaucer's rough and tough Shipman is a typical representative of his class.

Chaucer tells us that his Shipman certainly hails from the West and probably from Dartmouth. The detail individualizes him but at the same time has been included for a specific reason. As Bowden explains "The men of Dartmouth, besides holding from the king a blanket privateering commission, took the lead as freebooters, and were known as such throughout England." (Bowden, p. 193).

The Shipman has a rough and tough exterior. He rides as well as he could on a "rouncy" i.e. a clumsy, heavy-footed horse. Being a sailor he is not familiar with riding techniques which akes for an amusing sight. He is dressed in a short gown of a coarse woollen cloth ("faldyng"); he wears a dagger hanging on a cord ('Laas') across his chest



‘about his nekke, under his arm adown’ (l. 393); as for his skin, it has been scorched brown because of the hot summer sun. From his looks the narrator at once arrives at the conclusion that “*certainly he was a good felawe.*” (395). This observation is very interestingly placed right in the middle of the sketch. So, while it forms a conclusion to the Shipman’s physical description, at the same time it is a prelude to the immoral activities of the man the account of which soon follows. Therefore we are left in no doubt at all that the so called ‘goodness’ of the Shipman is questionable.

The Shipman is not at all averse to pilfering and indulging in petty robberies whenever he gets a chance. The wine of Bordeaux seems to be his weakness for if he has a cargo of it on board he helps himself while the merchant sleeps. His sins do not end here. Chaucer tells us about the manslaughter he indulges in:

*If that he faught, and hadde the hyer hand
By water he senle hem hoom lo every lond.* (Lines: 399-400)

Thus if he has an upper hand in a fight then whoever is taken prisoner is mercilessly thrown into the sea and sent to a watery grave.

The Shipman may be a rogue, but he knows his craft well. What Chaucer admires most in this character is his skill at his profession. The description that follows now eulogises his efficiency as a very able sea-captain. There is no doubt that he is good at his job. He knows well how to reckon tides; he is familiar with all the streams, currents and other dangers that can cause him harm; he knows all the ports, he can navigate well even by the moon, and he is a master at pilotage. In fact the narrator has not seen another Shipman like him from Hulle to Carthage. He is quite hardy as his profession required him to be and also wise enough to undertake many dangerous trips. We are told that his beard had been shaken by many a tempest. He is so experienced that he feels at home in all the harbours be it Gotland, Cape Finistree, or the small inlets (‘crykes’) of Brittany and Spain. Chaucer gives a last individualizing touch when he tells us that this brave Shipman’s barge was called ‘Maudelayne’. Records prove the existence of this name, in the fourteenth century.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 388 – 410
wonynge	dwelling	
Fer by weste	Far in the West	
woot	know	



Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 388 – 410
<i>rouncy</i>	carthorse	
<i>faldyng</i>	Coarse woolen cloth	
<i>laas</i>	cord	
<i>adoun</i>	down	
<i>Hoote somer</i>	Hot summer	
<i>hewe</i>	colour	
<i>broun</i>	brown	
<i>felawe</i>	companion	
<i>Ful many . . . ydrawe</i>	This could mean either that he had carried wine as cargo in his ship or that he had stolen wine while the merchant slept.	
<i>chapman</i>	merchant	
<i>Nyce conscience</i>	Clear conscience	
<i>Hyer hond</i>	Higher hand	
<i>By water . . . lond</i>	He sent them to a watery grave; he drowned them	
<i>craft</i>	skill	
<i>herbrewe</i>	harbour	
<i>moone</i>	moon	
<i>lodemenage</i>	Navigation, pilotage	
<i>Noon swich</i>	None such	
<i>berd</i>	beard	
<i>Alle the havenes</i>	All the harbours	
<i>cryke</i>	Creek or inlet	
<i>barge</i>	Ship	
<i>ycleped</i>	Was called	



Check Your Progress

1. Write a note on the profession of the Shipman.
2. Why is the Shipman armed?
3. How do we know that the Shipman is a rogue?
4. What does Chaucer admire about him?

6.2.14 The Doctor of Physik

Lines 411 – 444

*With us ther was a Doctour of Phisik;
In al this world ne was ther noon hym lik, ...*

.....
*For gold in phisik is a cordial,
Therefore he lovede gold in special.*

6.2.14.1 Detailed Paraphrase

With us, says Chaucer the narrator, there was a Doctor of Medicine and in all this world there was no one could speak of medicine and of surgery like him. He was well versed in astronomy. He watched over his patients many times to find out the astronomically suitable hours for them by use of his scientific and astrological knowledge. He knew well how to calculate the favourable planetary position for his talismans to work on his patients. He knew the cause of every malady, whether it was hot or cold or moist or dry and where it was generated and of which humour. He was a very perfect practitioner. As soon as he knew the cause and the root or source of his patient's sickness, he straightaway gave him his remedy. He had his apothecaries ready to send him drugs and his syrups, for each of them made the other profit – their friendship was not new or recently begun.

The Doctor knew well his Esculapius and Dioscorides and also Rufus, old Hippocrates, Haly and Galen, Serapion, Rhazes and Avicenna, Averroes, John the Damascan and Constantine, Bernard and Gatesden and Gilbertyn. Of his diet he was moderate and it was never in excess but greatly nourishing and digestible. His study of the bible was very little. He was clothed in red and blue, lined with taffeta and with silk; and yet he was judicious in spending. He kept what he earned in the time of plague. Since gold in medicine is good for the heart therefore he loved gold in special.



6.2.14.2 Critical Comment

Chaucer begins this portrait by making an exaggerated claim for the Physician and calling him unparalleled:

*In all this world ne was ther noon hym lik
To speak of phisik and of surgery: (Lines: 412 - 413)*

Modern readers might wonder what is the connection between ‘*phisik* and *surgerye*’ and ‘*astronomye*’ in which this doctor is well grounded? To understand their relevance we will have to take a look at medieval medicine which was still in its infancy. A qualified Doctor even in medieval England had to study medicine for almost about six to seven years before he could be called a doctor. The courses of study were wide and there were various known authorities for it. Chaucer gives us a long list of all medical authorities of his time thus displaying his awareness about it too. He takes one name after another. Chaucer the narrator might have found out about these names from the Doctor but it is Chaucer the poet who is putting his knowledge to good use here. Esculapies, Deyscorides, Rufus, Yporas, Haly, Galyen, Serapion, Razis and Avycen. Averrois, Damasci and Constantyn, Bemard, Galesden and Gilbertyn have all been studied by the Doctor. Apart from knowledge about these authorities, medieval medicine laid importance even on the science of Astronomy and its relevance to medicine. As Bowden explains: “Astronomy in the Middle Ages included the study not only of the nature and motions of heavenly bodies, but also of what we now term as “astrology.” The key to man’s physical well-being was thought to be contained in the mysteries of science and it was essential for a competent physician to know how to bring about the proper coincidence of treatment with favourable aspects of the stars and planets” (Bowden, p. 203).

Chaucer’s Physician therefore seems to be an admirably erudite man and treats his patients with his combined knowledge of the various sciences. We are given a description:

*He kepte his pacient a ful greet deel
In houres, by his magyk natureel.
Wel koude he fortunen the ascendent
of his ymager for his pacient. (Lines: 415-18)*

Natural magic was the science of astrology that worked by an observation of the heavenly bodies, as opposed to black magic which dealt with spirits. The Physician uses his natural magic to determine the exact time when the stars would be in a favourable position for him to apply his remedies. To do this he has to keep a constant watch over his patient. In addition to



this he was even skilful in making talismans for his patients, at the exact times when they would be most efficacious.

Chaucer's Doctor of Physic is therefore a man of immense learning and skill having a thorough knowledge of the various areas of medicine. We are told that he can tell the cause of every illness, whether it was due to a hot humour or cold, moist or dry. Knowing the cause of the disease and the roots of it too, he would then give the sick man his remedy. The narrator, quite impressed by this successful doctor, calls him a "*verray parfit praktisour*" (422). You may recall that Chaucer had described the Knight in an exactly similar phrase, but there was not even a slight hint of any irony then. In the Physician's portrait however he gives it a considerable satiric tilt. In between the long list of the Physician's impressive qualifications, the poet inserts four lines which expose the man to be a thorough materialist, one who has made a business out of a profession that should have been based only on a desire to serve. The Doctor has an understanding with his chosen apothecaries (the modern-day chemists), to send him the drugs he prescribed:

*Ful redy hadde he his apotehcaries
To sende him drogges and his letuaries. (425-26)*

To drive his point home, Chaucer is more explicit in the next line:

*For ech of hem made other for to wynne;
Hir frendshipe nas not newe to bigynne. (Lines: 427-28).*

The Doctor and the apothecaries, thus help each other to profit from the patient's illness and this has been going on for quite some time because as the poet says, their friendship is not new.

Chaucer next comments on the diet of the Physician and finds it balanced, nourishing and digestible and not superfluous like that of the Franklin. Details, however, are not given. Another ironic touch is seen when we are told that this immensely learned man knows '*but litel on the Bible*' (437), implying thereby that he was probably, like other physicians of the time, not a believer in God. It is obvious that he is not on this pilgrimage for any spiritual regeneration.

From what is described of his dress, the Physician seems a wealthy and fashionable man. He is dressed, from head to toe, in a rich cloth of red and blue colour. His robe is lined with taffeta and fine silk ('*Sendal*'). For all his expensive tastes, the Doctor is not a spendthrift and



keeps safe all the profits that he makes in the time of diseases and epidemics. With a stroke of genius, Chaucer puns on the Physician's love for gold:

For gold in phisik is a cordial

Therefore he loved gold in special. (Lines: 443-44)

The medicinal properties of gold had made it an invaluable material in 'phisik', therefore says Chaucer, it is natural that a 'doctor of phisik' should love gold. We as readers are by now intelligent enough, not to take the statement at face value. The greed and avariciousness of this character stands exposed.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 411 – 444
<i>Phisik</i>	medicine	
<i>Noon hym lik</i>	None like him	
<i>Speke of</i>	Speak of	
<i>astronomy</i>	astrology	
<i>Kepte his pacient</i>	Watched over his patient	
<i>Ful greet deel</i>	Many times	
<i>In houres</i>	In those hours when the planetary influence would work in favour of his patient	
<i>Magyk natureel</i>	Natural magic (astrology) as against black magic which dealt with spirits	
<i>Fortunen ascendent</i>	The Doctor would make his talismans at a time when the conjunction of the planets would be astrologically in favour of his patient and he would keep the patient's dominant planet also in a favourable position	
<i>Ymages</i>	talismans	
<i>Everich maladye</i>	Every sickness or disease	
<i>Hoot . . . drye</i>	This relates to the theory of humours. The four humours that determined the temperament of a person were hot, cold, moist and dry . These were a combination of four elements earth, air, fire and water. The temperaments they produced were melancholy, choleric,	

14th and 17th Century Poetry



Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 411 – 444
	phlegmatic and sanguine and were linked to the four body fluids i.e. blood (air), Choler or yellow bile (fire), phlegm (water) and black bile (earth). A balance of these humours was essential for good health.	
<i>engendered</i>	generated	
<i>humour</i>	The four humours explained above	
<i>Parfit practisour</i>	Perfect practitioner	
<i>yknowe</i>	known	
<i>Of his harm the roote</i>	The source of his patient's harm	
<i>boote</i>	remedy	
<i>apothecaries</i>	druggists	
<i>drogges</i>	drugs	
<i>letuaries</i>	syrups	
<i>Esculapius</i>	Aesculapius also known as the father of medicine in Greek mythology	
<i>Deyscorides</i>	Dioscurides, a Greek physician and author of the <i>Materia Medica</i> a book about medicinal plants.	
<i>Rufus</i>	Wrote in the second century and named the various parts of the human body	
<i>Ypocras</i>	Hippocrates, the founder of Greek medical science, flourished in the 5 th century B C. The	
<i>Haly</i>	Persian	
<i>Galen</i>	Wrote in the second century about his idea of the four elements and the four humours	
<i>Serapion</i>	Arabian medical writer of the 11 th century who wrote on herbal medicine	



Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 411 – 444
<i>Razis</i>	Rhazes of Baghdad from the end of the 9 th century	
<i>Avicen</i>	Avicenna or Ibn Sina, of Bokhara, a renowned Arabian philosopher and physician	
<i>Averrois</i>	Averros, another Arabian authority on medicine	
<i>Damascien</i>	this was a name attached to the writings of two authors – a Christian and an Arab medical authorities of the 9 th century.	
<i>Constantyn</i>	He was a monk who brought Arabian learning to Salerno in the 11 th century	
<i>Bernard</i>	Bernard Gordon, a 14 th century Scot professor of medicine	
<i>Gatesdyn</i>	John Gaddesdon , a physician from 14 th century, author of <i>Rosa Medicinae</i> and doctor to King Edward II.	
<i>Gilbertyn</i>	Gilbertus Anglicanus lived in the 13 th century. Known for his work <i>The Compendium of Medicine</i> that gave a comprehensive view of the best practices in medicine and surgery at the time.	
<i>diete</i>	diet	
<i>superfluitee</i>	excess	
<i>norissyng</i>	nourishing	
<i>Litel on the Bible</i>	Knew little about the Bible. Doctors were often considered to be atheists	
<i>Sangwyn and in pers</i>	Red and blue	
<i>taffata</i>	taffeta	
<i>sendal</i>	silk	
<i>Esy of dispencc</i>	Moderate in his expenditure	
<i>Wan in pestilence</i>	Won in the time of plague.	
<i>Cordial</i>	curative	
<i>In special</i>	In particular	



Check Your Progress

1. Why is it important for the doctor to be well versed in astronomy and astrology?
2. Which are the books he knows well, and which one does he know very little? What does this tell us about the doctor?
3. What is meant by the four humours?
4. What is the nexus between the doctor and the apothecaries?
5. Explain the pun on the word 'gold' and bring out the irony in these lines: "For gold in phisik is a cordial/ Therefore he loved gold in special."

6.2.15 The Wife of Bath

Lines 445 – 476

*A good Wif was ther of biside Bathe,
But she was somdel deef, and that was scathe ...*

.....
*Of remedies of love she knew per chaunce,
For she koude of that art the olde daunce.*

6.2.15.1 Detailed Paraphrase

There was a good Wife of Bath, tells the narrator, but it was a pity that she was a little deaf. She was however skilled in cloth making in which she surpassed everyone from Ypres to Ghent. In the entire parish there was no wife who could go to the Offering before her, and if anyone did then certainly the Wife would be so angry that she forgot all about being charitable. Her kerchiefs that she wore upon her head were very fine in texture and I dare swear, observes the narrator, that they weighed ten pounds. Her stockings were of fine scarlet red, tied closely and her shoes were soft and new. Her face was bold and fair and red in hue. All her life she had been a worthy woman and had been married five times. This is not counting the other company that she had kept in her youth. But there is no need to speak of that now, says the narrator.



Thrice the Wife had been to Jerusalem and had passed many a strange and foreign seas. She had been to Rome and Boloigne, in Galicia at St James and at Cologne. She knew much about wandering by the way. She was gap-toothed, truly to say. She sat easily upon an ambler (a pacing horse), wearing a large wimple (veil), and a hat as broad as is a shield. She wore an overskirt about her large hips and a pair of spurs on her feet. In fellowship she knew well how to laugh and chatter. She knew about the remedies of love, as it happened for she knew the tricks of the trade (from experience).

6.2.15.2 Critical Comment

When Chaucer introduces the Wife of Bath, he introduces her as a 'Wife' rather than as a professional cloth maker. For all other pilgrims Chaucer began their portraits by first mentioning their profession, so we have "A knight ther was..." 'Ther was a Nunne, a Prioress...' or 'A Monk ther was...' or 'Ther was a Doctor of Phisik...' and so on. With the Wife of Bath, however, he chooses to place an emphasis on her status as a wife (even though at the time she is a widow). He chooses to make her status as a cloth-maker secondary to her marital status. Of course, she is a much-married women, we are told, already married five times and now is on the lookout for a sixth husband. Is Chaucer then trying to say that 'marriage' and not cloth-making is the profession of this 'loud' woman? Maybe so, but there could be another reason for this too. The theme of the Wife of Bath's *Prologue* as well as her *Tale* is also Marriage and so the emphasis we find in the portrait is carried over into the *Tale* and thus the tale and the teller are linked.

In a company of thirty pilgrims there are just two more women beside the Wife of Bath. Both these women are from the Church, the convent to be more precise. One is the Prioress who fits the bill for a heroine of any conventional romance, being beautiful and sophisticated and the other who is also a nun is merely mentioned and not described. The Wife of Bath, Dame Alison as she is called, is poles apart from the delicate feminine attributes of the Prioress. Rather than being a beautiful and sophisticated figure like the Prioress, the Wife of Bath is a coarse and ostentatious figure modelled more on the lines of a female figure from a fabliau. She barges into this group of almost entirely male pilgrims, refusing to be dictated to by any conventional standards of good moral and social behaviour and also refuses to be the custodian of any conventional feminine virtues. Rather than being submissive and demure she is boldly assertive and flashy in her dress and acknowledges with an effrontery her liking for the physical pleasures of life.

Her partial deafness us what strikes the narrator next. In observing this fact he immediately individualizes her:



“A good Wif was ther of biside Bathe/ But she was somdel deaf , and that was scathe
...”

She is a ‘good’ wife but has the misfortune of being a bit hard of hearing. We have to be on our guard of course, to not take the use of the word ‘good’ at face value or for it to have any moral implications. Her portrait reveals her to be a forthright woman, with a great sense of humour, full of warmth, friendly, though with a little want of decorum, a little lack of restraint. But on the whole a lively and amusing character who makes an unforgettable impression on our minds. Let us see how the poet goes about this particular sketch.

The ‘good’ Wife is generally assumed to be from Bath, but Chaucer is less specific as he places her not exactly in Bath but ‘biside’ or somewhere near it. She is so good at cloth making that she even surpasses the expertise of the well-known weavers of ‘Ypres’ and ‘Gaunt’. Of course, you should be careful to note the subtle irony in this exaggerated praise. The poet is telling us that this is how the Wife values her own skill. So forceful is her personality that she makes her presence felt:

*In al the parisshe wif ne was ther noon
That to the offrynge bfore hire sholde goon;
And if ther dide, certeyn so wrooth was she,
That she was out of alle charitee (Lines: 449 – 52).*

The order of precedence in making the offering at church was of considerable importance in the Middle Ages. The Wife of Bath is therefore very particular about not being preceded in this matter, and if any other good wife dares to go before her, it will make her so angry that she would then be out of all charity. Once again this is a tongue-in-cheek remark from the poet, commenting on how the church was treated by these people. Religion or devotion was far from their mind when they attended the church.

As befits a woman of her standing, the Wife is dressed lavishly. Her ‘coverchiefs’ or headcovers are so elaborate and heavy that the narrator is sure that they weigh ten pounds. She wears these particularly on Sundays. Her ‘hosen’ or stockings are of a fine scarlet red colour and always tightly drawn not loose and hanging, and her shoes are soft and new. She has a bold look on her face and is of fair complexion with a red tinge to it. Once again there is a qualified use of the word ‘worthy’ because while the poet calls her so, he startles us in the next line by telling us about her marital and extra marital adventures. To begin with she has had five husbands and is now on the lookout for a sixth, not counting the other company she



has had in her youth. But now is not the time to recount all this, and so saying the poet switches over to other matters:

*She was a worthy woman al hir lyve,
Housebondes at chirche dore she hadde fyve,
Withouten oother compaignye in youthe
But ther-of nedeth nat to speke as mowthe, (Lines: 459 – 462).*

One wonders if there can be any connection between the Wife's worthiness and the number of husbands that she has had? Certainly, the word 'worthy' in this context does not carry any moral connotations.

We are next told of her love for travelling in gay company and are given a long list of the various places she has been to. She has visited Jerusalem thrice and has crossed many a strange streams. She has been to Rome, Boloigne; she has visited the great altar of St. James in Spain and has been to Cologne probably to visit the tomb of the Magi. There is perhaps no exaggeration when Chaucer tells us that the Wife knows a good deal about 'Wandrynge by the weye' (467). What is interesting, however, is the way Chaucer links up the fact of the Wife being 'gat toothed' with her accounts of travelling. This particular physical characteristic had many associations for the Middle Ages and it could be interpreted in several ways. Such women were thought to be diversely passionate, envious, rich, luxurious, bold, faithless, deceitful, suspicious, and in addition to all this Chaucer interprets it as a sign of much travel. It is obvious how the Wife's character bears out some of the other interpretations as well. She is rich, successful, bold, amorous, must be passionate too, is envious and could have been suspicious of her various husbands.

The Wife rides comfortably on an ambler i.e., an easy paced horse and is covered up to the neck with a wimple. On her head she wears a broad hat which is amusingly likened to a buckler or a small shield. She also wears a foot mantle or an outer skirt, around her ample hips and her feet are clasped in a pair of sharp spurs. The portrait ends with a general comment on her character:

*In feloweships wel koude she laughe and carpe;
Of remedies of love she knew per chaunce,
For she koude of that art the olde dance. (Lines: 474-76)*

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Being thus able to laugh and sing with her companions, she must surely have proved to be interesting and amusing company. Being an old hand at the game of love, she is quite adept at knowing all the various remedies for this illness, that afflicts all mankind.

You must notice that though the Wife of Bath has been to many pilgrimages and is going to another one on this journey Chaucer never once gives any indication of her being pious or devout. Her love for life, her love for physical pleasures is what is emphasized throughout.

Her deafness will be linked later to an incident in her life when she recounts how she came to losing her hearing in one ear. She was hit by her fourth husband when she snatched a book he was reading about the sinfulness of women. At the same time her deafness has also been seen to be symbolic of a refusal to accept the conventional interpretation of the scriptures and rather make a selective choice from them to support her own theories about marriage and sex in her *Prologue* to her tale. Her own interpretations of the scriptures run counter to those provided by the Church Fathers. The latter most surely and quite understandably carry the stamp of the patriarchal point of view and are almost always critical and dismissive where women are concerned.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 445– 476
<i>Biside Bathe</i>	Somewhere near Bath	
<i>Somdel deef</i>	A little deaf	
<i>Was scathe</i>	It was a pity	
<i>Clooth makyng</i>	Cloth making	
<i>Hadde swich can haunt</i>	Had such a skill	
<i>Ypres and Gaunt</i>	Ypres and Ghent, both places in Flanders and known for their skillful weavers.	
<i>Was ther noon</i>	There was none	
<i>Offrynge</i>	Offertory – that part of the Mass when people offer gifts or make their ‘offerings’. These days money is offered but in medieval times people often offered things of their own manufacturing. They go to the altar in	



Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 445– 476
	order of social precedence.	
<i>before hire</i>	Before her, precede her	
<i>Sholde goon</i>	Should go	
<i>So wroth was she</i>	She was so angry	
<i>Out of alle charitee</i>	Beyond any thoughts of being charitable.	
<i>coverchiefs</i>	scarves	
<i>Ful fyne</i>	Very fine	
<i>Weren of ground</i>	textured	
<i>Dorste swear</i>	Dare swear	
<i>weyeden</i>	weighed	
<i>heed</i>	head	
<i>hosen</i>	stockings	
<i>Ful streite ytyed</i>	Tightly laced up or tied	
<i>Moyste</i>	Moist, supple	
<i>Reed of hewe</i>	Red of hue	
<i>At chirche dore</i>	In front of the church door where all marriages took place.	
<i>nowthe</i>	Right now	
<i>Straunge strem</i>	Foreign seas	
<i>muchel</i>	much	
<i>Gat-toothed</i>	Gap-toothed	
<i>Soothly for to say</i>	Truly to say	
<i>Amblere</i>	Amler, an easy paced horse	
<i>ywympled</i>	Wimple or chin band was tied well	

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Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 445– 476
<i>Bokeler or a targe</i>	shield	
<i>Foot-mantel</i>	Outer skirt	
<i>Spores</i>	spurs	
<i>Carpe</i>	chatter	
<i>Per chaunce</i>	As it happened	
<i>Koude</i>	knew	
<i>Olde daunce</i>	Old dance (tricks of the trade)	

Check Your Progress

1. Why does Chaucer introduce her not by her profession but as a 'wife'?
2. What physical disability does the wife suffer from?
3. Describe her physical appearance in your own words.
4. How many husbands has the wife had?
5. What does Chaucer mean by the comment '*not counting other company in youthe*'?
6. What is Chaucer implying by the fact that the Wife is 'gap-toothed'?
7. When Chaucer tells us that '*she koude of that art the olde dance*' what is he referring to? What is the wife well versed in?

6.2.16 The Parson

Lines 477 – 528

*A good man was ther of religioun
And was a povre Person of a toun, ...*

.....

*But Cristes lore and his apostles twelve
He taught; but first he folwed it hymselfe.*

**6.2.16.1 Detailed Paraphrase**

A good man was there of religion, and he was a poor Parson of a town, but he was rich in holy thought and work, observes the narrator. He was a learned man, a scholar who would truly preach Christ's gospel and would devoutly teach his parishioners, continues the narrator. He was benign, and wonderfully diligent and very patient in times of adversity, and this had been proven many times. He was unwilling to 'curse' (excommunicate) people for non-payment of his tithes. There is no doubt that he would rather give some of his offering and income to his poor parishioners. He knew how to find sufficiency in little or few things. His parish was wide and houses were far apart but he did not leave visiting his parishioners in sickness or in trouble, even those living farthest away in his parish, both high and low in social ranking. With a staff in his hand and going by foot he set a noble example to his sheep (parishioners), that first he wrought (practised) and only afterwards he taught. He took out those words out of the gospel and added a metaphor to them, that if gold rusts then what will iron do? For, if a priest, on whom men place their trust, be foul (corrupt) then it is no wonder that a layman or an ordinary person would rust or go the wrong way. And it would certainly be a shame if the shepherd is dirty while the sheep (parishioners) are clean. A priest ought to set an example by his purity and show how his sheep (parishioners) should live.

The good Parson says the narrator, did not give his benefice on rent to leave his parishioners stuck in the swamp and run off to London to Saint Paul's to seek an appointment as a chantry priest or to be hired by a guild. Rather, he stayed at home and took care of his parishioners so that the wolf would not carry them away (so that they may not be led into sin). He was a shepherd and not a mercenary. Though he was holy and virtuous he did not despise sinful men, nor was he haughty or disdainful towards them in his speech. In his teaching he was discreet and benign. It was his constant aim to draw folks to heaven by fairness, by setting a good example. If, however, a person was obstinate, whoever he was, of high rank or low, he would snub him sharply for that reason. There was nowhere a better priest than him, says the narrator. He did not wait for or expect any pomp or reverence, nor made himself excessively meticulous about conscience. He taught Christ's teachings and about the twelve Apostles but first whatever he taught he followed it himself.

6.2.16.2 Critical Comment

This poor parish priest is an idealized figure whose portrait, like that of the Knight is devoid of any satire or criticism. He is a good man of religion and though not rich in the worldly sense he is rich in holy thoughts and work. He is also a learned man, a clerk, meaning thereby that he has been to the university. In true spirit he preaches the Christ's gospel and devoutly



teaches his parishioners. Chaucer describes him in terms of his virtues. The Biblical image of the priest being a good shepherd who would lead his sheep by setting a good example is adhered to in the entire portrait. We are not told at all about his appearance or dress because for him it did not matter and probably the narrator is so much in awe of the virtuous man that external trappings have become irrelevant for him as well.

The poet Chaucer's selection of details places an emphasis on things that the Parson did not do as compared to the other ecclesiastical characters that we have met so far such as the Monk, the Prioress and the Friar. These three characters, despite being connected directly to the church are worldly to the core. Not so the Parson. He neither craves comfort nor money or any material gains. For example, unlike other churchmen he would never leave his parishioners and go chant prayers in London for a patron just to make some extra money. He sets an example rather of frugal and clean living. He is an unusual man of virtue, such that his like is not commonly seen. He is benign and wonderfully hardworking; lets nothing stop him from fulfilling his duty; is patient in times of adversity and he hates to curse those who were unable to pay the tithes i.e. the ten per cent income tax that every parishioner was expected to pay. He is indeed an exceptional priest of his times. Instead of claiming from his poor parishioners, he gladly gives them whatever offerings he receives or whatever 'substance' he has because for himself he required very little: *'He koude in litel thyng have suffisaunce.'* (Line: 490).

The narrator's expectation is that such a thoroughly holy and virtuous man would be contemptuous of the sinners. But it is not so at all. This Parson is not scornful of the sinful man, nor is he unreasonably severe in his admonitions. Instead, he is discreet and benign in his teaching and because of his fair treatment folks are inadvertently drawn towards him. If, however, there was any obstinate man, whether he be rich or poor, he snubbed him sharply, regardless of his status in society. Thus he is an exception in treating all men as equals and making no distinction between the rich and the poor. We can believe the narrator when he says that he had never seen a better priest.

The catalogue of virtues is not over yet. The Parson believes in practical teaching, and never runs after pomp or reverence, nor is he bothered about fine theological issues which might make him lose sight of important fundamentals. He is a true Christian and gladly teaches Christ's love and the twelve apostles, but it is re-emphasized that he first followed himself whatever he taught others.

Chaucer the narrator almost reverses this virtuous priest and Chaucer the poet gives us an ideal portrait of what a man of the Church should be like. There are enough rogues in this



gallery who have been used by the poet to expose the corruption in the Church. The Parson stands in sharp contrast to all these figures showing the way things ought to be and can be. When Chaucer the narrator sums up by saying ‘a better preest I trowe that nowher noon ys’ (Line: 524), there is absolutely no underlying satire on the poet’s part.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 477 – 528
<i>Povre persoun</i>	Poor parson	
<i>werk</i>	work	
<i>clerk</i>	scholar	
<i>preche</i>	preach	
<i>parishshens</i>	parishioners	
<i>benign</i>	gracious	
<i>pacient</i>	patient	
<i>swich</i>	such	
<i>Ypreved</i>	Was proven	
<i>Ofte sithes</i>	Many times	
<i>Ful looth</i>	Very reluctant	
<i>Cursen for his tithes</i>	Excommunicate for tithes. People were supposed to give one tenth of their income or produce to their parish priest. This was known as tithes.	
<i>Out of doute</i>	There is no doubt	
<i>substaunce</i>	income	
<i>Fer asonder</i>	Far apart	
<i>Reyn ne thonder</i>	Rain or thunder	
<i>meschief</i>	trouble	
<i>ferreste</i>	farthest	
<i>Muche and lite</i>	High ranking and low	

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Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 477 – 528
wroghte	Took action	
figure	metaphor	
iren	iron	
lewed	Layman, uneducated	
shiten	Dirty, filthy (morally corrupt)	
clennesse	purity	
Benefice to hyre	Rent out his living	
Leet his sheep	Let his parishioners	
Encombred in the myre	Stuck in the mud	
Chaunterie for soules	If he so desired a priest could get himself (from a patron) the job of chanting a daily mass for the peace of the soul of a dead person	
bretherhed	Brotherhood (religious)	
Been withholde	Be appointed (a parish priest for a religious guild or brotherhood which would be a wealthy Order)	
His fold	His parish	
despitous	scornful	
Daungerous ne digne	contemptuous nor haughty	
benygne	kind	
bisynesse	aim	
snybben	rebuke	
nonys	At that moment	
Spyced	meticulous	
loore	Teachings	



Check Your Progress

1. Before telling us about the Parson's travels the narrator notes that in the Parson's parish the houses were 'far asunder' thereby meaning it was spread over a large area. How does this characterise the Parson?
2. What does the Parson do before teaching his parishioners?
3. Explain the metaphor 'when gold ruts what shall iron do' in the context of this portrait.
4. What is meant by tithes? What does the Parson do if any of his parishioners is not able to pay the tithes?
5. Why does the parson refuse to go to London?

6.2.17 The Plowman

Lines 529 – 541

*With hym ther was a Plowman, was his brother,
That hadde ylad of dong many a fother; ...*

*.....
Bothe of his proper swynk and his catel.
In a tabard he rood upon a mere.*

6.2.17.1 Detailed Paraphrase

With him there was a Ploughman, his (the Parson's) brother, who had carried many cartloads of dung. He was a true worker and a good one, living in peace and perfect charity. He loved God best with all his heart and at all times be they good or bad. And then he loved his neighbour as he loved himself. He would thresh and also ditch and dig for the sake of Christ for every poor person without taking any payment for his labour if it lay in his power. He paid his tithes regularly and completely both of his labour and of his property. He rode in a sleeveless jacket upon a mare.



6.2.17.2 Critical Comment

The Parson is accompanied by the poor Ploughman, (a small farmer), who is not only related to him, being his brother, but is also similar to him in character. Thus, another idealized portrait follows, which is quite far-removed from the actual facts surrounding the labour class of the fourteenth century England, already discussed in section 1.4. Chaucer's Ploughman is a good and true labourer who has carted many a load of dung, living always in perfect peace and charity. All the details of his life prove him to be an honest worker and a devout and true Christian just as the Knight is. His portrait is in sharp contrast to the corrupt members of the church that we have seen earlier like the Monk and the Friar. These men who should have been true men of religion only use it for their self-gratification whereas the Ploughman, being just an ordinary citizen yet lives up to the ideals of a true Christian.

He is dressed in a tabard which was a garment resembling the smock worn by country labourers and rides upon a mare. Chaucer's unqualified admiration for both these men, the Parson and the Ploughman is strongly felt.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 529 – 541
<i>him</i>	The Parson	
<i>yclad</i>	Carried, hauled	
<i>dong</i>	dung	
<i>fother</i>	Cart-load	
<i>pees</i>	peace	
<i>Gamed or smerte</i>	Pleased or pained him	
<i>thresshe</i>	thresh	
<i>therto</i>	also	
<i>dyke</i>	ditch	
<i>delve</i>	dig	
<i>Povre wight</i>	Poor person	
<i>Withouten hyre</i>	Without payment	



Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 529 – 541
<i>His proper swink</i>	His own labour	
<i>catel</i>	property	
<i>tabard</i>	Short sleeveless jacket	
<i>mere</i>	mare	

Check Your Progress

1. How Is the Plowman related to the Parson?
2. Describe the Plowman's nature of work.
3. How is he dressed?

6.2.18 The Miller**Lines 542 – 566**

*Ther was also a Reve, and a Millere,
A Somonour and a Pardoner also,*

*.....
A baggepipe wel koude he blowe and sowne
And therwithal he broghte us out of towne..*

6.2.18.1 Detailed Paraphrase

Lest we may feel the list of pilgrims to be endless Chaucer tells us that there are only a few left now and he names them all together. There was a Reeve and a Miller, a Sommoner and a Pardoner, a Manciple and Chaucer the narrator himself. There were no more. Then he begins with the description of the Miller.

The Miller is a stout fellow indeed. He was strong of muscle and also big of bone. His physical strength had been proven because at wrestling he would always take the prize. He was stocky, broadly built and a large-framed fellow. There was no door that he could not pull off its hinges or break it by ramming it with his head. His beard was as red as any sow or fox



and moreover it was as broad as though it were a spade. On the top of his nose he had a wart on which stood a tuft of hair, red as the bristles of a sow's ears. His nostrils were black and wide. He had a sword and a shield by his side. His mouth was as big as is a furnace. He was a loudmouth and a bawdy talker, and his talk was mostly of sin and harlotry. He knew well how to steal corn and take payment for it three times, and yet he had a thumb of gold indeed. He wore a white coat and a blue hood. He knew well how to blow and play a bagpipe and with that, says the narrator, he brought them all out of town.

6.2.18.2 Critical Comment

This group of five pilgrims, appended as if it were as an afterthought, consists of thoroughly and scathingly realistic portraits of cheats and rascals. Each one of them is a rogue to the core, quite adept at cheating innocent people in their respective professions. Let us begin with the first one -- the Miller.

In the Miller's portrait, there is a focus on physical details. The narrator's keenly observant eye sizes him up and down and records the particulars as he observes them filling them in with some additional information like the Miller always winning the wrestling matches due to his physical strength or that metaphorically speaking he had a thumb of gold. So impressive is the physique of the 'stout carl' that the narrator at once begins by describing it in detail:

Ful byg he was of brawn and eek of bones; (Line: 546).

So strong is he that at the place where he came from, he would always win the ram in wrestling matches. He was short-shouldered, broad, thick set ('thikke knarre') fellow who could pull off any door from its hinges or break it with his head if he ran into it. He is all brawn and no brain it seems.

The narrator seems to be almost eulogising about the Miller's strength. Just having read the two ideal portraits of the Parson and the Plowman, we may begin to take the Miller's portrait at face value. The poet Chaucer however intervenes and we realize that the irony is not so subtle now. The disparaging comparison of the colour of the Miller's beard with a sow and a fox immediately checks our reaction. The implications that are there in the physical details would have been all too clear for the medieval audience. The camera now covers, as though in a close up, a big wart that the Miller has on his nose, individualizing him immediately:

*Upon the cop right of his nose he hade
A werte, and thereon stood a toft of herys,
Red as the brestles of a sowes erys; (Lines: 554-56).*



Once again in a thoroughly derogatory manner, the colour of the bristles on the wart is compared to the colour of a sow's ears. It cannot be a coincidence that twice, the same man is compared to a pig and once to a fox. What are the implications? Well the associations are with treachery, sloth, violence and also shameful fornication. The Miller has big dirty black nostrils and a mouth as wide as a great furnace. Employed always in babbling, lying and telling indecent stories:

*He was a janglere and a goliardeys
And that was moost of synne and harloties.* (Lines: 560-61)

Body and spirit thus show an interesting correspondence. He looks what he is. Now we come to his skill in his business of cheating his customers:

*Wel koude he stelen corn and tollen thries,
And yet he hadde a thombe of gold, pardee.* (Lines: 563-64)

The narrator observes that though the Miller well knows how to steal corn and take his toll thrice, he still has a thumb of gold. If interpreted literally this would mean he was an honest miller, which is rare, and Chaucer is careful to tell us alongside that he is a clever thief, thus he uses the proverb ironically and implies that he is not honest at all. You might like to know who he was stealing this corn from? Well, glance back at fourteenth century England to understand better, the job and duties of a miller. As Pollard explains:

There was little free trade in milling in those days and restrictions survived as late as the eighteenth century. Everyone raising corn on a manor would have to take it to the manor mill to be ground, and thus, free from any check of competition medieval millers became famous for their knavish thefts. In the *Reeve's Tale* Chaucer tells how two Cambridge clerks tried to protect the college corn by standing one where the corn went in, and the other where the meal came out. But the Miller turned their horse loose and made it run away, and while they were trying to catch it, he stole more than ever. (pp. 85-86).

It is obvious that such a man was required to be strong and stout, just as our Miller is, so that he could silence any complaints and could enforce fine on those who went elsewhere to get their corn ground to cornmeal..

As for his apparel, he is dressed in a white coat and a blue hood, wears a sword and a buckler, and carries a bagpipe that he plays and in this manner leads the merry company out of the town.

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Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 79 – 100
<i>Stout carl</i>	Sturdy fellow	
<i>For the nones</i>	For the occasion	
<i>wrastlynge</i>	wrestling	
<i>Alwey the ram</i>	The prize in a wrestling match	
<i>Thikke knarre</i>	Thickset fellow	
<i>Nolde heve of harre</i>	Would heave off its hinges	
<i>Breke it</i>	Break it	
<i>rennyng</i>	Ramming it	
<i>Cop</i>	tip	
<i>werte</i>	wart	
<i>herys</i>	hair	
<i>erys</i>	ears	
<i>nosethirles</i>	nostrils	
<i>bokeler</i>	shield	
<i>Greet forneys</i>	Large furnace	
<i>jangler</i>	gossiper	
<i>goliardys</i>	Vulgar talker	
<i>harlotryes</i>	Bawdy stories	
<i>Stelen corn, and tollen thryce</i>	Millers were allowed to take a portion of the corn they ground. This dishonest miller cunningly took thrice of what his share was.	
<i>Thumb of gold</i>	This was a proverb that an honest miller has a thumb of gold but the implication is that there are no honest millers. Millers used their thumb to test the corn and the meal.	
<i>sowne</i>	play	
<i>therwithal</i>	With all that	



Check Your Progress

1. Describe the Miller's physical appearance.
2. To which animal is the colour of his hair or beard compared to? What is the implication?
3. Which disturbing physical detail individualizes the Miller?
4. What does the narrator mean when he says that the Miller had a gold thumb?
5. Which instrument does the Miller play?

6.2.19 The Manciple

Lines 567 – 586

*A gentil Maunciple was ther of a temple,
Of which achatours myghte take exemple ...*

*.....
In any caas that myghte falle or happe.
And yet this Manciple sete hir aller cappe.*

6.2.19.1 Detailed Paraphrase

There was a fine Manciple of a Temple i.e. a law school, who was an example for those who buy provisions or foodstuff, for he knew how to be wise in buying of victuals; for whether he paid cash or bought goods on credit, he always watched out for his purchases so that he was always ahead and in good condition. The narrator observes that certainly this was only by the good grace of God that such an uneducated man's wit shall surpass the wisdom of a heap of learned men.

He had more than three-times-ten masters who were experts of law and also skilful in it. Out of these there were a dozen in that house worthy to be stewards (managers of estates) of rent and land for any lord that is in England and enable him to live by his own wealth with honour and without any debt (unless he was out of his mind) or live economically if he so desired. Also they were capable enough to help in any emergency or accident that may occur. Yet this Manciple fooled them all.



6.2.19.2 Critical Comment

Chaucer defines the Manciple completely by his occupation and how extremely good he is at it. Let us try and understand what a Manciple's job was. "A Manciple in the fourteenth century was, as he still is today, a buyer of provisions for a college, an Inn of court, or the like. Chaucer's Manciple is 'of a temple,' that is, he caters for the lawyers and students at one of the Inns of court" (Bowden, p. 256). This portrait begins with a direct attack on the cheating capabilities of the Manciple:

*A gentil Maunciple was ther of a temple,
Of which achatours myghte take exemple
For to be wise in byynge of vitaille;* (Lines: 567-69)

The narrator notes that the Manciple is so good at deceiving people in the buying of provisions that all buyers (achatours') ought to take a cue from him. Whether he buys in cash or on credit ("by taille") he always comes out a winner and way ahead of anyone else. The speaker is thoroughly impressed and observes:

*Now is not that of god a ful fair grace
That such a lewed mannes wit shal pace
The wisdom of an heepe of lerned men?* (Lines: 573-75).

Of course this is a sly remark from the poet Chaucer. One's ability at cheating can surely not be due to God's grace. For the narrator however, it is a skill as any other and he admires the Manciple for it. One cannot miss the underlying irony in the portrait.

More than half the sketch is devoted to the skills of the men whom the Manciple serves. He has more than thirty masters who are expert in matters of law and a dozen of them are worthy enough to be stewards to any lord in England and help him live well. These worthy masters of the Manciple are capable of helping a whole shire in case of any mishap.

They may be learned men and exceptionally skilful, yet it speaks volumes for the manciple's skill at cheating when the narrator notes that he is able to hoodwink them all. So extremely clever is he at managing his show that he even gets the better of those who are superior to him in every way! This surely makes him more dexterous than them despite being an unlearned man himself. The humour is quite direct in this portrait. The criticism that is implied in the Manciple's practices exposes him as a cheat. Chaucer's irony that has been so subtle throughout, now seems to be getting increasingly explicit and the satire and criticism surface more often in the humour.



The variety in Chaucer's art of characterization is evident in the fact that in the Manciple's portrait he avoids giving us any details of the Manciple's physical appearance. He doesn't adhere to any fixed plan when describing the pilgrims.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 567 – 586
<i>gentil</i>	excellent	
<i>temple</i>	The lawyer's Inns of Court	
<i>achatours</i>	purchasers	
<i>Byynge of vitaille</i>	Buying of provisions	
<i>Payde or took by taille</i>	Paid in cash or took by tally. A tally was a wooden stick that was used to buy goods on credit. Notches made on the stick recorded the goods bought	
<i>algate</i>	always	
<i>wayted</i>	Watched carefully, paid attention	
<i>For his achaat</i>	To his purchases	
<i>He was ay biforn</i>	He was always ahead	
<i>In good staat</i>	In good condition	
<i>Lewed man's wit shal pace</i>	An uneducated man's intelligence shall outdo/surpass	
<i>heep</i>	heap	
<i>maistres</i>	Masters, qualified lawyers	
<i>More than thries ten</i>	More than three times ten	
<i>curious</i>	skillful	
<i>duszeyne</i>	dozen	
<i>stywardes</i>	Stewards/ managers of estate	
<i>hym</i>	The lord	
<i>His proper good</i>	His own wealth	
<i>dettelees</i>	debtless	

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Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 567 – 586
<i>but</i>	unless	
<i>He were wood</i>	He was mad	
<i>scarsly</i>	economically	
<i>Hym list</i>	Pleased him	
<i>Al a shire</i>	A whole county	
<i>Any caas</i>	Any situation/ emergency/accident	
<i>Falle or happe</i>	Come about or happen	
<i>Sette hir aller cappe</i>	Set the caps of them all – made fools of them all	

Check Your Progress

1. What is a Manciple? What does he do?
2. Why is the narrator impressed by this man?
3. Is the poet Chaucer being critical in this portrait? What is he criticizing and how?

6.2.20 The Reeve

Lines 587 – 622

*A Reeve was a sclendre colerik man.
His berd was shave as ny as ever he kan;*

.....
*Tukked he was as is a frere aboute
And ever he rood as is a frere aboute.*

6.2.20.1 Detailed Paraphrase

The Reeve was a thin choleric man. His beard was shaved very close, and his hair was also closely cropped around his ears. The hair in his front was cut short like a priest's. His legs were very long and lean like sticks, there was no calf to be seen. He knew well how to take care of a granary and a corn bin, and no auditor could get the better of him. He could always tell, in times of drought as well as rain, what would be the yield of his grain. His lord's sheep,



his cattle, his dairy cows, his pigs, horses his livestock and his poultry were completely in the Reeve's control. And in accordance with his contract he maintained the accounts since the time his lord had been twenty years of age. There was no man who could find him in arrears. There was no farm manager, no herdsman, no other farm worker whose trickery and treachery he did not know. They were all afraid of him as of the Black Death or the plague.

His dwelling was very well situated upon a heath with green trees providing shade. He could buy property better than his lord could purchase. He was secretly very well provided. He knew well how to please his lord subtly by giving and lending him some of his lord's own possessions and was rewarded with thanks from him and also a coat and a hood.

In youth he had learned a good trade, he was a very good craftsman a carpenter. He sat upon a very good horse that was dapple grey and was called Scot. He wore a long outer coat of dark blue and by his side he wore a rusty sword. This Reeve was of Norfolk from near a town men call Bawdeswelle. He had hitched up his coat and belted it like a friar, and he rode as the last of the company.

6.2.20.2 Critical Comment

There is enough evidence in the *Miller's Prologue* and the *Reeve's Prologue* to point to the fact that these two men have known each other for quite some time and there seems to be a long-standing enmity existing between them. Robin, the Miller, addresses Oswald the Reeve by name and the *Miller's Tale* seems to be based on factual occurrences of the past in which both he and the Reeve have participated. Chaucer has therefore been quite clever in placing the Manciple between these two enemies.

What were the duties of a Reeve? To quote from Bowden, once again: "The office of reeve on a medieval manor farm lay theoretically between that of bailiff, who was in turn subordinate to the chief manager, or seneschal, and that of provost, but in practice the three offices often became one. The activities of Chaucer's Reeve seem to indicate that he serves as both bailiff and provost, and even as seneschal" (Bowden, p. 250).

As far as his physical attributes go, Chaucer chooses to begin the portrait by giving us a detailed account of them. The Reeve and the Miller are opposite extremes even in the matter of appearances. Where the Miller is a stout, heavy, thickset man, exuding strength, the Reeve is so thin that there is no calf seen on his legs which therefore look like staves. He is a slender 'colerik' man, with a close shaved beard and a close-cropped head that gives him a somewhat clerical appearance. His long blue overcoat which he tucks up like a friar and his rusted sword are all indications that he belongs to an inferior level in society. But what about



his duties? Does he perform them well? It seems one cannot find a fault with him there. As the narrator says, no auditor could find errors in his accounts. Be it a time of drought or rain, he always knew exactly when to sow and when to reap so that the yield is never affected. He looks well after his lord's sheep, cattle ("neet") and his dairy. Also his lord's swine, horses, stock and poultry. In other words he is completely in charge of all this. Since his lordship was twenty years of age, this model bailiff, by agreement, has managed the whole accounts. No man could ever find him in arrears and there was no bailiff, no herdsman, ("hierde") no farm labourer ("hyne") who could be cunning or deceitful with this Reeve, without him coming to know of it. He can even make better purchases than the lord of the manor himself. Everything seems to be going on smoothly till this point. The Reeve is performing his duties extremely well. But suddenly there is a change of tone:

They were adrad of hym as of the deeth. (Line: 605)

"They", here refers to the other workers on the manor. The Reeve inspires in all these men, a fear that can be likened to the fear of death. Why are they so afraid of him? Is he a cruel, relentless manager? Possibly so. This is not all, though. There are other negative aspects to this perfect husbandman. He is also a cheat, a swindler who can sell the lord's own goods back to him and even be rewarded with thanks and gifts:

*His lord wel koude he plesen subtilly
To yeve äid lene hym of his owene good
And have a thank, and yet a gowne and hood.* (Lines: 610-612)

In addition to this he is extremely clever about lining his own pockets. He has his secret barns stocked full. This Reeve, however, is master of the craft of carpentry:

*In youthe he lerned hadde a good myster;
He was a wel good wrighte, a carpenter.* (Lines: 613-614)

This one single detail immediately personalizes this man. Readers have often tried to look for real life parallels for Chaucer's pilgrims and it is personalizing details like these that prompt such endeavours. He sits upon a good 'Stot', (which is probably a stout horse of a low breed), of grey colour and who is called Scot. He hails from Norfolk, from near a town called Baidswelle. The narrator is quick to observe that this man always rides the "hyndreste of oure route." (622).

Where the Miller had been the one to lead them out of town, playing on his bagpipe, the Reeve is his opposite and forms the tail of the group. Does it not indicate some kind of shyness, inferiority, shiftiness in a man who always likes to walk, behind? The poet has



placed many pointers to make his opinion of this particular character quite clear. But the satire is still genial. It is not vituperative or vindictive. Nor is it an explicit denouncement. The last two characters however, who now appear on the scene, are so openly wicked and evil, that even the narrator who all along has posed as a simpleton, is not naïve enough to be taken in by them. He too recognizes them for what they are and fails to find any excuses for their behaviour. These two are treated with extreme disgust and loathing. They are both connected with the church.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 79 – 100
<i>sclendre</i>	thin	
<i>colerik</i>	angry	
<i>Ny as ever he can</i>	Close as ever he can	
<i>heer</i>	hair	
<i>erys</i>	ears	
<i>yshorn</i>	Closely cropped	
<i>dokked</i>	Cut short in front	
<i>Ylyk a staf</i>	Like a staff	
<i>Garner and bynne</i>	Granary and corn bin	
<i>Auditour koude on him wynne</i>	No assessor could get the better of him	
<i>Wel wiste he</i>	Wel knew he	
<i>By the droghte . . . reyn</i>	By the drought and the rain	
<i>yeldynge</i>	The yield	
<i>neet</i>	cattle	
<i>dayerye</i>	dairy	
<i>stoor</i>	livestock	
<i>pultrye</i>	poultry	

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Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 79 – 100
<i>hooly</i>	wholly	
<i>Reve's governynge</i>	Reeve's control	
<i>Brynge hym in arrerage</i>	Who could find him in arrears	
<i>Nas baillif</i>	No bailiff	
<i>Ne hierde</i>	No herdsman	
<i>No other hyne</i>	No other farm hand	
<i>Sleighte and his covyne</i>	Trickery and treachery	
<i>Adrad of him</i>	Afraid of him	
<i>wonyng</i>	dwelling	
<i>Astored pryvely</i>	Secretly well-stocked	
<i>Plesen subtilly</i>	Please him subtly	
<i>Yeve and lene</i>	Giving and lending	
<i>cote</i>	coat	
<i>myster</i>	Craft/trade	
<i>Wel good wright</i>	Very good craftsman	
<i>stot</i>	A stout horse	
<i>pomely</i>	dappled	
<i>Highte</i>	called	
<i>Surcote of pers</i>	Long outer coat of dark blue	
<i>Rusty blade</i>	Rusty sword	
<i>tukked</i>	Coat hitched up and belted	
<i>A frere aboute</i>	Like a friar	
<i>hyndreste</i>	Hindmost, the last	



Check Your Progress

1. Chaucer calls the Reeve a choleric man. Explain what he means by it.
2. Describe the Reeve's physical appearance.
3. What was the job of the Reeve? Why are other workers on the manor afraid of him?
4. How do we know that the Reeve is a cheat and a swindler?

6.2.21 The Summoner

Lines 623 – 668

*A Somonour was there with us in that place
That had a fyr reed cherubynnes face,....*

.....

*As greet as it were for an ale-stake.
A bokeleer hadde he maad hym of a cake..*

6.2.21.1 Detailed Paraphrase

A Summoner was there with us in that place, says the narrator and goes on to tell us that he had a fire red face like a cherub for it was full of pimples and he had narrow eyes. He was as lustful and lecherous as a sparrow, with black scabby brows and a scanty beard. Children were afraid of his face. There was no mercury, lead monoxide nor sulphur, borax, white lead nor any oil of tartar nor any ointment that would clean and scour and cure him of his white pimples, the knobs sitting on his cheeks. He loved to eat garlic, onions and also leeks and to drink strong wine red as blood; then he would speak and cry out as if he were mad. And when he had drunk the wine well, then he would speak nothing but Latin. He knew a few legal terms, some two or three, that he had learned out of some decree – it is no wonder that he knew that because he heard it all day and the narrator is quick to point out that we know all too well how a jay can call out 'Walter' as well as a Pope can. But if anyone knew how to examine him any further they would find that his learning was all used up. He would always cry "The question is, which point of law applies?"

He was a fine rascal and a kind one; men may not be able to find a better fellow. For a quart of wine he would allow a 'good fellow' to have his mistress for twelvemonths and still



excuse him completely. Secretly he also knew how to seduce a girl and if he found anywhere a good fellow he would teach him to not be in awe of the archbishop's curse (excommunication), unless a man's soul were in his purse for he would then be punished through his purse only. "Purse is the archdeacon's hell" he always said but the narrator intervenes and tells us that here he knew the Summoner was lying. Each guilty man should be afraid of excommunication for excommunication will slay just as forgiveness will save. And let him also beware of a '*Significavit*' – the written order for imprisonment. He had under his control the young people of the diocese because he knew their secrets and was advisor to them all.

He had set a garland upon his head that was as large as if it were meant to be hung on a pole outside a tavern. He had made a shield for himself out of a round cake.

6.2.21.2 Critical Comment

The Summoner or apparitor, "was not a cleric but a minor official of the Church who was connected with the ecclesiastical courts" (Bowden, p. 262). His most important activity was "to bear summons from the ecclesiastical court to the person cited to appear. By the end of the century the apparitor had become a kind of "criminal investigator" for bishops or archdeacons, who were the two officials commonly presiding in the ecclesiastical courts. For them the summoner nosed out evasions of the law and any crimes which might come under church jurisdiction: apparently his remuneration was a percentage of what he collected in fines for the courts. It would seem inevitable under such a system that some apparitors would become extortioners, and there is documentary evidence that that was the case" (Bowden, pp. 265-66).

The duties of the Summoner, therefore afforded him ample opportunities for taking bribes. But before Chaucer tells us about this disgusting perversion of office, he begins by giving us the Summoner's physical description which is equally loathsome. His face is covered with spots and pimples ("*saucefleem*") and is therefore red as fire. He is hot and lecherous, has narrow eyes, scruffy black brows, and a plucked beard. He is so repulsive and frightening to look at that children are afraid of him. "*Of his visage children were afraid*" (628). He has not left any stone unturned and has tried all kinds of remedies to get rid of his "*whelkes white*" and of the "*knobbes sittynge on his chekes*" (633). Quick-silver, white lead ("*lytarge*"), brimstone, borax ("*boras*") and oil of tartar, have all been used and found ineffective. Of course the cause of his ailment is hinted at when the poet calls him "*As hoot he was, and lecherous, as a sparwe*" (626), but we get some more details now. His food-habits are repulsive for he loves garlic, onions and leeks and strong wines which are '*reed as*



blood'. And once he is drunk, then he would speak nothing but Latin. Lest we may be slightly impressed, the poet Chaucer at once proceeds to give us an account of how much Latin he knew and why:

*A few termes hadde ne, two or thre
That he had lemed out of som decree,
No wonder is, he herde it al the day;
And eek ye knewen wel how that a jay
Kan clepen Watte as wel as kan the pope. (Lines: 639-643)*

So like a parrot ("jay"), he keeps repeating the few Latin terms he has learned.

Till this point, Chaucer, though not condoning any aspect of the Summoner, has not even condemned anything. Only hints have been placed at various places, to enable the readers to be wary of this character. What follows now however is loaded with sarcasm which reveals the poet's own indignation with this servant of the church:

*He was a gentil harlot and a kynde;
A bettre felawe sholde men noght fynde,
He would suffre, for a quart of wyn,
A good felawe to have his concubyn
A twelf monthe, and excuse hym atte fulle; (Lines: 647-652)*

To put it in a simpler form, the narrator observes that he has seen no gentler or kinder rascal ("harlot") because, for a mere quart of wine he would allow a man to have his mistress for a full year and not say a word about it. Most certainly because the narrator observes in the same breath that the Summoner would be enjoying the woman's favours himself and indulging in the same sin ("a fyrich eek koude he pulle"). It does not end here though. We are further informed that if he finds a fellow who is willing to loosen his purse strings, the Summoner assures him not to have any fear of the Archdeacon's Curse:

*For in his purs he sholde y-punysshed be:
Purs is the Erce dekenes helle, "seyde he. (Lines: 657-58).*

Money can wash a man clean as far as the Summoner is concerned. He can thus easily extort money from people. The rich could always wriggle out of any sort of crime. The poor on the other hand were always bearing the brunt of the Summoner's duties and being punished often.



The narrator is filled with indignation at this blatant disregard for the rules of the church. The poet and the pilgrim become one here in their condemnation of this man:

*But wel I woot he lyed right in dede,
Of cursyng oghte ech gilty man him drede,
For curs wol slee, - right as assoillyng savith;
And also war him of a Significani. (Lines: 659-62)*

The narrator/poet comes out with an outright denunciation of the Summoner's disregard of the curse. Money can never wash off guilt and if the Summoner is announcing so, he is definitely lying, says the poet. Every guilty man should be afraid of excommunication for a curse can slay ("slee") the soul just as absolution ("assoilyng") can save it- and certainly one should beware of the *Significavit*. To understand the full import of this line it is necessary first to understand the meaning of *Significavit*. A *significavit* was the writ according to which a certain communication was sent to the king. As Pollard explains: "The purpose of the writ was that the Bishop had signified to the king (i.e. the civil authorities) that a man had remained obstinate after being excommunicated for forty days, and he was therefore forthwith to be put into prison till he made submission" (p.93). Thus Chaucer qualifies his earlier stand by implying that no curses or absolutions are worth anything unless the penitent is truly contrite. The least ironic statement is therefore about the *significavit* which a guilty man should fear most.

The Summoner's control over the young people of the diocese, especially the young girls, is an unhealthy one. He has them under his thumb because he knows all their secrets ('*conseil*') and is free with his advice ("*reed*"). What kind of advice can it be except wrong and corrupt, we wonder!

This monstrous, lecherous, loud mouthed, repulsive and avaricious character is crowned with a garland of flowers and leaves, similar to the sign outside any alehouse. As a shield he bears a round flattened loaf of bread, a cake, which he will probably eat later. Calling it a shield is not only a parody of the protective equipment used by soldiers but is also a parody of the scriptures in the context of the pilgrimage. The shield of faith as mentioned in Ephesians 6:16, was supposed to protect the believer from all that was evil and wicked. The Summoner's shield however is only for physical sustenance.

The poet does not allow the Summoner to have any redeeming features. In fact, so disgusted is he with the man's blatant contempt for the Church and the misuse of his powers as a church official that the entire portrait is a downright condemnation of his character, both in the physical description as well as the moral one.



Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 623 – 668
<i>Somonour</i>	Summoner – so called because it was his duty to summon wrongdoers to the ecclesiastical courts. He served summons to them.	
<i>Fyr-reed</i>	Fire-red	
<i>cherubynnes</i>	Like a cherub or an angel. Chaucer is being ironic here because there is nothing angelic about the Summoner	
<i>saucefleem</i>	pimpled	
<i>Eyen narwe</i>	Eyes narrow	
<i>hoot</i>	lustful	
<i>Scalled</i>	scabby	
<i>Piled berd</i>	Sparse beard	
<i>visage</i>	face	
<i>aferd</i>	afraid	
<i>nas</i>	Was no	
<i>Quyke-silver, lytarge, ne brymston</i>	Quick-silver, lead monoxide, nor sulphur	
<i>Boras, ceruce,</i>	Borax, white lead	
<i>Ne oille of tartre</i>	No oil of tarter	
<i>Clense and byte</i>	Clean and bite/burn	
<i>Whelks white</i>	White pustules	
<i>lekes</i>	leeks	
<i>wood</i>	mad	
<i>termes</i>	Legal terms	
<i>Som decree</i>	Some text of canon law	
<i>jay</i>	parrot	
<i>Watte</i>	Walter	
<i>Whoso . . . grope</i>	Whoever knew how to cross question him or examine him in other	

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Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 623 – 668
	matters	
<i>Questio quid iuris</i>	'the question is what law applies' – this	
<i>harlot</i>	Rascal (the word harlot was applied to both men and women in Chaucer's time.	
<i>suffre</i>	allow	
<i>Ate fulle</i>	completely	
<i>Prively a finch eek coude he pulle</i>	Pluck the feathers of a finch i.e. a bird thereby meaning he could easily seduce a girl	
<i>owher</i>	Anywhere	
<i>The ercedekenes curs</i>	The archdeacon's curse which was the curse of being excommunicated	
<i>significavit</i>	Written order of imprisonment	
<i>In daunger</i>	In his control	
<i>At his own gise</i>	In his own way	
<i>Knew hir conseil</i>	Knew their secrets	
<i>Al hir reed</i>	Advised them all	
<i>Ale-stake</i>	A pole outside a tavern on which a garland was hung to identify it	
<i>bokeler</i>	Shield (an obvious parody of the shield of faith that protects the believer from evil as mentioned in Ephesians 6:16)	

Check Your Progress

1. What is a Summoner?
2. What does his physical description tell us about him?
3. Which part of the Summoner's dress is a parody of the scriptures? How?
4. Why does the narrator call him generous and friendly? Is he really so?
5. Explain the lines: *For in his purs he sholde y-punysshed be:/Purs is the Ercedekenes helle, "seyde he.*



6.2.22 The Pardoner

Lines 669 – 714

*With hym ther rode a gentil Pardoner
Of Rouncivale, his freend and his compeer, . . .*

.....
*To wynne silver, as he very well knew how;
Herefore he song the muriely and loude.*

6.2.22.1 Detailed Paraphrase

With him there rode a fine Pardoner of Rouncivale, he was his friend and his companion who had come straight from Rome. He sang very loudly “*Come hither, love to me!*” and the Summoner accompanied him in a strong bass voice, even a trumpet was never half so great in sound.

This Pardoner had hair as yellow as wax and smooth it hung as does a bundle of flax. His locks hung in small strands and were spread over his shoulders, but very thinly, each strand one by one. He wore no hood for fun, and kept it bundled up in his bag. He thought he rode all in the latest style with untidy loose hair and except for his cap he rode all bare headed. He had glaring eyes like a hare. He had sown a Veronica on his cap. In his lap before him he had his bag which was brim-full of pardons all fresh from Rome. He had a voice as small as is a goat’s and he had no beard nor should ever have. His face was smooth as if it had been recently shaven. I think says the narrator, that he was either a castrated horse (gelding) or a female horse (mare).

To speak of his craft however, there was no such pardoner from Berwick to Ware. In his pouch he had a pillow case which he claimed to be his Lady’s veil. He said he had a piece of the sail that St. Peter had when he went upon the sea until Jesus Christ saved him. He had a cross made from a brass-like alloy and all covered with stones and in a glass jar he had pigs’ bones. With these relics he was able to make more money in one day from a poor person dwelling in the countryside than that the Parson would get in two months. And so, with feigned flattery and tricks he made a fool of that person and the people in general.

But to tell you at last, says the narrator, he was a noble official of the church. He knew well how to read a lesson or a story but best of all he sung the Offertory. For he knew well that when that song was sung, he must preach and smoothen his speech to win silver as he very well knew how. Therefore he sung merrily and loud.



6.2.22.2 Critical Comment

The monstrous Summoner is paired off with a fraudulent Pardoner, who is his friend and comrade. We are told that he had come straight from Rome. Chaucer's disgust is apparent at every point in this portrait. The more we are told of the Pardoner the more fitting we find his pairing with the Summoner. They are really two of a kind and the first thing Chaucer hints at is the possibility of them having an unnatural, perverted relationship. As the narrator observes:

*Ful loude he soong "Com hider, love to me!
This Somonour bar to him a stif burdown
Was never grompe of half so greet a soun. (Lines: 672-74).*

In other words, the Pardoner's love ditty is addressed to the Summoner, who lends it a strong bass accompaniment. Evidently he is not averse to the Pardoner's perverted, unnatural advances. The former's physical description too shows him to be effeminate: his hair is 'as yellow as wax' and smooth and straight and hang down his shoulders in locks. Almost like a girl he spreads his yellow hair over his shoulders. He wears no hood for it was packed up (trussed') in his bag and he goes bare headed save for a cap, in his absurdly foppish desire to be fashionable:

*Hym thoughtle he rood al of the newe jet;
Dischevelee, save his cappe, he rood al bare. (Lines: 682-83).*

His description thus points not only towards an effeminacy of body but also of mind. All this while the narrator is merely observing and giving us the details. It is the poet Chaucer who is choosing these details to tell us by implication about the kind of person the Pardoner is.

Glaring eyes such as the Pardoner's, indicate according to certain authorities "a man given to folly, a glutton, a libertine and a drunkard" (Bowden, p. 275). As we read on, the Pardoner justifies this assumption. Chaucer devotes a few more lines to emphasize the Pardoner's effeminate nature. His voice is thin as a goat's, he has no beard and 'ne never sholde have' and his face is as smooth as though it has just been shaved, and lest we may still miss the point he explicitly states 'In trowe he were a geldyng or a mare'. (691). Even the gullible narrator can make an inference from all these details. All the earlier suggestive remarks, observations, hints etc., are now lent absolute credence. The friendship of the Summoner and the Pardoner is certainly a perverted relationship. Chaucer is thoroughly scornful of the two.



But what of his profession? Does he perform his duties well? Before we look for an answer to this question, a brief explanation is required as to the legitimate duties of a Pardoner. Pollard explains thus:

A Pardoner was a trafficker in papal pardons or indulgences. In the early church a penitent as a condition of receiving absolution would have to fast (i.e. abstain from meat), or do other penance, for so many days, according to the gravity of his sin. Later on, a payment of money to an approved charitable purpose was accepted as an equivalent for so many days' penance, and a certificate of such payment was called a pardon or indulgence. The indulgence was a remission of ecclesiastical penances, not a remission of sins, but its true character was easily obscured, and a theory of a 'treasury' of super abounding merits of the Virgin and saints 'promulgated by Pope Clement V. in 1350' introduced new confusion. In order to raise money for building or repairing a church or other good objects, men were sent all over Europe offering indulgences to all who contributed. Moreover these authorized alms-gatherers were out-rivalled by irregular ones, who having obtained, or forged, a license from a Pope or Bishop, exhibited relics, to the veneration of which, so they pretended, special indulgences had been attached in the cases of those offering money for the privilege. Popes, Bishops, and Kings all tried at various times to suppress these irregular Pardoners, but the traffic in both authorized and unauthorized indulgences went on till the Reformation. (p.93-94).

As is evident from the above explanation, the office of a pardoner afforded ample opportunities of dishonesty, swindling and fraud. Chaucer's Pardoner we see is a typical representative of these irregular pardoners. He carries with him many false relics which he sells to the unsuspecting innocent people. In his trunk ("male") he carries a pillowcase ("pilwe-beer") which he claims is St. Peter's sail when he went to the sea. He even carries a crucifix made of 'latoun' (which is a metal like brass), studded with stones. In a glass jar he has a few pigs' bones. Armed with these relics he is always on the lookout for some poor innocent man. Once he gets hold of one he is able to convince the gullible fellow and extract more money from him more than a Parson could ever hope to earn in two months. Thus:

.... with feyned flaterye and japes

He made the person and the peple his apes. (Lines: 705-706).

This greedy, avaricious, lying, shameless, fraudulent Pardoner can prove a noble ecclesiast in Church:

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*Well koude he rede a lessown or a storie,
But alderbest he song an offertories: (Lines: 709-710)*

And when that song is sung, he preaches in his polished (*'afile'*) tongue, but the aim is “*To winne silver, as ful wel koude.*” It is only for the money that he sings so merrily and loud. Thus his preaching, his sermonising, his songs and relics are all meant to deceive the people and not to show them the right path. Such an absolute distortion of office deserves and gets an outright condemnation from the narrator. The tone which had been so genial throughout is now bitter and full of disgust. There is no cloaking of true meaning, even the naïve narrator can see the truth.

Significantly, the Pardoner is the last pilgrim to be described possibly because he is an outcast in more ways than one. Not only because of his physical impotence but also because of his dark, perverted, unrepentant, unreformed heart and soul; his spiritual blindness or we can say moral and spiritual impotence. As each of the pilgrims relates his/her tale, we get to know them increasingly better and so also is the case with the Pardoner.

One more fact which would have had special relevance for contemporary readers, needs to be mentioned. At the beginning of the Pardoner's portrait Chaucer tells us that he comes from Rouncivalle. This means, he is connected to the convent of Roncesvalles in Spain. Pardoners who worked for institutions governed from abroad were especially difficult to control and just when Chaucer was writing there had been many scandals connected with the Pardoner's Rouncivalle. Therefore, contemporary public could already connect the Pardoner with these scandals and Chaucer could thus have an added advantage.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 669 – 714
<i>compeer</i>	companion	
<i>Bar to hym</i>	Accompanied him	
<i>Stif burdoun</i>	Strong bass	
<i>trompe</i>	trumpet	
<i>heer</i>	hair	
<i>heeng</i>	hung	
<i>A strike of flex</i>	A bundle of flax	



Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 669 – 714
<i>His shuldres overspradde</i>	Spread over his shoulders	
<i>By colpons oon on oon</i>	Bystrands one by one	
<i>For jolitee</i>	For fun sake	
<i>Trussed up</i>	Bundled up	
<i>walet</i>	bag	
<i>Newe jet</i>	In latest style	
<i>dischevelee</i>	disheveled	
<i>Glarynge eyen hadde he as an hare</i>	Glaring eyes make him to be a shameless person and the comparison to a hare is also disparaging as it indicates his effeminate nature	
<i>Vernicle</i>	Veronica – St Veronica offered her veil to Christ so he could wipe his face. The impression of Christ's face was transferred to the veil. This veil was kept at St. Peter's in Rome. Copies of it were available and often worn by pilgrims. The Pardoner professes to have a piece of this veil or a copy of it in his bag full of relics.	
<i>Bretful of pardons</i>	Brimful of pardons	
<i>geldyng</i>	A castrated horse	
<i>male</i>	bag	
<i>Pilwe beer</i>	Pillow case	
<i>Our Lady's veyl</i>	Virgin Mary's veil	
<i>Gobet of the seyl</i>	A piece of the sail	
<i>croys</i>	crucifix	
<i>latoun</i>	Metal like brass	
<i>glas</i>	Glass jar	



Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 669 – 714
japes	tricks	
trewely	truly	
chirche	Church	
Noble ecclesiaste	Te pardoner was probably not a clergyman.	
storie	From the Bible	
alderbest	Best of all	
offertory	The part of the Mass when people offer gifts	
wiste	knew	
affyle	Smoothen	
murierly	merrily	

Check Your Progress

1. What is a pardon? What is the job of a pardoner?
2. What do certain details in the Pardoner's physical description tell us about him?
3. What does he carry in his wallet?
4. Why does the poet call him a gelding or a mare?
5. Describe some of the fake relics that the Pardoner carries with him.
6. How is the Pardoner abusing his profession?

Apart from these pilgrims who are described in some details, there are two more who undertake the pilgrimage. The Host of the Tabard Inn and Chaucer himself. The Host is described briefly as a large man with sharp eyes, bold and honest in his speech and also wise. 'A *semely man*' he is also jovial and as opposed to the Pardoner, the Host is quite positively masculine:

And of manhood hym lakkede right naught', (Line: 756).



It is his suggestion that to pass their time on the way to Canterbury, each pilgrim shall tell two tales and two while coming back. Of course the plan changes as already discussed in section 3.0. but they do set off with his scheme in mind.

The pilgrim Chaucer, however, tells us nothing about himself except some short remarks here and there. We as readers have to build up his character as it comes out through his descriptions of the various pilgrims. He has a very important role to play, as the innocent, naive, gullible, unsuspecting persona who takes things at face value. Some aspects of his role have already been discussed in section 3.4. E.T. Donaldson's essay 'Chaucer the Pilgrim' deals extensively with the topic.

6.3 The Conclusion

Having described all the pilgrims, the narrator proceeds to tell us a little about what happened during the night as they all waited to set off on a pilgrimage the next morning. From what the narrator has told us we are supposed to imagine that he has gone around talking to all these people and has gleaned all the information he has provided us with about each one of them. In the ensuing lines he informs us about the story-telling game that they all have planned; gives us a description of the Host of the Inn at Southwark; describes how they draw lots to decide who will tell a tale first and how the lot falls to the Knight and how they all finally set off the next morning with a lot of fanfare. Let us read and see how it happens.

6.3.1 The Narrator

Lines 714 – 746

*Now have I toold you smoothly, in a clause,
Th' estaat, th'array, the nobre, and eek the cause . . .*

.....
*Heere in this tale, as that they sholde stonde.
My wit is short, ye may wel understonde.*

6.3.1.1 Detailed Paraphrase

The narrator sums up for us that he has told us briefly about the rank, the dress, the number and also the reason why this company was gathered here in Southwark at this fine hostelry that was called the Tabard, situated close by the Bell. But, he says, now the time has come to tell us how this group of pilgrims conducted themselves during the night and he includes himself in the group. After that he declares he will tell us about their journey and all the rest of the pilgrimage. But first he appeals to our courtesy and prays that we should not attribute it



to his rudeness, that he spoke plainly in the matter when he repeated their exact words and their behavior, because he reported accurately whatever was told to him. He emphasizes it further by saying that whoever repeats a story after someone, he must repeat it as truthfully and closely as possible. Every single word must be close to the original if it be in the narrator's power, although he may seem rude and free, or else his tale would be inaccurate 'untrewe'. He may then have to make up things or find new words. So, he must speak the truth and not spare the person even though he may be his brother. He is obliged to repeat their words. Christ himself spoke very plainly in Holy Writ, says the narrator and also Plato said that words must be closely related to the deed. The narrator now appeals to us to forgive him because he has not set folks in their order of rank in this tale and the reason he gives is that his wit is short so we must understand.

6.3.1.2 Critical Comment

In these lines Chaucer the narrator takes us back to the point from where we had started reminding us of how he had planned to describe each of the pilgrims. He brings us full circle here telling us that he has done what he set out to do. He followed his plan and told us what sort of person each pilgrim was and also about his/her social rank and attire. Having read these portraits we are well aware that the plan has not been observed rigidly or else the portraits would have turned out to be drab and uninteresting, all following the same pattern. As it happens and as we have witnessed ourselves in our reading of the *Prologue*, no two portraits are alike. There is endless variety here and abundant humour and satire as well.

It is an ingenious move on the poet's part to make the narrator apologize for being impolite and rude while reporting all that he has been able to uncover about these pilgrims from his interaction with them. He is only being truthful he says, which of course is amusing since the entire work is a work of fiction. The narrator also apologizes for not having listed the portraits in their order:

*Also I prey yow foryeve it me,
Al Have I nat set folk in hir degree
Here in this tale, as that they sholde toned;
My wit is short, ye may wel understonde (Lines: 743-746)*

Claiming to fall short of intelligence (my wit is short) is a master stroke of irony. We know only too well how much skill and intelligence has gone into each and every description on the poet's part. Irony works so well only because the poet has created the persona of a gullible narrator who approves of whatever he sees. The poet standing behind him, however,



constantly chooses words and details that make us see the reality of these characters. The poet is being modest here.

Making the narrator apologize for not having listed the pilgrims according to their social rank is an attempt on the part of the poet to draw attention to the fact that he has done just that. He begins with the Knight who in this company of pilgrims belongs to the highest social order – the feudal class, then moves on to the ecclesiasts and then to the rising middle classes and finally finishes with the rogues.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 714 – 746
<i>soothly</i>	truthfully	
<i>clause</i>	In brief	
<i>estaat</i>	rank	
<i>array</i>	clothes	
<i>highte</i>	Was called	
<i>Faste by</i>	Close by	
<i>Belle</i>	Probably another inn	
<i>How we baren us</i>	How we bore ourselves/ what we did with ourselves	
<i>alight</i>	Alighted/settled	
<i>viage</i>	journey	
<i>remenaunt</i>	remaining	
<i>N'arete</i>	do not ascribe	
<i>vileinye</i>	rudeness	
<i>hir</i>	their	
<i>cheere</i>	behavior	
<i>properly</i>	exactly	
<i>moot</i>	must	

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Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 714 – 746
<i>reherce</i>	repeat	
<i>As ny</i>	As closely	
<i>rudeliche</i>	rudely	
<i>large</i>	broadly	
<i>feyne</i>	Feign things	
<i>spare</i>	avoid	
<i>Moot as wel seye</i>	Must say accurately	
<i>Ful brode</i>	Broadly/ clearly	
<i>Ye woot</i>	You know	
<i>No vileinye</i>	It is not a disgrace	
<i>Mote be cosin</i>	Must be cousin	
<i>Al</i>	although	
<i>degree</i>	Social rank	
<i>My wit is short</i>	I am not clever enough	

6.3.2 The Host

Lines 747 – 783

*Greet chiere made oure Host us everichon
And to the soper sette he us anon . .*

.....

*But ye be myrie, I wol yeve yow myn heed!
Hoold up youre hondes, withouten moore speche”*

6.3.2.1 Detailed Paraphrase

Our Host welcomed each one of us, says the narrator and he set us to supper right away. He served us with food of the best sort. The wine was strong and we were all very happy to drink it. Our Host was an impressive man indeed, the narrator tells us. He was fit to be a marshal



i.e., a master of ceremonies, in a lord's hall. He was a large man with prominent or bulging eyes. There was no better businessman in Cheapside. He was bold in his speech and sensible and well-mannered and lacked nothing in manhood. Moreover, he was a jolly man and after supper he began to be merry. When we had paid our bills, the narrator tells us, the Host spoke of mirth among other things and said thus: "Now gentlemen, truly, you are heartily welcome to me. For by my word and I shall not lie, I have not seen this year so merry a company at one time in this lodging as is at this moment. I would gladly make you merry if I knew how and I have just thought of an amusement that would give you pleasure and it will cost nothing."

6.3.2.2 Critical Comment

In this section of the Prologue we are introduced to the Host. He is described as a large manly man, domineering, sociable, fun loving but a shrewd businessman. The detail about his bulging eyes immediately individualizes him. He is an excellent innkeeper and runs his tavern well. He looks after the guests nicely and serves them the best sort of food and wine. As expected the narrator is impressed by him and approves of whatever he does. According to him he is good enough to be master of ceremonies at any lord's table. While the gullible narrator observes, it is the poet working behind him who tells us what a smart businessman the Host is. He introduces his plan only after all of them had paid their bills. He gets in their good books by praising them all saying that he has never seen such a merry company before. Having gained their confidence he proceeds to introduce his plan but not before emphasizing that it will cost them nothing. He is a materialistic man and understands the importance of money for each of these pilgrims and uses it appropriately in his plan. They look forward to entertainment that is also free of cost. He thus creates a sense of eagerness for pleasure amongst the pilgrims. His leadership qualities are evident.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 747 – 768
<i>Greet chere</i>	Great welcome	
<i>everichon</i>	Each one	
<i>soper</i>	supper	
<i>anon</i>	At once	
<i>leste</i>	glad	
<i>semely</i>	Seemly/ suitable	

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Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 747 – 768
<i>withalle</i>	moreover	
<i>marshall</i>	Master of ceremonies	
<i>Eyen stepe</i>	Prominent eyes	
<i>burgeys</i>	ciizen	
<i>Chepe</i>	Cheapside	
<i>wys</i>	wise	
<i>Wel -ytaught</i>	Well mannered	
<i>Eek therto</i>	He was also	
<i>pleyen</i>	entertainment	
<i>mirth</i>	Fun/amusement	
<i>rekeninges</i>	Payments/ paid our bills	
<i>atones</i>	At once	
<i>herberwe</i>	inn	
<i>bithought</i>	Struck by a thought	
<i>To doon yow ese</i>	To entertain you	

6.3.3 The Host's Suggestion

Lines 769 – 809

*Ye goon to Canterbury – God yow spede
The blissful martir quyte yow your mede*

*Tel me anon, withouten words mo,
And I wol erly shape me therefore.*

6.3.3.1 Detailed Paraphrase

Addressing the pilgrims the Host says “you go to Canterbury – may God give you success and may the blessed martyr pay you your reward! And I know well that as you go by the way, you plan to tell stories and amuse yourselves; but truly it is neither comfort nor mirth in



riding by the way as dumb as a stone; Therefore, I will create an entertainment for you, as I told you before and provide some pleasure. And if it pleases you all to accept my judgement and to do as I tell you, tomorrow when you ride by the way, Now by the soul of my father who is dead, if you are not merry, I will give you my head! Hold up your hands without more speech.”

The narrator informs us that it did not take long for the pilgrims to decide. It did not seem worthwhile to think too much about it and the Host’s request was granted without more discussion. He was asked to pronounce his verdict as he wished. Once again addressing the pilgrims the Host begins: “Gentlemen,” he says, “now listen to me for the best course of action. But I pray you do not be scornful. This is the point, to speak briefly and plainly, to make our way seem short, one must tell two tales in this journey to Canterbury, I mean on the way to Canterbury, and then while coming homeward he shall tell two more stories of adventures that have happened to him in old times. And whichever of you does the best of all – that is to say, whoever tells in this case tales of best moral meaning and provide the most entertainment – shall – have supper at the cost of us all, here in the same place sitting by this post when we come back from Canterbury. And to make you all the more merrier I will gladly ride with you entirely at my cost and be your guide; And whosoever will not accept my judgement shall pay all that we spend on the way. And if you all agree to it tell me straightaway without further discussion and I will get ready early for this.”

6.3.3.2 Critical Comment

Two things are happening in the lines mentioned above. It only gets reinforced that the Host is a born leader as he appoints himself their judge and chalks out a plan for a competition. It is also very evident that he has an eye on his own profit because in the plan that he lays out the pilgrims are supposed to return to his inn and reward the winner with a meal at everybody else’s expense. So, from the point of view of business the Host stands to gain in the competition. To ensure that they return he even decides to join them in the pilgrimage.

The other and more important thing happening in these lines is that we are given the entire plan that will string diverse tales together. This is the competition that the Host plans. Each pilgrim will tell two tales while going towards Canterbury and two tales while coming back. Whoever tells the best tale in terms of edification and entertainment will be feasted at the expense of the other twenty-nine pilgrims. There being thirty pilgrims in all including the narrator this gave scope to include one hundred and twenty tales. The work as it stands, however, is incomplete and has twenty finished stories, two unfinished ones and two interrupted ones.

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Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 769 – 809
<i>God yow spede</i>	May God give you success	
<i>The blissful martir</i>	The blessed martyr (St. Thomas a Beckett)	
<i>Quyte yow your mede</i>	Give you your reward	
<i>woot</i>	know	
<i>Ye shape yow</i>	You plan to	
<i>talen</i>	Tell stories	
<i>To pleye</i>	To play / have fun	
<i>Doumb as a stoon</i>	Dumb as a stone	
<i>Maken youw disport</i>	Entertain you	
<i>Seyde erst</i>	Said before	
<i>Y oon assent</i>	By everyone's agreement	
<i>Stoned at my jugement</i>	Stand by my judgement/accept	
<i>But ye be merye</i>	If you do not enjoy it	
<i>I wol yeve yow</i>	I will give you	
<i>Myn heed</i>	My head	
<i>Hoold up . . . more speche</i>	Hold your hands I agreement without discussing it further	
<i>Oure counseil was nat . . . to seche</i>	It did not take long for us to decide.	
<i>Make it wys</i>	Discuss it too much	
<i>Withouten more avys</i>	Without much consideration	
<i>Bad him</i>	Told him	



Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 769 – 809
<i>Voirdit . . . leste</i>	Pronounce his decision as he wished	
<i>Herkeneth for the beste</i>	Listen carefully	
<i>But . . . desdeyn</i>	But do not treat it with disdain	
<i>To shorte with oure weye</i>	To shorten our way	
<i>Viage</i>	journey	
<i>tweye</i>	two	
<i>To Caunterbury-ward</i>	On the way to Canterbury	
<i>Whilom han bifalle</i>	Had happened in the past	
<i>Bereth him best of alle</i>	Manages /performs best of all	
<i>In this cas</i>	On this occasion	
<i>Tales of best sentence</i>	Tales of serious meaning	
<i>Most solace</i>	Most entertaining and comforting	
<i>Oure aller cost</i>	At the expense of rest of the pilgrims	
<i>Agayn</i>	back	
<i>goodly</i>	Gladly	
<i>My jugement withseye</i>	Contradicts or disputes my judgement	
<i>vouchesauf</i>	Agree/grant	
<i>Tell me anon</i>	Tell me immediately	
<i>Erly shape me</i>	Get ready for the journey early	



6.3.4 The Acceptance and Setting Off

Lines 810 – 858

*This thing was graunted and oure othes swore
With ful glad herte, and preyden hym also...*

.....
*Whoso be rebel to my juggement
Shal paye for al that by the wey.*

6.3.4.1 Detailed Paraphrase

The narrator tells us that everybody accepted the Host's proposal and swore to abide by it. The pilgrims requested the Host that he would consent to be their governor and would judge and keep score of their tales and set the supper at a certain price. The pilgrims all agreed to be governed according to his wish in every respect and thus unanimously the pilgrims agreed to accord to his judgement. After that the wine was fetched immediately and everyone drank and went to rest without delaying any longer.

In the morning when the day began the Host arose, tells the narrator and awakened all the pilgrims and gathered them all together in a flock. And they set off on their way walking briskly at a pace more than a walk till they reached the Watering of St. Thomas; and there the Host stopped his horse and addressed them again: "Gentlemen, listen if you please. You know our agreement and I remind you of it. If what you said last night agrees with what you say this morning then let's see now who will tell the first tale. As ever I may drink wine or ale, whoever rebels against my judgement shall pay for all that is spent on the way. Now let's draw lots before we proceed any further. He that has the shortest will begin."

The Host then addresses the Knight and calling him his master and his lord, asks him to draw the lot. He calls the Prioress and asks her to come near and also calls the Clerk asking him to leave aside his modesty. He calls out to all of them to not think too much and come forward. The drawing of lots began, tells the narrator, and as it happened, whether by fate or chance, the truth is that the cut fell to the Knight. Everyone was glad about it and it was right that he must tell his tale as promised and agreed. When this good man (the Knight) saw it was so and he was wise and obedient, he said "Since I shall begin the game, Why! Welcome be the cut in God's name! Now let us ride and listen to what I say." And with that word, says the narrator, we rode forth on our way. And he (the Knight) began his tale in a happy manner and what he said you may now hear.

**6.3.4.2 Critical Comment**

In these lines, under the Host's leadership, the plan of the competition is followed through. The Host proves himself to be the right kind of person to draw such a diverse group together. He is chosen to be the judge unanimously, which speaks volumes for his tact and geniality. In order to make them adhere to the plan he even makes use of a mild threat saying that whoever contradicts his judgement will have to pay for everybody's expenses along the way. The next step is to decide who will tell the first tale.

In this group of pilgrims, it is the Knight who occupies the highest place in order of social rank. The Host manipulates the drawing of lots in such a way that the cut falls to the Knight to tell the first tale. The poet, however, lets it remain ambiguous whether it happened by chance or was it a conscious attempt.

The last thing we see of the pilgrims is all of them riding out together in a merry spirit and a cheerful manner enjoying themselves thoroughly.

Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 810 – 858
<i>Oure othes swore</i>	Our oaths were sworn	
<i>vouchesauf</i>	Agree	
<i>governour</i>	president	
<i>Juge and reportour</i>	Judge and reporter	
<i>And set . . . prys</i>	And arrange a supper at a certain price	
<i>Reuled been</i>	Be ruled	
<i>At his devys</i>	At his direction/pleasure	
<i>In heigh and lowe</i>	In great things and small	
<i>By oon assent</i>	By everyone's agreement	
<i>Accorded to</i>	Agreed to	
<i>Wyn was fet</i>	Wine was fetched	
<i>To reste went ech</i>	Each one went to rest	
<i>taryinge</i>	delay	

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Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 810 – 858
<i>amorwe</i>	In the morning	
<i>cok</i>	Cock, the rooster	
<i>gadrede</i>	gathered	
<i>Litel more than pas</i>	Little faster than the walking pace	
<i>watering</i>	Watering place – where the pilgrims stop to water their horses	
<i>Bigan his hors areste</i>	Stopped or pulled u his horse	
<i>If yow leste</i>	If you please	
<i>Ye woot youre forward</i>	You know your promise	
<i>I it yow recorde</i>	I remind you of it	
<i>If even song . . . acorde</i>	If evening song and morning song agree i.e. if you haven't changed your decision	
<i>mote</i>	must	
<i>Draweth cut</i>	Draw lots – the Host holds some straws in his hand of different lengths. The lot will fall to the one who draws the shortest straw.	
<i>Er that we ferrer twinne</i>	Before we go any further	
<i>accord</i>	decision	
<i>Lat be youre shamfastnesse</i>	Set aside your modesty	
<i>ne studieth noght</i>	Stop dreaming or thinking too much about it	
<i>Every wight</i>	Every person	
<i>By aventure, or sort or cas</i>	By luck or fate or chance	



Glossary and Explanatory Notes		Lines 810 – 858
<i>The sothe is</i>	The truth is	
<i>The cut fil</i>	The cut / lot fell	
<i>blythe</i>	happy	
<i>As was resoun</i>	As was right	
<i>composicioun</i>	agreement	
<i>Han herd</i>	Have heard	
<i>What nedeth words mo</i>	What more needs to be said	
<i>That wys was</i>	That was wise/sensible	
<i>We riden forth</i>	We rode forth	
<i>Merry chere</i>	Happy manner	

Check Your Progress

1. What does the narrator apologise to the readers about after having described all the pilgrims?
2. What distinguishes the Host as a leader of the company of pilgrims?
3. What sport or game does he suggest for passing the time? What are the rules of this game?
4. How is it decided who will tell the first tale?

7. THE PARDONERS'S PROLOGUE AND TALE

In our discussion of the Pardoner's character in Section 6.2.22 we have already seen what a corrupt official of the Church he is. His *Prologue* and *Tale* reinforce the point, so much so that it becomes almost a kind of self-exposure. He structures his *Tale* as a sermon basing it on the text '*Radix malorum est cupiditas*' meaning 'Avarice is the root of all evil.' The irony



here is unmissable. In essence he is preaching against that very sin of which he himself is guilty.

In terms of narrative art, *The Pardoner's Tale* is a masterful example of Chaucer's skill as a storyteller. The tale is rich in symbolism and allegory, and Chaucer employs a variety of literary techniques to create a vivid and engaging narrative. The use of foreshadowing, and dramatic irony, create suspense and tension and together they all contribute to the tale's impact. The ambiguous ending leaves the reader with much to ponder.

7.1 THE PROLOGUE: SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

In his Prologue the Pardoner begins with a boastful account of his preaching prowess and of the deceptions he has practiced so successfully all along:

*Lordinges, 'quod he, 'in cherches whan I preche
I peyne me to han an hauteyn speech...' (43-44)*

He is obviously very impressed with himself, and unashamedly launches into singing his own praises. He always knows his text by heart, he says, and always preaches on the same theme: Love of money is the root of all evils, thus stating the theme of his tale right at the outset. He then proceeds to give a list of the fraudulent tricks he practices on ignorant, simple country people. He first establishes his credentials by showing them the bulls, or official documents that entrust him with his particular duties. At first he shows them the seal of their local bishop (*'oure lige lordes seel'*), who has licensed the Pardoner, and then goes on to produce fake documents from the Cardinals, Popes etc. He even uses a few Latin words to further impress the simple people.

Having established his authenticity, the Pardoner now describes how he sells bogus relics and earns a lot of money. He carries '*cristal stones*' i.e. glass boxes with pieces of old rags or bones in them. People take them to be relics of some saints. He then describes one or two of his relics more specifically. He has a sheep's shoulder bone, which he passes off as belonging to a holy Jew. Then begins his clever, effective sales-talk. This bone, he says, if placed in a well, has the power to make the water of the well almost magical. Any sick animal drinking that water would be cured. Sheep will also be cured of their various skin diseases. But most important of all, if the man who owns the well, drinks its water every week, early in the morning, he will find that the number of his cattle will rapidly increase. His eyes probably alighting on the ladies of the company, he adds another magical power to this relic. If any wife serves her jealous husband, a soup made out of that well's water, her husband will never suspect her. Thus, he claims it will cure jealousy.



He next takes out a mitten which he asserts can be used to advantage by a farmer if he wears it while sowing seeds in his field. The yield of grain will decidedly increase.

This consummate hypocrite now boasts proudly of his final shot. He tells it plainly to the simple people that those men who have committed sins so terrible that they dare not confess them, and those women who have been unfaithful to their husbands will not be able to buy pardons from him. All people who are innocent of such sins however, can readily come forward and buy his relics.

With this he turns to the Canterbury pilgrims and boasts unashamedly how much he has earned just from this business of selling fraudulent relics.

*By this gaude have I wonne, yeer by yeer,
An hundred mark sith I was Pardoner. (101-102)*

He is the perfect, smooth operator, confident of his professional skill and gift of oratory. He then proceeds to give a flattering description of himself preaching a sermon. What strikes one most is his utter contempt for the ignorant people who are stupid enough to be taken in by his sales-talk:

*I' stonde lyk a clerk in my pulpet/ And whan the lewed peple is down y-set
I preche, so as yc han herd bifore,
And telle an hundred false japes more. (103-106)*

Not being a cleric yet posing like one he is once again able to use his fraudulent means successfully, but part of his success lies in the stupidity of the people too. Quite confident of his powers of eloquence and ability to convince people he decides to relate a few hundred 'false japes more.' All the time he is conscious of being a performer and we see him excelling in his own performance:

*Than peyne me to strecche forth the nekke
And est and west upon the peple I bekke,
As doth a dove sitting on a berne.
Myn hondes and y tonge goon so yere
That it is joye to see my business. (107-111)*

He thoroughly enjoys his business. Comparing himself to a dove he describes how he stretches out his neck and moves his head rapidly, along with the speed of the tongue and the hands. There is a convincing show of outward energy. One would expect the preacher to be



inwardly agitated as well, if not equally then to some extent at least. But the Pardoner is completely indifferent. He preaches against avarice but only so that the people may give their money to him. The sole purpose of his preaching is not any correction of sin but to make as much money as he can. For all he cares, his listeners' souls may go blackberrying once they are dead and gone:

*Of avaryce and of swich cursednesse
Is al my preching, for to make hem free
To yeve hir pens and namely unto me;
For my entente is not but for to winne,
And no thing for correccioun of sinne.
I rekke never, whan that they ben beried,
Though that hir soules goon a-blakeberied. (112-118).*

We are shocked to witness such callousness, such cruel indifference, such avaricious self-interest. All his energetic and forceful preaching is seriously undermined by the perverted aim it has. He preaches against avarice only for his own gain. The irony is that he is practising the very sin that he is preaching against.

The only time we see the Pardoner totally involved in his preaching is when he preaches against his opponents who attack him and other pardoners for their fraudulent behaviour:

*For whan I da, non other wyys debate
Than wol I stinge him with my tongue smorte
In preching, so that he shal nat asterte
To been defamed falsely, if that he
hath trespassed to my brethren or to me. (124-128)*

Probably it is his fear of being caught that rouses him to such an energetic condemnation and defamation of those who seek to expose him. Though he refuses to divulge any names, yet he is sure that there are indications which will reveal the culprit. Thus, he admits, under cover of holiness, he spits out his venom.

What is disarming is the Pardoner's frank avowal of his fraud and hypocrisy. He preaches against nothing but avarice and therefore his text is always the same:



‘*Radix malorum est cupiditas*’ i.e. love of money, is the root of all evil. But then he goes on to declare quite openly that he practices the very vice against which he sermonises:

*Thus can I preche agayn that same vyce
Which that I use, and that is avaryce. (139-140-)*

Though he is himself guilty of the sin, yet he boasts proudly, he can get many men to repent on it. The Pardoner’s self-awareness is however limited. Ironically he has a very good understanding of the various sins he preaches against but only to convert others, not himself. Thus, he goes about quite happily in his business. Why should he labour and work hard when there is so much easy money to come by? Why should he even bother to imitate the lives of Christ’s apostles? He will have money, wool, cheese, and wheat, even if it comes from the poorest page or:

*...Of the pourest widwe in a village
Al sholde hir children sterve for famyne.(162-63)*

He is certainly embarrassingly frank. But this is not all. This spiritually, physically sterile man, a eunuch, a gelding or a mare as Chaucer had called him, boasts of having a wench in every town:

*Nay! I wol drinke licour of the vyne
And have a holy wenche in every town.(164-65)*

Finally, he addresses the pilgrims at the end of this long boastful confession and hopes to tell them a good tale now that he has had his drink and hopes also to please them all. His own wickedness does not prevent him from telling a moral tale and he requests the audience to be quiet so that he may begin.

The tale is a constant reflection of the Pardoner. Thus the process of self-exposure does not end with the prologue. The Tale become an extension of character.

Check Your Progress

1. What does the Pardoner’s profession involve?
2. What does he preach against?
3. What is text of his sermon? What is the irony behind it?
4. How does Chaucer the poet expose the Pardoner in his Prologue?



7.2 THE PARDONER'S TALE: A CRITICAL SUMMARY

The Pardoner begins his tale by telling of some people in Flanders who were given to a riotous living. They indulged in the various sins of drinking, gambling, and blaspheming in the taverns. He stops at this point to preach against each of these sins he has mentioned, drawing examples from ancient times to support his arguments. Thus, when he preaches against the evils of drunkenness he uses the examples of Loi, Herod and Attila and later also Lemuel. It was gluttony, he says, that drove Adam from Paradise. Then he preaches against gambling, relating the experiences of Stilboun (Chilon) and Demetrius. Finally, he preaches against the sin of blasphemy. As in a medieval sermon, he too quotes various authorities - Seneca and Paul on drunkenness and gluttony; Mathew and Jeremiah on swearing and so he goes from one sin to the other. The interdependence of all these sins and their relevance to the tale is exhibited in the way they are carried over in the three rioters who are an embodiment of all of them. The moral perspective for the tale is thus set.

Returning to the tale he tells of the three revellers who while sitting in a tavern hear the funeral bell tolling. One of the revellers asks a boy-servant to find out the name of the dead person. The child however already knows that it was an old friend of these three and was killed as he sat drunk. Who killed him? The boy explains:

*Ther came a privee thief men clepeth deeth,
That in this contree al the peple sleeth,
And with his spere he smoot his herte a two
And wente his wey withouten wordes mo. (387-90)*

The child thus personifies Death in his description and warns the three revellers against such an adversary who had slain thousands of people in a pestilence. The boy's mother had advised him in a like manner. The tavern owner supports the boy's story and relates how Death had killed many people in a nearby village. That village surely must be Death's dwelling place and it would be wise to be prepared.

The revellers swear to seek out Death and make light of the danger they were being warned against. They swear to be one in this search for Death and pledge themselves brothers. Drunk as they are, they set out in their search in a furious mood, swearing violent oaths and thus metaphorically tearing Christ's body to pieces.

They have not even crossed half a mile when they meet an old man who greets them humbly. Characteristically they are rude to this old man and ask him why he is covered so much that only his face can be seen. Also, since he seems to be old, one rioter asks him why



he has lived so long. The old man, before answering, looks long at the young man's face and then says, he has lived so long because there was no one willing to exchange his youth for the old man's age. And so, he has to live on as long as God wishes. Even Death does not choose to take his life even though he keeps knocking at the earth with his staff, imploring her to take him in. He would willingly give all his clothes just to be wrapped in a shroud. But mother earth has not yet heard his plea. So, his face is pale and withered ('welked'). He then admonishes the young men for their rude behaviour and advises them not to behave so, especially with old people. He is about to go when the revellers once again rudely stop him and demand to know the whereabouts of Death. They even accuse him of being a party to Death's wish of killing young people.

The old man guides them to a crooked path where he has just left Death, sitting under a tree. Finally, he blesses them and prays to Christ to save and redeem them. The old man now leaves, and the three rioters go running to the tree. All they discover there is a heap of gold florin coins. The sight of gold makes them forget their own pledge and they sit down by the pile of glittering coins.

The 'worst of them' is the first to speak and says that he may be joking all the time, yet he is clever and considers this discovery a gift of fortune. Since the money has come to them so easily, so shall it be spent. But they must move this treasure secretly by night, to one of their houses or else they will be accused of being thieves and may be executed for their own treasure. Two must stay and guard the money while the third goes and buys some bread and wine to last them till nightfall. To decide this, they draw lots and it falls to the youngest to go to the town, and so he leaves.

As soon as his back is turned, the other two revellers agree to stab him when he comes back so that the gold may be divided only between the two of them. Meanwhile, the youngest reveller has decided to kill the other two, so he poisons their wine and keeps his own pure. When he returns the other two stab him and kill him. But as they sit down to celebrate their treasure, the remaining two revellers are also killed by the poisoned wine. At the end of the tale, they are all dead.

The tale is not original and many versions of it may be found in classical and medieval writings. The earliest such tale however is traced back to the Indian Jatakakatha. The emphasis however varies in most of the versions. When Chaucer decided to begin with a declaration of killing Death, it makes for much more irony than would have been there otherwise. Chaucer's revellers are victims of extreme literalism. They take the personification to be a person and so fail to recognize it in the shape of the glittering gold. Their blindness is



absolute. The tale is also a comment on the avaricious nature of mankind which can often lead him into perils.

In this Tale, Chaucer has put all his rhetorical skills to use. Examples, illustrations, comparisons, interpretations, digressions, all contribute to creating the right kind of attitude for the Tale. After having preached against the various sins, suddenly the three rioters are thrust at the readers, thus creating a strong impact. Chaucer deviates from the sources to make this Tale more enjoyable and exciting. He personifies Death, thus making a quest for death possible. He shows how the three rioters are unable to distinguish between the literal and metaphorical meaning. Then he even introduces an irony of situation by describing how the rioters do not know in which direction they are moving. They go to seek death, find it, and it is Death which kills them and not vice versa. The detailed descriptions of the Apothecary and the Old Man may seem superfluous but they have their share in making the Tale exciting.

As far as characterization is concerned, Chaucer has been careful not to individualize the Characters. Instead, he keeps them anonymous, naming only 'Death' thus placing the emphasis where it was required most. By now it is evident that the characters here represent ideas and forces in the mind of the Pardoner. Their impact therefore depends on their thematic importance. The rioters personify the various sins, the child is a personification of innocence, youth as contrasted with the old man who, apart from other interpretations, can be seen to represent Old Age as such. But in the Tale, the Child and the Old Man also represent dramatic choices and turning points for the rioters.

Finally, a double perspective and a unifying irony is maintained throughout the Tale. All events can be explained rationally yet everything can also be seen in terms of allegory and Personification. The ever-present underlying irony, which weaves in and out of the story finally surfaces when Death slays the rioters instead of being killed by them.

The old man in the tale is mysterious figure and has been seen to have symbolic significance. Is he a character in his own right? Is he another personification of Death? Is he the allegorical figure of Old Age, the harbinger of Death? Is he only a contrast to the young revellers or is he the voice of religion? There are many ways of looking at him.



Check Your Progress

1. Who is the Pardoner's Tale about?
2. What do the three rioters personify?
3. What features of a medieval sermon does the tale contain?
4. What prompts the three rioters to search for death.
5. What does the old man personify?
6. What is the irony behind the rioters' search for death?
7. How is the tale an allegory?

7.3 THE EPILOGUE

After he has finished his tale, the Pardoner begins to exploit his own story, he exclaims against the sins that have figured in his tale - treachery, murder, gambling, greed, swearing, gluttony etc. How can it happen, he asks:

*That to thy Creatour which that thee wroughte,
And with his precious herete-blood thee boghte,
Thou art so fals and so unkinde, alas! (613-15)*

It is the perfect moment for him when his audience is reeling under the impression and the implications of the tale. He proceeds to pray for his audience that they may be saved from avarice and then, quite confident of himself, he blatantly tries to cash in on their present emotional and mental state:

*Now goode men, God forgeve you your trespass
And ware you fro the sinne of avaryce.
Myn holy pardoun may yow alle waryce,
So that ye offre nobles or sterlings
Or elles silver broches, spones, ringes (616-20)*

There is, however, a sudden change of tone. Perhaps realizing he has gone too far the Pardoner retreats and pretends that he was only demonstrating how he usually ends his sermon:

*...and lo sirs thus I preche.
And Jesu Crist, that is our soules leche,
So graunte yow his pardon to receyve;
For that is best; I wol you not deceyve. (627-30).*

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It is however difficult to believe that the Pardoner is repentant or sincere at this moment. Many readers have felt this to be a terrible moment of sincerity for the Pardoner, but there is nothing in the previous developments to support such a hypothesis. Moreover, we have already seen too much of his insincerity to believe him now.

The Epilogue bears out the truth of the fact that he was in fact insincere. He now actually tries to sell his pardons and relics to the pilgrims who have witnessed all his confessions. Had he succeeded it would have been the supreme moment of triumph for him. But the Host, who is his first target, launches a counterattack going straight to the two most vulnerable points in him: his homosexuality and his fraudulent relics. The Pardoner is so taken aback and so extremely angry that he refuses to say a word. The Knight has to intervene to bring the congenial atmosphere back into the pilgrimage.

Chaucer's final word seems to be that however effective rhetoric may prove in persuading people against all odds, yet there are limitations to it. All men cannot be fooled at all times.

Check Your Progress

1. What does the Pardoner do the moment he concludes his tale?
2. Comment critically on the following lines:
...and lo sirs thus I preche./ And Jesu Crist, that is our soules leche,/ So graunte yow his pardon to receyve;/ For that is best; I wol you not deceyve.
3. Who stops the Pardoner from succeeding in his attempts to swindle the pilgrims?

8. SUMMING UP

The General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales gives us a glimpse into fourteenth century England where all classes of society are represented except the very rich or the very poor. Chaucer's vivid characterization makes these figures come alive for us and they leave an indelible mark. Be it the chivalrous Knight, the coy Prioress or the crafty Pardoner or even the dirty Cook, they live on in our memory. *The Prologue* provides a fitting framework for the tales that Chaucer's pilgrims tell. His creation of the gullible persona makes for the underlying irony which is a masterstroke that gives Chaucer the freedom for the good humoured but critical appraisal of the pilgrims.



In *The Pardoner's Tale* we get an excellent example of Chaucer's art as a storyteller. It is a complex narrative that touches on several themes, including greed, storytelling, death, religion, and betrayal. Through the story of the three young men, Chaucer highlights the dangers of excessive greed and the importance of living a virtuous life. The tale also explores the power of storytelling and the role of religion in people's lives. Finally, the story emphasizes the importance of trust and loyalty in relationships and the destructive consequences of betrayal.

The Pardoner is a skilled storyteller who uses his tale to manipulate and control his audience. He employs various rhetorical techniques, such as using vivid imagery and invoking the audience's emotions, to create a compelling narrative. Through the Pardoner's tale, Chaucer explores the idea that storytelling can be used to shape people's beliefs and values, as well as to manipulate and control them.

9. SOME EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

I. Reference to Context questions

1. Contextualize, paraphrase and critically comment on the lines given below

*Me thynketh it acordaunt to resoun
To telle yow al the condicioun
Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,
And whiche they weren, and of what degree,
And eek in what array that they were inne;*

2. Identify and critically comment on the lines given below:

*And he was clad in cote and hood of grene.
A sheef of pecok arwes, bright and kene,
Under his belt he bar ful thriftily
(Wel koude he dresse his takel yemanly;
His arwes drouped noght with fetheres lowe),
And in his hand he baar a myghty bowe.*

3. Paraphrase the lines given below and analyze them critically:

*But for to speken of hire conscience,
She was so charitable and so pitous*



*She wolde wepe, if that she saugh a mous
Kaught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde.
Of smale houndes hadde she that she fedde
With rosted flessch, or milk and wastel-breed.
But soore wepte she if oon of hem were deed,
Or if men smoot it with a yerde smerte;
And al was conscience and tendre herte.*

4. Identify and add critical comments bringing out the irony in this description:

*This ilke Monk leet olde thynges pace,
And heeld after the newe world the space.
He yaf nat of that text a pulled hen,
That seith that hunters ben nat hooly men,
Ne that a monk, whan he is recchelees,
Is likned til a fissh that is waterlees --
This is to seyn, a monk out of his cloystre.
But thilke text heeld he nat worth an oystre;
And I seyde his opinion was good.*

5. Paraphrase the following lines and analyze them critically:

*A good WIF was ther OF biside BATHE,
But she was somdel deaf, and that was scathe.
Of clooth-makyng she hadde swich an haunt
She passed hem of Ypres and of Gaunt.
In al the parisshe wif ne was ther noon
That to the offrynge bfore hire sholde goon;
And if ther dide, certeyn so wrooth was she
That she was out of alle charitee.*

6. Identify and critically comment on the lines given below:

*But first I pray yow, of youre curteisye,
That ye n' arette it nat my vileynye,*



Thogh that I pleyedly speke in this mateere,
To telle yow hir wordes and hir cheere,
Ne thogh I speke hir wordes proprely.
For this ye knowen al so wel as I:
Whoso shal telle a tale after a man,
He moot reherce as ny as evere he kan
Everich a word, if it be in his charge,
Al speke he never so rudeliche and large,
Or ellis he moot telle his tale untrewe,

II. Long Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the opening of the *General Prologue*.
2. Do you agree with the view that the *General Prologue* is a cross section of fourteenth century England?
3. Critically analyze the portrait of the Prioress in the *General Prologue*.
4. Write a short note on Chaucer the narrator.
5. Do you agree with the view that all is not as it seems in the *General Prologue*? Justify your answer.
6. Comment critically on the framework device used by Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales*.
7. Comment on any two ideal portraits in the *General Prologue*.
8. The rising middle class was an important section of Medieval England. Discuss any two portraits from this group.
9. Comment on Chaucer's use of irony in the *General Prologue*.
10. The satire in the description of the Pardoner and the Summoner condemns them directly. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
11. "The Pardoner's Tale is a sermon that goes out of control." Discuss.
12. "Chaucer never points an accusing finger at his characters, even when dwelling on their faults." Consider with reference to *The Canterbury Tales*.
13. "The Pardoner is an adept performer." Discuss The Pardoner's prologue and Tale in the light of this remark.



14. Do you think that Chaucer has violated dramatic propriety by putting into the pardoner's mouth one of the most beautiful as well as one of the best told tales in the whole collection? Give a reasoned answer.
15. "He abuses the word of God for worldly ends." Comment on this remark about the pardoner in the light of your reading of Chaucer's *The Pardoner's Tale*.
16. "To describe The General prologue to The Canterbury Tales as the greatest portrait gallery is inadequate, for the Prologue is much more than a collection of character sketches." Critically examine the statement. Analyse Chaucer's skill in characterization with reference to The General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales.
17. Show how the Pardoner's Tale substantiates the text on which the Pardoner preaches, viz., that greed is the root of all evil.

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SONNET-1 ASTROPHEL AND STELLA

Philip Sidney

Shriya Pandey

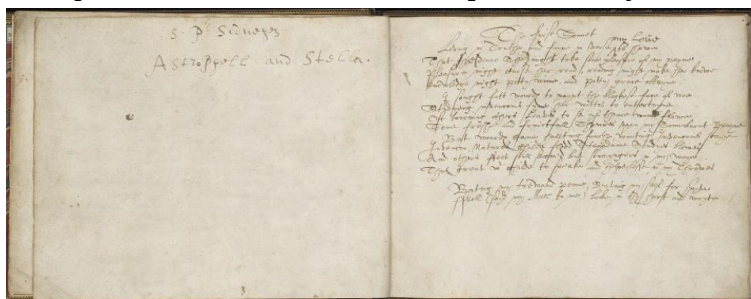
1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This lesson will enable you to understand:

- Philip Sidney (1554-1586) and his times
- Renaissance and Reformation
- Petrarchan Sonnet
- *Astrophel and Stella*
- 'Sonnet I'

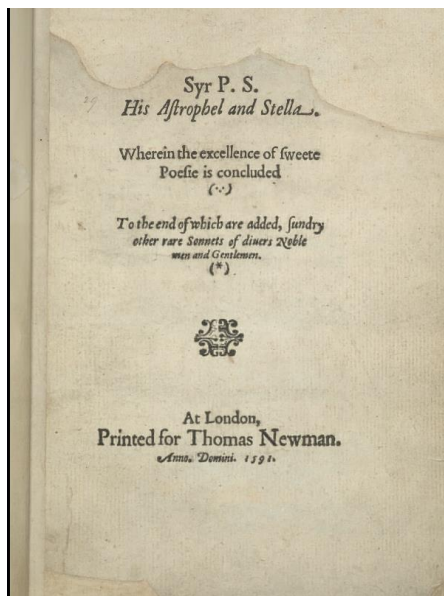
2. INTRODUCTION

Philip Sidney was born on November 29, 1554, in Penhurst, Kent. He belonged to the literary period of the 'Renaissance and Reformation' (1510-1620) and was an Elizabethan courtier. The three major Elizabethan works that Sidney authored are *Arcadia* (1593), a pastoral romance; *Astrophel and Stella* (1591), the first Elizabethan sonnet cycle; and the literary essay, *The Defense of Poesy* (1595) which was published under two titles 'The Defence of Poesie' or 'An Apology for Poetrie'. Herein, is the original copy of the manuscript of *Astrophel and Stella* which was published by Thomas Newman in 1591. The original manuscript is from 'The University of Edinburgh's' archive, "This is perhaps the most important early manuscript of Sir Philip Sidney's sonnet sequence, a defining work of Elizabethan English love poetry."





Sidney (1554-1586) wrote his original manuscript in the 1580s; this copy was made by Sir Edward Dymoke, an associate of Sir William Fowler, uncle of William Drummond, from whose collection it came to Edinburgh University Library in the 1620s.” (collection.ed.ac.uk) The second picture is the front page of *Astrophel and Stella* published in 1591 from ‘The British Library’s’ catalogue.



Education

This part will enable us in recognizing the influences on Sidney that are present in his writing. For instance, Sidney's definition of creativity in *The Defense of Poesy* (1595) states that creativity is the ability to imagine something with the aid of the natural world. Thus that it does not only dictate dates, metaphysics, and beliefs like historians, philosophers, and rhetoricians do. It is understandable that the perspective of art during the Renaissance period influenced his views because the primary goal of poetry is to please rather than to instruct. To keep his place in Queen Elizabeth I's court, he expands it in response to the needs of the time. Thomas Aston, Sidney's instructor at Shrewsbury in 1564, provided him an introduction to classical Greek and Roman thought. He was a Calvinist and humanist minister who ministered in English. Humanists thought that art was purely a subjective impression produced by the intellect. Calvinists are protestants who believe pleasure is sin and only a few souls are predestined to attain God's grace. Protestantism, on the other hand, did not believe in predestination and held that the only way to obtain God's grace is through faith.

Later, in 1568 Sidney enrolled at Christ Church, Oxford. Here, he became familiar with the discipline of rhetoric and logic. He was disappointed by the focus placed on logic and rhetorical analysis in the curriculum. According to Sidney, the desire to communicate, as is in *Astrophel and Stella*, is complicated by the eloquence of language (Renaissance's understanding of the term rhetoric). Because, it placed too much emphasis on memorization, the pompousness achieved by showing off the learning made the poetic language devoid of true emotions. As, Sidney is directly speaking about love, and the stock comic figure of a lover, hence deductive reasoning is harmful for the purpose of delighting. A few months before the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, Sidney left Oxford and moved to France to finish

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his education in 1572. From 1572 to 1575, Sidney travelled the continent and got involved in the establishment of Protestant League and his political efforts were directed to this cause.

Career

Sidney started a diplomatic career in 1575, but it was short-lived because of his staunch Protestantism. Hence, Sidney went to live with his sister, Mary Herbert, the Countess of Pembroke, in 1580. Sidney began writing *Arcadia*, *Astrophil and Stella*, and *The Defense of Poesy*. He returned to the court in 1580. He contributed to the development and implementation of strong Protestant policies while working in the administrative affairs of England, which was preparing for the inevitable confrontation with Spain in 1581. The relationship between England and Spain during the 1580s worsened due to religious differences and business expedition. He married Frances, the daughter of Sir Walsingham, the secretary of state, in 1583, the same year that the Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603) knighted him. Sidney was a valuable member of the Queen's court even though he occasionally disagreed with her views. Sidney was even known as favourite of Queen Elizabeth I. In 1585, the Queen Elizabeth I sent her troops to the war with Spain was inevitable. Sidney was wounded in the thigh during a brief military battle; 22 days later, just before turning 32, he passed away in 1586 and was buried in St. Paul's Cathedral.

Check Your Progress

1. What are the three major works of Sidney?
2. Why did Sidney start the 'Protestant League'?

3. RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION (1510-1620)

Italy began the *Renaissance* in 13th century Europe which lead to a period of *Reformation* in 16th century England. The *Renaissance* was a period of intellectual innovation that aimed to revive the tradition of ancient Greece and Rome while also creating something new and different from Medieval literature. It sought new perspectives on Plato, Aristotle, Epicureanism, and ancient Greek and Roman philosophy. The 15th century spread ideas of *Renaissance* to the northern European, such as, England and France, primarily due to Johannes Gutenberg (1406-1468) who invented movable printing press (1440) which began to print 'Latin Grammar' (*Ars Minor*), 'Gutenberg Bible' (1454-55) and increased the book trade in Europe. Interest in the completeness of human nature increased during the Period



influenced by Petrarch's writings, for example, courtly love tradition in *Rime Sparse* or *Il Canzoniere* (1374) which emphasized on turning away from misery in order to celebrate human virtue. As, the English merchant William Caxton (1422-1491) had introduced printing press into England in 1476. Petrarch's *Rime Sparse* was translated into English in 1380 by Geoffrey Chaucer, and became well known when Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard translated (1527-?) several *Rime* in English in the court of Henry VIII (1491-1547). It is likely that this is how Philip Sidney came to know of Petrarch and his works.

During the 16th century, the English *Reformation* began in 1533 with King Henry VIII's 'Act in Restraint of Appeals,' thus formally separating England from the Roman Catholic Church. The court's official language was established as English. This created a new branch of Christianity, Protestantism. A great number of 'English Bible' (1535) and William Tyndale's (1494-1536) 'Great Bible' (1540) were printed during this time. In many ways, *Reformation's* key ideas were peace as well as fame, honour, and glory. During the reign of queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603) the prominent thought '*via media*' saw emergence. '*Via Media*' means the middle road. The establishment of 72 new grammar schools (*The Royal Grammar* or *Lily's Grammar*) and the use of modern science (arithmetics, physical science et al) in universities during the 16th century were other significant changes. For example, in *Astrophel and Stella*, 'Sonnet I' Astrophel yearns for Stella in the same way he does for 'Invention' of a genuine poetic language. In 'Sonnet 63' the poet writes, "But Grammar's force with sweet success confirm".

Check Your Progress

1. What are main characteristics of *Renaissance and Reformation*?

4. PETRARCHAN SONNET

Petrarchan Sonnets are in the form of 14 lines divided into octave and a sestet stanza. It was first introduced by Italian Renaissance poet, Petrarch (1304-1374) in the poetry collection *Rime Sparse* (1374). Petrarch's influence resulted in the abolition of old mediaeval forms, the adoption of the sonnet and other Italian forms, and the ten-syllable (or twelve-syllable) line as the standard in England, France, Germany, Spain, and other countries. It resulted in new readings of Virgil and Ovid as well as a fresh perspective on the kind of music that can be created in verse. The sonnet sequence *Astrophel and Stella* is composed in Petrarchan tradition; it has 14 lines divided into eight line stanza (octave) and a six line stanza (sestet). The sonnets follow the rhyme scheme of English sonnets abab, cdcd, efef, gg. The meter used

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by Sidney varies from Iambic Pentameter to Iambic Hexameter (Alexandrines). The *Rime Sparse* and the *Trionfi* (1374) had a profound impact on the development of Renaissance style across all of the Europe, “In the rhyme scheme he used the popular ABBA ABBA, only sometimes employing ABAB ABAB or ABAB BAAB. The sestet, he varies between CDE CDE and CDCDCD.” (Ramdev, 2012, p. vx)

A sonnet is a 14-line lyric poem with formal rhymes that expresses various facets of a single idea, mood, or feeling before concluding it in the final lines. In the 1530s, Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) brought the sonnet tradition to England. In *Tottel's Miscellany* (1557), with their translations of Italian sonnets and a few of their original sonnets, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard (1516-1547), Earl of Surrey, are credited with introducing the sonnet to England. Among the greatest examples in English are Sir Philip Sidney's sonnet sequence *Astrophel and Stella* (1591), which established the Petrarchan sonnet form in England. The main subject of the 16th-century sonnet was love.

In Petrarch's works, the interpenetration of passion and virtue is a fundamental theme. These themes are also followed by the English poets who continued the Petrarchan tradition. The contradiction of freedom and servitude is another intriguing theme found in Petrarch's poetry. The lady's presence gave the male lovers a purpose in life, validated their honour and value, and established their nobility and identity. As a result, the service is seen as both a trap and a means of liberation, due to the fact that rewards are not always connected with the lady's service.

Check Your Progress

1. What is a Petrarchan sonnet?
2. How did it gain popularity in England?

5. ASTROPHEL AND STELLA (1591)

There are 108 sonnets and eleven songs in the collection *Astrophel and Stella*, which is more than just a love tale. Sidney discusses a range of subjects related to poetry, creativity, invention, various poetic views, and poetic methods. He also draws the reader's attention to a number of conflicts, including those between wit and emotions, duty and love, desire and reason, and virtue and passion.



Alan Sinfield in *Sidney and Astrophil* (1980) writes that the sonnet sequence is in the style of a dramatic monologue where the narrator infuses it with an ethical perspective as well as dramatic irony with the help of first person and third person narrative to show a shift in point of view. The effect of Astrophel's outright denial of virtue on the love tradition is not something he learns as the events unfold; rather, it comes up as a direct confrontation at the beginning, setting the tone for all that comes after. There is no sincere pretense that love can be justified because it is understood to be self-centered, repressive, and at conflict with decency.

The first-person perspective encourages readers to accept the speaker's historical resemblance even while there are indications that the speaker is entirely fictitious. Sidney attempts to amplify this ambiguity by simultaneously playing up both possibilities. To keep us from mistaking the speaker for a real person, he gives the speaker a name, places him in an ethical context, and occasionally addresses us in the third person. According to A.C. Hamilton in *Sidney's 'Astrophel and Stella' as a Sonnet Sequence* (1969), Astrophel experiences a crisis as a poet and a lover as a result of his courtship's minimal success. He had envisioned Stella as an ideal in his first sonnet, someone who would enjoy hearing his admiration and, out of love, would extend a favour to him. She tragically proves to be a listener who becomes less and less interested as she advances up his literary ladder. She initially revels in his suffering, but no longer; she then accepts his virtue while rejecting his passion.

Check Your Progress

1. Explain the central conflict in *Astrophel and Stella*.
2. Explain the use of first person and third person narrative voices in *Astrophel and Stella*.

6. ASTROPHEL AND STELLA – SONNET I

Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show
That she (dear She) might take some pleasure of my pain:
Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make her know,
Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain;
I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,



Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain:
Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sun-burn'd brain
But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay,
Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame Study's blows,
And others' feet still seem'd but strangers in my way.
Thus, great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,
Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite-
"Fool," said my Muse to me, "look in thy heart and write."

6.1 Critical Analysis

'Sonnet I' follows the rhyme scheme - abababab, cdcd, and ee. The lines are written in iambic hexameter; it has six feet (12 syllables), and the first syllable is unstressed while the second is stressed, for example,

Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show

Lôvínɡ || îñ trúth, || âñd fáín|| îñ vérsé|| mý lôvé|| tô shów

The hexameter Echo verses with iambic beats, which Sidney himself refers to as Anacreon-like verses, is $\wedge / || \wedge / || \wedge / || \wedge / || \wedge / || \wedge /$. Anacreon was a 7th century ancient lyric poet who wrote in praise of love. Sidney came across 'anacreon meter' while translating another ancient 7th century Greek lyric poet Sappho's *Ode to Aphrodite* in the second eclogue of *Arcadia* (1585).

The Octave (Lines 1-8)

The first sonnet of *Astrophel and Stella* sets the tone of the sonnets, which is, passion and virtue. The first-person narrative voice (Astrophel) wants to convince his mistress Stella of the genuineness of his love. Astrophel wants Stella to 'read' the truthfulness of his affection, and the weakening passion he feels for her. He is hopeful that expressing the passion he feels for attaining Stella might make her return his affection. The language is straightforward, and the contradiction between, passion and virtue, is presented dramatically. Stella is a representation of a variety of significant feelings that have been magnified and intensified, sometimes very dramatically brought on by Sidney's need to express them. While simplicity and directness are the foundations around which the other attributes are built, *Astrophel and*



Stella possess much more than these qualities. The conflict between virtue and passion, which is a crucial component of the subject matter in *Astrophel and Stella*, is what gives the presentation its inherent drama in addition to the outward style.

In the lines 4-6, Astrophel tells the readers that he sought to express his woe with knowledgeable words to obtain Stella's grace. Sidney uses the language of speech repetition, "pity"; and the figurative device, personification, "blackest face of woe" for melancholy. He internalizes the rhyme in the line with "win" and "obtain" giving it an alliterative quality. Roger Kuin in *Sir Philip Sidney: The Courtier and the Text* (1989) highlights the word "Sprezzatura" to characterise the texture of Sidney's work. In *The Book of the Courtier* (1528) Castiglione defines Sprezzatura as "a certain nonchalance, so as to conceal all art and make whatever one does or says appear to be without effort and almost without any thought about it." Hence, the 'passion' expressed for Stella demonstrates to the onlookers the values of a wonderful courtier. The courtier is "self-fashioning", as Stephen Greenblatt states in *Renaissance Self Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (1980) to charm Stella who becomes a symbolic sign for the Queen Elizabeth I. This is more apparent in lines 6-8 where Astrophel describes Stella as his muse;

Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain:
Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sun-burn'd brain.

The first three words of Sidney are "inventions," "wits," and "entertain." Astrophel refers to Stella as the "sun"- a star, himself as a "star-lover". Stella has "wit" and also is metaphorically represented as "fresh and fruitful shower". The Renaissance men saw 'nature' and 'art' as having a vast and all-encompassing dominion over the world, though the precise meanings of these terms varied greatly from writer to writer depending on the individual's beliefs about the particular state of 'fallen nature', "the evil in sexual act was due to the submergence of the rational faculty" (Kapadia, 2012, p.9). And, his assumptions about the reliability of human reason as the source of all art. Sidney argues that 'nature' inherently encompasses all empirically observable phenomena, both past and present, while art is only the systematic presentation of these facts.

In the line, "Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow" Astrophel claims that in order to show his love through words and appease to her wit and fine stature he borrowed from other great poets "Oft turning others' leaves" as a transferred epithet for books. "To see if thence would flow" but did not find the satisfaction in such imitations.



The Sestet (Lines 9-14)

In the sestet Sidney goes on to address the second subject of 'Sonnet I', which is, Invention or imagination. Invention is personified as 'Nature's child' and is the most important aspect of the creative process, but wanting it to 'stay' becomes difficult when he is still imitating from other's 'leaves'. The words which elude him will become real and possible only if he looks into his 'heart' and writes. He is reprimanded by his muse when he is in "helpless throes" and is cautioned against the "truant pen". Sidney uses personification, symbolism and irony to reject anything less than the utmost devotion to true emotions.

Check Your Progress

1. Describe the development of poetic subjectivity in 'Sonnet I'.
2. Explain the use of personification in 'Sonnet I'.
3. How does the poet express his internal conflict in 'Sonnet I'?

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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‘THE PASSIONATE MAN’S PILGRIMAGE’

Walter Raleigh

Shriya Pandey

1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Walter Raleigh (1554-1618): Brief biography
- Late 16th century Elizabethan Lyrics
- ‘A Passionate Man’s Pilgrimage’ (1604)- Critical Analysis

2. INTRODUCTION

Walter Raleigh (1554-1618) was an English courtier, explorer, and historian who also composed poetry. Edmund Gosse in *Sir Walter Raleigh* (1903) describes him as a geographer and patron of geographical writing who approaches his subject in the purest light of imagination. As a courtier of Queen Elizabeth I, Raleigh made many attempts to establish colonies between 1584 and 1603. Raleigh arrived at court in the year 1581; he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth I in 1585. With time and his political influence as the Member of Parliament for Devon and Cornwall, Raleigh amassed vast estates in the southwest, the Midlands, and Ireland. He constructed a vessel with his fortune, which he eventually presented it to Queen Elizabeth I, who gave it the name Ark Royal. Later, this ship served as the English fleet’s flagship in the Spanish Armada (1588). When Elizabeth I passed away in 1603 without having had an heir, her cousin James VI of Scotland succeeded her as James I of England. In 1603 Raleigh was sentenced to prison by the enraged king James I after Raleigh’s failed expedition to Guyana (1596) which worsened crown’s relationship with its rival Spain.

Raleigh’s *Apology* (1618) was a series of letters written to Queen Anne, Lord George Carew, and King James I. These were formal letters to communicate his earnestness to be pardoned while he was imprisoned in the ‘Tower of London’. Raleigh was executed in 1618. His most acclaimed poems are *The Lie* (1592), *The Nymph’s Reply to the Shephard* (1600) and *The Passionate Man’s Pilgrimage* (1604).



Check Your Progress

1. In which year was Walter Raleigh knighted by Queen Elizabeth I?
2. Describe the role of Raleigh as Elizabeth I's courtier.

3. THE ELIZABETHAN LYRIC VERSE

According to Reginald Waddy in *Elizabethan Lyrics and Love-Songs* (1911), Elizabethan lyric was influenced by mediaeval song, ballad music, folk song, and a variety of Italian and Renaissance poetry. The lyrics improved in diction after the extreme asceticism and restriction of the Middle Ages, as men realized lyrics were an expression of life, nature, and man in their most amiable and joyful states. An Elizabethan lyric's main theme is love. This theme extends to the love of nature, including the love of birds and flowers, pastoral scenes, spring, country living, simplicity, and serenity.

The 16th Century Lyric in England: A Critical and Historical Reinterpretation: Part I (1939) explains the primary distinction between the Petrarchan sonnets and Lyric poetry of 16th century as the simplicity of language or poetic rhetoric. The most important contribution of the lyric poetry of 16th century is to 'sprung rhythm'. It is a type of unnamed rhythm devised in 16th century where there are two-three accented syllables (which at times might be lightly stressed) followed by unaccented syllables, for example, the first line of *A Passionate Man's Pilgrimage* (1604);

Gúé mé mÿ Scállōp shēll óf quiét (í- accented, î-unaccented, î-lightly accented)

The two key developments in lyric verse from the Elizabethan to the Jacobean eras are: first, the courtiers had an ironic perspective on the pastoral imagery of the early Elizabethans because there was a disconnect between utopian ideals and aspirations for upward mobility. Second, the religious attitude in the lyrics was a cynical reaction to the pacifism of Stuart King James I. The nobility was given more prestige by the Tudors' and London became the center of English life. Trade increased, and new capital from American colonies surged in last two decades of 16th century. As a result, the poetry of the age was a reflection of a largely urban culture;

The eclogue was the pastoral genre inherited and imitated by Renaissance poets. But Elizabethan pastoral is characterized by a proliferation into other genres...within larger



narrative and dramatic forms...lyrics, romances, satires, comedies and tragicomedies, erotic Ovidian narratives, pageants and masques, all of which may be wholly or partially pastoral. It is this explosion of pastoral possibilities that makes the last decades of the sixteenth century and the first decades of the seventeenth century the golden age of English pastoral literature. (Montrose, 1983, p. 420)

Montrose in *Of Gentlemen and Shepherds: The Politics of Elizabethan Pastoral Form* (1983) discusses that the poetry focused on creating an elite community within rural settings in order to portray a world where privilege and virtue meet. The lyrics frequently highlighted the comparison between religious and secular forms of courtly worship and supplication through the employment of language of self-presentation.

Check Your Progress

1. Describe Elizabethan lyric verse.
2. How did the colonial expansion during the last decade of the 16th century influence lyric verse?

4. A PASSIONATE MAN'S PILGRIMAGE (1604): CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Supposed to be written by one at the point of death.

The poem was composed in 1603 and published in 1604, when Raleigh was sentenced to prison by the enraged king James I after Raleigh's failed expedition to Guyana (1596) which worsened crown's relationship with its rival Spain. The first six lines of the poem reveal the Elizabethan knight's shame on being wrongly accused by the court. The poem begins with an echo of his earlier impassioned defense of Elizabethan policy of expansion. The dramatic language situates the poetic diction of Raleigh as a pilgrimage towards glory.

Lines 1-6

'Give me my scallop shell of quiet,
My staff of faith to walk upon
My scrip of joy, immortal diet,
My bottle of salvation

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My gown of glory, hope's true gage,
And thus I'll take my pilgrimage.'

(Rhyme scheme: ABAB CC)

The narrator uses the possessive pronoun 'my' which according to Montrose, is a language strategy of late 16th century writers to calculate the relationship between individual labour and its contribution in glorification of the crown. The use of religious imagery capitalizes on the moral piety of the English people. The desire for salvation, glory and immortality are the key signifiers of a good soul. In the above lines, narrator, pleads for quiet and uses the metaphor of "scallop shell". The despair of narrator does not defeat his hope of attaining salvation and glory. The lines use metaphor to associate the feelings of narrator with his imagination and senses. The rhyming pattern of the lyrics is ABAB CC. The coupled rhyme used by Raleigh have a varying beat style, these were later known as 'Sprung Rhythm' (one-two stressed and indefinite number of unstressed syllables with sudden stressed syllables) and could be traced back to the alliterative verse of old English poetry; eg. 'Givé mé mÿ Scállōp shēll ôf quiet'

Check Your Progress

1. Comment on the religious imagery used in these lines.
2. What is 'sprung Rhythm'?
3. What is the context of this poem?

Lines 7-18

'Blood must be my body's balmer,
No other balm will there be given,
Whilst my soul, like a white palmer,
Travels to the land of heaven;
Over the silver mountains,
Where spring the nectar fountains;
And there I'll kiss
The bowl of bliss,
And drink my eternal fill



On every milken hill.
My soul will be a-dry before,
But after it will ne'er thirst more;

(Rhyme scheme: ABAB CC DD EE FF)

These 12 lines, can be divided into the Elizabethan sonnet form of three quatrains (four line stanzas), or the Ballad form with eight line stanza (Octave) and 4 line stanza (envoi). The lines if viewed as a point of reflection and pietistic devotion profess the love of the poet for the pilgrimage of the soul. The narrator confesses his innocence with the use of simile 'like a white palmer'. The image of the biblical garden is claimed to be the final resting home, with the use of allusions to Socrate's bowl 'The Bowl of bliss' and the eternal fill of milken hill will end the soul's restlessness 'never thirst more'. Raleigh's failed expedition of Guyana in search for 'gold' and charges of sedition lead to his trial and imprisonment in 'The Garden House' of the 'Tower of London'.

The irony of the situation here is that, when he was most likely writing his lyrical verse after being convicted of conspiracy against the crown resulting in a death sentence, the same was changed to life imprisonment in the same year. Ballad, which is a long song telling a story may also have been used by Raleigh to express his amusement as well as fear. It might be targeted at the conspirators who intended his fall and as an apology to James I to plead his innocence. The narrative shifts from the banal to the mystical in the envoi. If we analyze the meter of the poem we can see, that the beats are irregular, sometime in form of a trochee (one stressed and another unstressed syllable).

Check Your Progress

1. How does the narrative shift from the banal to the mystical?
2. Explain 'Bowl of bliss' and 'White palmer'.
3. What is the irony in the writing of this poem?

Lines 19-28

'And by the happy blissful way
More peaceful pilgrims I shall see,
That have shook off their gowns of clay,

14th and 17th Century Poetry



And go apparelled fresh like me.
I'll bring them first
To slake their thirst
And then to taste those nectar suckets,
At the clear wells
Where sweetness dwells,
Drawn up by saints in crystal buckets.'

(Rhyme scheme: ABAB CC DE ED)

This stanza has 10 lines. 'Terra Rima' was invented by Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) in his Italian narrative poem *Divine Comedy* (1321). The poem is based on three premises, human reason, divine revelation and contemplative mysticism. It narrates the state of soul after death which is due for verdict. The rhyme scheme of a 'Terra Rima' is altered in these lines but the allusion is more similar thematically than in form. The narrator uses metaphor to compare the mortal body with 'gowns of clay' and replaces the human ego with a more egalitarian tone of servitude, 'Ile bring them first... Drawn up by Saints in Crystal buckets.'

Check Your Progress

1. Explain the thematic similarity to the *Divine Comedy*.
2. Explain the metaphor 'gowns of clay'.

Lines 29-34

'And when our bottles and all we
Are fill'd with immortality,
Then the holy paths we'll travel,
Strew'd with rubies thick as gravel,
Ceilings of diamonds, sapphire floors,
High walls of coral, and pearl bowers.'

(Rhyme scheme : Irregular)

Anna Beer in "Textual Politics: The Execution of Sir Walter Raleigh" writes that after the



arrest and verdict of 1603, Raleigh began to defend himself brilliantly; “The failure of these intercessions reveals Raleigh's increasing inability to control the language of address. The *Apology* is a long, tortuous, and tortured work, which degenerates into confusion, both syntactically and ideologically. Raleigh mixes humility, in the form of admissions of his failure and his unpardoned status, with aggressive attacks on both the men who failed him in the voyage, the ‘very scum of the world’, and the ‘knaves and liars’ who now slander him. This confusion of tone disables the more lucid passages, which, in their use of historical analogy, their careful expositions of events, and their dialogic expressions, echo the techniques in his other late works. When Raleigh succeeds in stating his case clearly, it is formulated in the aggressively antithetical mode of *The History of the World*.” (p. 22)

‘And when our bottles and all we...High walls of coral, and pearl bowers.’

The inability to control the syntactic language of his lyric is visible in these lines which do not have a rhyme scheme or a definite rhythm. During his days of imprisonment in ‘The Garden House’ Raleigh prepared ‘Balsam of Guiana’ which was a medicine made of ‘pearl, musk, hartshorn, bezoar stone, mint, gentian, mace, red rose, aloes, sassafras, spirits of wine, and vipers’ hearts’. The lines composed during the same time might indicate to this ongoing experiment. The potion was declared to be an atheistic enterprise and revived the oldest charges of religious sacrilege against Raleigh. Hence, the lines are also strategic in this that he hoped, “By casting off the suspicions of religious nonconformity which had dogged him throughout his life, Raleigh's newfound piety served to validate his claims of political truth telling.” (Anna B, 1996, p. 27)

Check Your Progress

1. Explain the significance of the irregular rhyme scheme in these lines.
2. What are the precious gems an allusion to?

Lines 35-50

From thence to heaven's bribeless hall
Where no corrupted voices brawl,
No conscience molten into gold,
Nor forg'd accusers bought and sold,
No cause deferr'd, nor vain-spent journey,

14th and 17th Century Poetry



For there Christ is the king's attorney,
Who pleads for all without degrees,
And he hath angels, but no fees.

When the grand twelve million jury
Of our sins and sinful fury,
'Gainst our souls black verdicts give,
Christ pleads his death, and then we live.
Be thou my speaker, taintless pleader,
Unblotted lawyer, true proceeder,
Thou movest salvation even for alms,
Not with a bribed lawyer's palms.

(Rhyme scheme: AA BB CC DD)

Raleigh is seen defending his personal honour and shows his passionate belief in piety by extolling the King and his lawyers by using the metaphor of Christ and angels. He calls to attention the decadent state of courtiers who according to him are unfit for their positions as they have lost their personal honour and virtue. The rhyme scheme is AABBCDD, and uses varying tri-meter (Fróm thêncê || tó heávêns || Brîbelêss háll/ Whérê nó || còrrúptéd || vóicês bráwl) to express narrator's anguish in being accused wrongfully by the conspirators.

The survival of the state and the state church depended on the internalization of obedience. A good example of this procedure is the pious and submissive Raleigh, who, in these words, renounced a defiance based on personal dignity and instead accepted the justice of his trial, confessed his sin, and begged the King for forgiveness, At the moment of execution it is reported that a great 'muttering went through the multitude[:] never died a braver spirit.' Those who had never loved Raleigh 'loved him in the catastrophe of his life.' (Anna B, 1996, p.31)

Check Your Progress

1. How does Raleigh defend his personal honour?
2. Explain the reference to Christ in relation to James I.



Lines 51-58

And this is my eternal plea
To him that made heaven, earth, and sea,
Seeing my flesh must die so soon,
And want a head to dine next noon,
Just at the stroke when my veins start and spread,
Set on my soul an everlasting head.
Then am I ready, like a palmer fit,
To tread those blest paths which before I writ.

(Rhyme scheme: AA BB CC DD)

These concluding eight lines follow the Petrarchan tradition of reflection. The grotesque imagery of the lines such as, ‘And want a head...start and spread’ and the irony and sardonic tone of the lines alongside the ‘eternal plea’ of the narrator chiefly juxtaposes the idea of honour and martyrdom. It is implicit of dramatization of internalized obedience by the honorable knight Raleigh, who is determined to present his truthfulness. The professed faith through the mystical allusion to perfect Christian death alongside political truth telling is the visual display of Raleigh’s performance.

Check Your Progress

1. How does the poet juxtapose the ideas of honour and martyrdom?

5. CONCLUSION

“Supposed to be written by one at the point of death.”

Execution ballads, were an extremely popular form in early modern England. Taverns, marketplaces, homes, and even the execution space itself resounded with the singing of these macabre ditties, allowing the public to reflect upon and relive the brutal spectacle of execution through the medium of song. Whilst ballads were probably read out loud, they were, first and foremost, intended to be sung, and the majority of ballad sheets usually contain an inscription under the title indicating its tune. These popular and memorable melodies were used over and over again, garnering new thematic and emotional associations with each rendering. (Willis, 2021, web)



The internal variation of stanza, rhyme and rhythm is an imaginative stance dramatized by Raleigh in his lyrical verse. The poem's opening sequence and the closing sequence follow the Petrarchan stanzaic division, with a difference. The middle of the poem is divided into varying lengths and show the influence of Shakespeare, Spencer, Sidney and early classical Renaissance framework, such as, Dante. The change of reigning house, from the Tudors to the Stuarts lead to a series of events which impacted the courtiers. "Into the sunset Raleigh took an intellect which was one of the most powerful and most highly trained of the rich Elizabethan age, He was poet, historian, chemist, soldier, philosopher, courtier; he carried with him on his geographical expeditions the prestige, the skill, the basis of ripe thought which all this commerce with the world of men and books had given him." (Gosse, 1903, p. 605)

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**‘THE SUNNE RISING’ ‘THE CANONIZATION’
‘THE GOOD-MORROW’**

John Donne

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This lesson will enable you to

- Situate Donne in the poetic love tradition
- Understand the main features of metaphysical poetry
- Critically analyze the poems prescribed for your study

THE SUNNE RISING

John Donne

Vibhuti Wadhawan

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Life of John Donne (1572-1631)

John Donne was born in the latter half of Queen Elizabeth’s reign in 1572, in the period commonly identified as the English Renaissance, and lived until the first decade of the Caroline age. Donne’s poems were chiefly read in the manuscript form during his lifetime and were published only after his death in 1631, and therefore, he is considered more of a Jacobean poet. However, critic Jonson considers that Donne had already produced his best work before he was twenty-five, but since his poems were published later, he is regarded as the seventeenth century Jacobean poet.

The early seventeenth century was marked by political upheavals and religious unrest. Donne was born of Roman Catholic parents but by the beginning of the seventeenth century



came under tremendous pressure to conform to the Anglican faith under the Protestant Queen Elizabeth. In 1598, Donne entered the services of Sir Thomas Egerton, Lord Keeper of England, as his secretary. However, what damaged his career was his secret marriage to Anne More who was a minor under the guardianship of Egerton. As a result of his elopement, Donne was dismissed from Egerton's service and fell on bad times. For the next decade, he lived in extreme poverty and unemployment while his family grew, with Anne giving birth to a child each year. In order to improve his fortunes then, Donne took orders as a deacon and priest in 1615 under pressure from King James. However, his wife Anne died soon after while giving birth to a stillborn child. Distraught poet in bereavement turned fully to his vocation as a man of religion. This was also the time his literary compositions saw a shift from secular themes to religious concerns. He became the dean of St. Paul's Cathedral and held this position until his death in 1631.

1.2 DONNE AND THE POETIC LOVE TRADITION

At the time of Donne, there were mainly two 'schools' of love—the Platonic and the Ovidian. Platonic love inspired from Petrarch was of a non-sensuous kind, where the beloved was seen as a spiritual ideal—a manifestation of the higher divine. On the other hand, the Ovidian school had a more sensuous and playful approach towards love where the lover became a slave to his passions. While the Ovidian lover's adoration was to win sensual rewards from his ladylove, the Platonic lover was more devoted and deferential.

Let us not forget that Donne was writing for the Elizabethan court where courtly love poetry enjoyed great patronage and favour with the queen. Courtly love ideal was revived by Queen Elizabeth following the classical and medieval literary traditions of the courtly love poetry, where a nobleman pronounced his love for a lady and idealised her as chaste and unattainable. The higher aim of courtly love ideal was to lead men to transcend the physical beauty of the beloved to reach the ultimate beauty and truth of God. Through the pursuit of such beauty, the lover would be exalted beyond the physical/temporal to a higher spiritual plane. Most of the Elizabethan sonneteers such as Sidney and Spencer wrote in the courtly love tradition and imitated Petrarch's platonic model of courtly love, with their sonnets venerating Queen Elizabeth as the "Virgin Queen".

However, unlike his predecessors such as Spencer who described the visible physical beauty, Petrarch who talked about sublimation in love, and Ovid for whom love was a sport, Donne gives importance to physicality, earthiness and mutuality in love. While Petrarch and



Dante sanctified women's body beyond such unholy contemplation, Donne rejects this old platonic style which was devoid of passion and makes an unabashed declaration of his love.

Donne's poems register a clear departure from the sonnet conventions of the Elizabethan court as he moves away from the idealistic platonic approach of the courtly tradition to a more sensual Ovidian expression. Donne can be credited for not only introducing innovation in the Elizabethan renaissance poetry with his metaphysical conceits but also for challenging the Petrarchan tradition where the beloved was seen as chaste and divine. With Donne, there is no Petrarchan idealisation of women as goddesses. He rejects the platonic Petrarchan ideal of womanhood and instead takes recourse to Ovidian elegies. He subverts the mystification of the beloved commonly seen in Petrarch and expresses a longing for intimacy with the beloved. In complete contrast to Petrarch, Donne celebrates reciprocity in male and female love relationships and there is a continuous assertion of mutuality and reciprocity in the experience of love. The 'thou' and 'I' that one sees in Petrarch becomes 'we' in Donne's poetry.

Broadly speaking, Donne's poetry has been divided into two categories—love poetry and religious poetry. Love is a recurrent theme in his poetry where he expresses a longing for intimacy with the beloved and desires a union that cures "the defects of loneliness" (*The Extasie*). While Donne's love poems, songs and sonnets were composed in 1590s, the impact of religion is seen towards the latter part of his life after he was ordained as an Anglican priest under pressure from King James.

With the ascendancy of James I, the love poetry that flourished in the Elizabethan court was gradually replaced by religious verses greatly patronised the king. The changed socio-religious scene from Elizabethan to Jacobean age also cast its influence on Donne's writings. In contrast to the unabashed eroticism and promiscuity of his earlier poems, his later poems reflect a mature understanding of love that took on a spiritual colouring. Grierson and Smith identify this transition from sensual to religious poetry by Anne Donne's death, and believe that "when Anne died, all Donne's love for her turned back to God from whom she came" (97). His wife Anne's death during childbirth and its bereavement turned him towards God that paved way for religious poetry.

If Donne's early poems are about love and its expression, his later poems are metaphysical in content and reflect his spiritual awareness. However, the two experiences are not shown exclusive and are often presented as one. Several of his holy sonnets and poems conflate the sexual and the spiritual where the two experiences intertwine. Donne's love poems often use religious metaphors. In *Batter my Heart*, the poet uses rape as the central



metaphor. God is drawn as a masculine lover with poet a pliant female asking God to ravish her to make her pure. The later poems reveal a shift in the poet's religious sensibilities where his initial scepticism about God in the *Holy Sonnets* converts to assured faith in *Hymn to God in my Sickness*. It is in his poems where the religious unrest of his age along with his spiritual scepticism and confusion accompanying his ordination also finds expression.

Check Your Progress

1. Explain the difference between the Platonic and Ovidian schools of love.
2. How do Donne's poems register a clear departure from the sonnet conventions of the Elizabethan court?

1.3 THE METAPHYSICAL POETS

The phrase 'metaphysical poets' was first used by Samuel Johnson in *The Lives of Poets* (1799) who applied it to the work of poets writing at the beginning of the seventeenth century whose "manner resembled that of Donne". Most of the metaphysical poetry was written in the latter part of the sixteenth century to mid-seventeenth century, prominently between 1595 and 1660. The metaphysical school included George Herbert, Andrew Marvell, Abraham Cowley among others.

Ostensibly, the word 'metaphysical' is a combination of 'meta' (after) and 'physical' (material) which means beyond or after the physical. Metaphysics is seen as opposite to the physical/material nature of the world and deals with philosophical ideas related to religion, death, nature of the soul, universe and man's place in it. Critic R.G Cox suggests that the term 'metaphysical' was used to identify poetry with "fundamental problems and opposition of a metaphysical nature" that was "express(ed) by a special kind of paradoxical metaphors" (Cox, 110). Much of the metaphysical poetry is religious and frequently other concerns related to soul, eternity and time do appear.

A salient and distinguishing feature of metaphysical poetry is its use of conceits. Conceits are witty and intellectualized metaphors that draw a deliberate parallel between two dissimilar objects/ideas. The two objects may be vastly different and not alike at all, but the ingenuity lies in bringing two disparate ideas and images together to draw an unlikely parallel between the two.



Samuel Johnson identified Donne's poetry as "metaphysical" for his rich use of conceits. Donne's poems use weird analogies, wit and wordplay to fuse logic and emotions through abstract ratiocination and intellectual conceits. If in *A Valediction*, Donne presents lovers as "twin-feet compass", in *The Flea* he uses conceit of a flea to convince his beloved for lovemaking.

Over the years, critics have differentiated conceits from ordinary poetic metaphors. While metaphors imply straightforward comparison, a conceit likens two dissimilar objects. Skilful use of a conceit establishes a relationship between two different ideas to convey the poet's vision by cleverly linking the ordinary and familiar with the abstract and imaginary. The strength of a poem lies in its creative use of metaphysical wit (clever reasoning) that unites unrelated ideas incapable of any link or association.

According to Grierson and Smith, "if Donne's conceits are extravagant, his vocabulary is simple" to reveal his cogent logic and his creative cleverness (99). There are frequent references to religion, medieval cosmology, alchemy, chemistry and imperialism that well illustrate the concerns of his age. Discourses on monarchy, law and science are alluded to and often figure in the form of analogies and conceits.

Check Your Progress

1. What is a conceit? How is it different from ordinary metaphors?

1.4 THE SUNNE RISING

The Sun Rising

Busy old fool, unruly sun.

Why dost thou thus.

Through windows, and through curtains call on us?

Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?

Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide

Late schoolboys, and sour prentices,

Go tell Court-huntsmen, that the King will ride,

Call country ants to harvest offices;

Love, all alike, no season knows, nor clime,

Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.



Thy beams, so reverend, and strong
Why shouldst thou think?
I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,
But that I would not lose her sight so long:
If her eyes have not blinded thine,
Look, and to morrow late, tell me,
Whether both the Indias of spice and Myn
Be where thou left'st them, or lie here with me.
Ask for those Kings whom thou saw'st yesterday.
And thou shall heare, All here in one bed lay.
She's all States, and all Princes, I,
Nothing else is.
Princes do but play us; compar'd to this.
All honor's mimic; All wealth alchemy,
Thou sun art half as happy as we,
In that the world's contracted thus;
Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
To warm the world, that's done in warming us.
Shine here to us, and thou art every where;
This bed thy centre is, these walls, thy sphere.

Donne's *The Sunne Rising* is an imitation of the medieval European tradition of *aubade* –a morning love song sung by the lover when the lovers separate at dawn. These twelfth century *aubade* were essentially love poems in which the lover lamented the end of night's comfort with daybreak. The poem is also influenced by Ovid's *Amores* that were playful and erotic love elegies. Though Donne borrows from the two poetic traditions of Ovid and *aubade*, he subverts them by reinventing the conventions.

The Sunne Rising is addressed to the sun. The poem has the poet speaking in voice of a lover who reproaches the sun for disrupting the pleasures of the night with his beloved. The conceit of the sun runs throughout the poem and the sun presented as a vain voyeur, a peeping-tom who bothers the lovers through the curtains and windows and interferes in their lovemaking.



Though it is the sun that determines the diurnal rhythm, it becomes an irksome nobody for the lover as the lovers are subject to the motions of this sun like the rest of the world. The lover upbraids the sun as “saucy” (impertinent) and “pedantic wretch” (haughty) and asserts his superiority over the sun by calling it “a busy old fool”(1). He condescendingly instructs him to stop bothering them and instead wake up “late schoolboys”, apprentices to various trades, court’s huntsmen preparing for king’s riding out and the “country ants” who go harvesting. The image of the “country ants” here refers to both the real insect ‘ants’ and the field labourers/farm hands engaged in agriculture. “Court huntsmen” here carries a veiled reference to King James who was fond of hunting. Despite its importance, the impertinent orb is dismissively dispatched to discharge his diurnal duties and not bother the lovers.

The sun is a symbol of life; a marker of time, hours and seasons and reins the activities of the world. But the lover refuses to recognise the authority of the sun and flagrantly debunks it by asserting that his love is eternal and not a slave of time or seasons: “Love, all alike, no season knows, nor clime...”(9) Admonishing the sun, Donne asks him what makes the sun think he can control the meeting of the lovers, and goes on to claim that their love is not bound or enslaved by the movement of the sun. The sun holds no authority over the life of lovers and is instead curtly asked to go about his daily business.

The sun is criticised throughout the poem. It is denigrated as “unruly” for intruding into the lives of the lovers and is pulled down from its exalted pedestal. The poet-lover further claims that the sun “beams” are not so powerful and he can easily eclipse/block the sun by merely shutting his eyes, something he would not do because he cannot bear to lose the sight of his beloved even for a second. The sun is stripped of all its grandeur that in turn is imparted to the beloved’s eyes which the lover says are more radiant than the sun.

Every insult thrown at the sun becomes a compliment to the beloved. It is by using the conceit of the sun that the lover elevates his beloved above all the fragrance and the riches of the world.

The sun is rendered peripheral with its glory imparted to the beloved upon whom the lover claims sovereignty. The beloved is “all states” and the lover is the “prince” ruling over her. And in his power over his beloved, he becomes a king/ruler of the most extensive state. There is an allusion to the imperialistic enterprise of his day when Donne mentions East Indies known for its perfumes and spices and West Indies famous for gold. The lover commands the sun to “look” around the globe and report “tomorrow” all the richness and treasures of India that he says are concentrated in the beloved who lies with him in bed, proclaiming that compared to these riches, what he has in his bed pales the treasures of India.



All the honours, riches and alchemy of this world are meaningless before their love. “All honor's mimique, all wealth alchemy” (24) refers to Plato’s conception of the material world as temporary where all honour/fame is unreal and all wealth bogus. For the lover, the entire world is illusive and only his love is real. It is the lovers that constitute the entire world and all that is meaningful and worthy is concentrated in their love for each other.

In their status as lovers, the couple is exalted beyond the temporal. The world with all its riches is concentrated in their bed as they look down on the sun and treat it with disdain. The sun becomes a part of the material world that is unreal while the lovers present true reality—timeless and eternal in their love for each other. Seasons, climate or time does not alter the intensity of love in poet’s mind, as the poem reiterates lovers’ seclusion and exclusion from the prying eyes of the hostile world and grants love permanence by elevating lovers beyond the temporal world.

Paradoxically enough, the lover who was initially impatient at the appearance of the sun, now orders the sun to stay forever in his room. The sun is “old” and should not take pains of going around the world. And since the lovers constitute the whole world, the sun should make the lovers his centre and revolve around them by making their bed its centre and walls its orbit and shine on them. In the final lines, contempt gives way to patronage as the sun is asked to shine on the lovers, with the couple taking the place of decentered earth: “shine here on us, and thou art everywhere” (29). For the lover, it is the beloved who encapsulates all the richness and grandeur. And since his beloved is the essence of all kingdoms, glory and wealth, the sun should shine on them and not take pains to go around the world.

Though the heliocentric nature of the universe had long been discovered and known, Donne still refers to the sun going around the earth and gives love the centrality he believes it deserves/commands. For the lover, the sun may be a mighty symbol of life and a marker of time, but the lovers are above it in the boundlessness of their love that defies the limits of both time and space. The lovers will keep their own time and the force of their love will make the sun go round.

The Sunne Rising has Donne reiterating his belief in the sovereignty of love over every other human and natural activity. It is male heterosexual love that finds expression in verses where a man praises his beloved. However, the power that the lover wishes over the beloved needs a closer inspection. Catherine Belsey questions this kind of love expressed in terms of “conquest” with a “wholly silent women” and goes on to identify “sexual politics with the cultural analysis of femininity and masculinity”(219). She contends that Donne’s



poems reveal an inherent gender hierarchy through the construction of this ‘self’ and the ‘other’, where the ‘self’ is the superior male/coloniser/ruler/powerful and the ‘other’ is the inferior woman/colonised subject/ruled/weak. Women are objectified and become the subordinated ‘other’ –a kind of possession to be gazed at, desired and conquered.

Though many of Donne’s love poems are addressed to women, the women in them remain silent and subordinate to the male voice. His other poems *Elegie: to his Mistress Going to Bed* and *The Good-morrow* also present sexual relation in terms of imperial politics where the beloved’s body becomes a territorial possession to be mapped and discovered. According to Thomas Docherty “what is being sought by the poet is a recognition of his maleness, recognition of his phallus, and an acknowledgement of the power which its potency is supposed to give him” (82). Implicit gender hierarchy is revealed through the metaphor of colonization, where the lover becomes a ‘prince’ ruling over his ‘states’. With the lover rightfully declaring mastery over his beloved, the poet seems to make it clear that the rule of the female monarch does not mean patriarchal society is rethinking gender roles, and reaffirms the old hierarchy where men are superior and women play a subordinate role.

The tone of *The Sunne Rising* is both commanding and patronising and the language, colloquial. Metaphors ranging from science to colonial explorations are employed to assert dominion over the beloved. Each of the three stanzas is ten lines long and follow the rhyme pattern of ABBACDCDEE. The poem addresses the sun by way of ‘apostrophe’— a figure of speech which directly addresses an object, in this case it is the sun by which the poet replaces Galileo’s heliocentric concept of the universe with the geocentric theory where the sun goes around the earth.

Check Your Progress

1. In *The Sunne Rising*, how does the speaker use the conceit of the sun.
2. How does his attitude towards the sun change by the end of the poem?

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THE CANONIZATION

John Donne

Shriya Pandey

1.5 THE CANONIZATION

For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love,
Or chide my palsy, or my gout,
My five gray hairs, or ruined fortune flout,
With wealth your state, your mind with arts improve,
Take you a course, get you a place,
Observe his honor, or his grace,
Or the king's real, or his stampèd face
Contemplate; what you will, approve,
So you will let me love.

Alas, alas, who's injured by my love?
What merchant's ships have my sighs drowned?
Who says my tears have overflowed his ground?
When did my colds a forward spring remove?
When did the heats which my veins fill
Add one more to the plaguy bill?



Soldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still
Litigious men, which quarrels move,
Though she and I do love.

Call us what you will, we are made such by love;
Call her one, me another fly,
We're tapers too, and at our own cost die,
And we in us find the eagle and the dove.
The phoenix riddle hath more wit
By us; we two being one, are it.
So, to one neutral thing both sexes fit.
We die and rise the same, and prove
Mysterious by this love.

We can die by it, if not live by love,
And if unfit for tombs and hearse
Our legend be, it will be fit for verse;
And if no piece of chronicle we prove,
We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms;
As well a well-wrought urn becomes
The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs,
And by these hymns, all shall approve
Us canonized for Love.

And thus invoke us: "You, whom reverend love
Made one another's hermitage;
You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage;
Who did the whole world's soul contract, and drove
Into the glasses of your eyes
(So made such mirrors, and such spies,
That they did all to you epitomize)



Countries, towns, courts: beg from above
A pattern of your love!”

1.5 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The poem's attempts to establish the sacredness of love between a man and a woman through the use of religious language and is thematically linked to the process of canonization. According to The Encyclopaedia Britannica canonization is “an official act of a Christian communion- mainly the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church- declaring one of its deceased members worthy of public cult and entering his or her name in the canon, or the authorized list, of that communion’s recognized saints.”

In the poem, Donne employs wordplay, ambiguity, and paradox to canonize love and lovers. The poem has five stanzas of nine lines each, all rhyme in the pattern abbaccaa. The meter of the line is irregular, though the major foot or pairing of unstressed-stressed syllable used in the poem is iamb. For instance,

We can die by it, if not live by love,
Wé cán dié bÿ ít, ít nôt lívê bÿ lôvê

Check Your Progress

1. What is canonization?
2. What is the rhyme scheme of the poem?

Stanza I

Donne’s speaker begins his process of canonization of love with spirited “For God's sake.” The speaker dramatises the act of love by highlighting the “paradox and problem” of constantly receiving criticism for his love life. Hence, he humorously asks society as a whole to permit love to exist in its material world. According to Donne's speaker, materialistic pursuits are worshipped and everything is valued above love. Because, sycophancy and dishonesty are common in this culture, the speaker suggests that this value system is defective. The other meaning conveyed by this image of a physically aging body of a cynical man is that Donne and his contemporaries are now occupying the barren ruins of the social structure, religious foundations, and Petrarchan courtly culture that originally subsisted love poetry.



Your wealth will better your situation, and the arts will improve your mind, the speaker tells the unknown listener, who is criticising him for loving, and advises him to “Take you a course, get you a place”. However, when the speaker considers the goal (“Get you a place”)—for wealth instead of love, the affection for this person quickly turns into disapproval. The King or a bishop encourage men to worship—“observe his honour or his grace”—and who, in speaker's perspective, damage social bonds since they are men who may provide favour to their sycophants. Donne asserts that the meaninglessness of traditional literary forms and subjects is a result of the corrupt patronage system. As the courtiers only want fame by being seen with the monarch—“or his stamped face, I contemplate”—, the king's “stamped face,” or money is their true object of desire. The paradoxical wordplay is effective in silencing the listener, whose only goal is to look at monetary benefits.

Check Your Progress

1. Why does the speaker want his listener to ‘Hold your tongue’?
2. Describe the image of the lover.

Stanza II

In stanza two, the speaker continues to discuss the “paradox and problem”: the love of power, the love of wealth, the desire of military or judicial conquest which permeates the legal language and social values. The cynicism of the speaker is evident in the tone of surrender with which he discusses this problem. The playful vocabulary of the aging lover—sighs and tears, colds and heats, imitating the Petrarchan courtly love tradition—is paradoxically contrasted against the realities of a profane, harsh, and exploitative world. The poem was written after Donne's marriage with Anne More. Once Donne lost the King's favour, everything changed. He was simply disallowed from participating in court, much alone hoping to benefit from it. Around the same time, he discovered a possible alternative in his love for Anne More. Donne's depiction of love makes it obvious that his perspective on the courtly world has significantly changed.

The core of the speaker's new moral urge and value system is love, whose worth is underlined by the speaker in the second stanza by showing its capacity to remain beyond worldly vanity and petty ambitions. In Donne's poem, the idea of canonization persists as the main metaphysical conceit. Due to the fact that canons are created and upheld in societies that are themselves shaped by institutional and ideological biases, “Soldiers find wars, and



lawyers find out still/ Litigious men, which quarrels move,” Value systems, modes of thinking, and ways of seeing may sometimes result in cultural superiority. But, such human flaws allow us to focus on the evolutionary and liberating character of love, “Though she and I do love.” The atmosphere that Donne evokes is of a communal reverence and religious sermon.

Check Your Progress

1. What does the speaker wish to prove by the series of rhetorical questions?
2. Which figure of speech is being used?

Stanza III

The poem's third stanza begins with the grandeur of a religious sermon. The picture of the fly is changed into an eagle, a dove, and finally a phoenix, showing the trans-valuation through shifting images. Trans-valuation is a strategy used by Donne to dramatise the process of canonization of love. The strategy of comparing and contrasting the value associated with the symbolism of fly, dove, eagle and phoenix helps with paradoxical inversion to reject the arguments against love. The speaker perceives himself as a fly because in the material world, love is small and inconsequential. The fly serves as an image of paradox that contributes to the development of the poem's tone and overall meaning. First of all, most flies are non-predatory and easily eaten by other insects “We're tapers (candles) too, and at our own cost die,” The second reason is that, due to its insignificance, it symbolizes a dramatic change in Donne's line of reasoning: “Call us what you will,” even a fly. This is a stark contrast to the earlier tone of self-celebration.

The stanza refers to the Phoenix, a sacred bird in Greek mythology. The fly, like the phoenix, can and must “die” a fiery death, according to the speaker. “We die and rise the same,” to “prove” lovers “rise” again after they “die,” they live on after their own deaths. Donne here is using the word ‘die’ as a pun. In the case of the mythological bird Phoenix ‘die’ is mortal death, but in the instance of the lovers ‘die’ refers to the sexual climax, an orgasmic death. The Phoenix rising from its ashes is also symbolic of the resurrection of Christ. “The phoenix riddle hath more wit/By us; we two being one, are it.” The riddle, as a problem and a paradox, is accurately described by Donne's in this poem as—love is capable of simply being resurrected as a moral perfection because of the authority granted to it by God. Since, love also “fit both sexes,” suggesting that their souls are stretched into each other



in an erotic, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual union. The lovers should also be recognised as saints of love and canonized.

Check Your Progress

1. How does the Phoenix riddle have “more wit by us”?
2. Explain the pun of the word ‘die’.

Stanza IV

In the stanza, Donne's speaker invites the admirers to their private love celebrations: “And by these hymns, all shall approve/Us canonized for love. The paradoxical wordplay here is saying both that—it is the virtue of their love that will bring about this “canonization,” their elevation to a sphere above everyone else, and Donne is also saying that it is the quality of his writing that will bring it about, because “all shall approve / of our canonization for love” through “these hymns.” In order to be apart from the ordinary, the lovers in the stanza reject society, work, ambition, and wealth. For instance, the speaker plays the part of a social authority who is above the materialistic social system because of his love, “We can die by it, if not live by it.” According to David Kelley in *The Canonization of John Donne* (1995), Donne is seen as more monumental than poetical as a result of reinventing love. He is the “half-acre tomb” as opposed to the “well-wrought urn,” which he compares to a sonnet.

The mortal lovers are transformed into exemplary presences by the speaker, who, due to the transformative power of their love, will be imitated at all levels of society. Donne envisions a time when the lovers' celebrations will no longer be private but rather become public due to the exhumation of their skeletal remains. However, the lines “And if no piece of chronicle we prove, / We'll build pretty rooms in sonnets; / as well a well-wrought urn becomes/ The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs” argue against arrogance by comparing writing to an act of physical creation. According to Donne, the custom of seeing tombs as symbols of social status is similar to value placed on grandeur and imitation in the poems, which like the funeral monuments are superficial and meaningless forms of art. Instead, the motivating qualities of love in his writing will resurrect the prestige of poetry as a spiritual home to prevent psychological suffering after the lovers have passed away, and their skeletal remains of “sonnets” and “hymns” will be canonized by their imagined admirers in order to honour them.



Check Your Progress

1. What would be the 'hymns' to the canonized lovers?

Stanza V

Donne invokes the Catholic idea of the Communion of Saints' special capacity to bring the living and the dead together in his metaphysical conceit of canonization. The imagery of religious tension developed by the speaker is a criticism of nobility that devalues love and uses religious arguments to hide their moral flaw. The speaker develops a spectacular solution for overcoming the rejection and isolation that he and his lover go through while they are alive, since he is not content to merely compete with the monumental forms that he challenges. You, whom reverend love/ Made one another's hermitage;" According to Donne, generations will view the couple as saints because of his poetry's depictions of love.

The first and the last stanzas of the poem mirror each other in the manner of reversed images. The process of canonization is performed in the last stanza as— a dramatic monologue perfected as a prayer,

And thus invoke us: "You, whom reverend love
Made one another's hermitage;
You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage;
Who did the whole world's soul contract, and drove
Into the glasses of your eyes
(So made such mirrors, and such spies,
That they did all to you epitomize)
Countries, towns, courts: beg from above
A pattern of your love!"

"Who did the whole world's soul contract." expresses the symbolic reference to time and mortality. Time is now seen as important not for providing the challenging and creative medium in which lovers may grow towards self-fulfillment, but for its leading towards death and judgment. Donne accomplishes a mathematical increase of love by paradoxically reducing two to one, "So made such mirrors", the eyes, rage and peace of the lovers prepares us for the hyperbolic triumph of love. The linked hands "spies" and the linked eyes "mirror", which represent the windows of the soul, both refer to a physical and a spiritual union. The



“Countries, towns, courts: beg from above/ A pattern of your love!” becomes the proof of personal sanctity of heroic virtue immortalized as love. The stark examination of the sainthood of love is enshrined in literature as speaker’s triumph over life.

Check Your Progress

1. How will the canonized lovers be invoked by the believers in love?

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THE GOOD MORROW

John Donne

Nalini Prabhakar

1.6 THE GOOD MORROW

The Good-Morrow’

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I
Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then?
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers’ den?
’Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.



If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

And now good-morrow to our waking souls,
Which watch not one another out of fear;
For love, all love of other sights controls,
And makes one little room an everywhere.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown,
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;
Where can we find two better hemispheres,
Without sharp north, without declining west?
Whatever dies, was not mixed equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.

Introduction

The poem 'The Good Morrow' like 'The Sunne Rising' is an aubade. Aubade is a love song or poem usually sung at dawn when lovers part. This poetic genre seems to have originated in medieval France. Whereas the speaker in 'The Sunne Rising' has already experienced love, in 'The Good Morrow' he experiences love for the first time and is in a state of awe and wonder. The poem is organised in two parts; the first part (stanza-1) deals with the life of the lovers before they experienced love. The second part deals with the awakening after experiencing love. This experience marks a distinct shift in their perspective to life, the world around them, and their understanding of it. The poem has 21 lines split into three 7-line stanzas, with the rhyme scheme ABABCCC. The first 6 lines in the stanza are in iambic pentameter (10 syllables/unstressed-stressed) and the last line is an iambic hexameter (12 syllables).



Check Your Progress

1. What is an aubade?
2. How is this poem organized?

Critical Analysis

Stanza-1

In this stanza the lover/speaker through rhetorical questions claims that whatever they ‘did’ before they found each other and experienced love was insignificant and inconsequential. The word ‘did’ presupposes that both she and he have been in relationships before, and are not novices in love. The speaker employs two metaphorical images to dismiss the quality of life and love experienced by them previously. The first metaphor is drawn from a child suckling at its mother’s breast. The lovers were like children, immature, who have not yet been weaned away, and were sucking /suckling on simple pleasures. The words ‘not weaned’ ‘suck’d’ and ‘childishly’ draw our attention to the immaturity of their actions. The second metaphor of seven sleepers den indicates that like the sleepers they were in an un-awakened state. The allusion here is to the Christian myth wherein seven young men hid themselves in a cave/ ‘den’ to avoid Roman persecution, and came out after close to 200 years when the cave was reopened. In this metaphor the Cave symbolises the womb, and the emergence from it after centuries of sleep, a rebirth. Similarly in the case of the lovers, experiencing love for the first time is a rebirth, a coming into being for the second time. The lovers until then were like the sleepers in an un-awakened state, and now have moved into a wakened state of being.

In the last 3 lines of the stanza, the lover admits to ‘seeing’, ‘desiring’, and ‘getting’ beauty-referring to the women he has loved before, but now realises that all those pleasures were mere ‘fancies’ and his past experience of love nothing but an unreal ‘dream’.

Check Your Progress

1. Explain the two metaphors used in this stanza.

Stanza 2

In this stanza the speaker moves from the past to the present by using the image of “waking souls’. This image establishes their love as not merely physical but also spiritual. The power



of their shared love- ‘love of all other sights controls’- liberates them from fear and suspicion and enables them to rise above the fear of losing love. The experience of love in which the body and soul work in harmony, is sacred, and allows the lovers to transcend the world of time and space, and makes “one little room an everywhere”.

Elizabethan age was a period of voyages and discoveries of new lands hitherto unknown to the western world. The ‘little room’ which is the lovers universe, stands in stark contrast to the ever expanding universe. The speaker says that, what the voyagers, explorers, and astronomers have discovered is only one small part of the universe and not the whole of it, and even that part they will never ‘possess’. The lovers have surpassed them because without moving from their little room they have made it an ‘everywhere’ and unlike the explorers they ‘possess’ it too. The compression of the entire universe into a little room is an excellent example of a metaphysical conceit. A similar idea is used in ‘The Sun Rising’ when the lover tells the sun “shine here to us and thou art everywhere; This bed thy center is, these walls thy sphere”. Here too the whole world is compressed into a bed which signifies the love between the lovers. In a world dictated by material wealth and possessions, the lovers have created their own world based on their mutual love which is free from the demands and constraints of time and space.

Check Your Progress

1. What does the image of “waking souls’ signify?
2. ‘For love, love of all other sights controls’. Explain
3. Explain how “one little room an everywhere” is a conceit.

Stanza- 3

When the lovers gaze into each other's eyes, they see themselves reflected in the eyes of the other, and the faces thus reflected are true plain hearts devoid of fear and suspicion. The speaker employs another conceit by comparing the face of each lover to one hemisphere. The two reflected faces which are two hemispheres combine to complete each other and form the whole world. Unlike the hemispheres which constitute the world, as on a map, the lovers are not afflicted by the sharp north and the declining west. The reference here is to the sharp cold winds of the Arctic north and the setting/ declining sun in the west.

All things that ‘die’ do so because they suffer from a paucity of harmony and balance, as they have not being ‘mix’t equally’. If the love between the lovers is mixed in equal measure their



love cannot die. The last line of the poem resorts to the pun on the word 'die'. In the earlier poem 'The Canonization' we have seen the usage of this pun in the context of the Phoenix- "The Phoenix riddle hath more wit by us; ... We die and rise the same". This pun is being cleverly used to prove the permanence of love. Die in the old usage of English also refers to the sexual climax and the coming to an end of the sexual act. The lover here suggests that if their love is true and does not slacken, they can continue to experience love permanently- "none do slacken none can die". The death is only temporary for like the Phoenix they will rise again and again to experience love.

Check Your Progress

1. Explain the conceit in "My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;
Where can we find two better hemispheres,
Without sharp north, without declining west?"
2. Explain the pun in the last line.

Summing up

In this lesson we have briefly summarized the poetic love tradition and the place of metaphysical poetry in it. We have also critically analyzed the three poems prescribed for your study, paying special attention to the distinctive features of metaphysical poetry.

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JOHN MILTON: PARADISE LOST BOOK-1

STRUCTURE

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Section-1

Life and Times of John Milton

Anil Aneja

1.1 JOHN MILTON: A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

John Milton was born on 9th of December 1608 at Spread Eagle, on the East side of Bread Street. In Cheapside, Milton's father owned a shop and conducted his business as a scrivener, a profession which by the seventeenth century, had extended beyond the work of a scribe to include the functions of notarizing, money-lending and investment brokerage.

To begin with, Milton's early education was in the hands of private tutors until 1615 when he joined a school, St. Paul's which adjoined the Cathedral. In 1621, one of the great metaphysical poets, John Donne was appointed as Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral and Milton probably heard Donne preach on several occasions. Right from his childhood Milton was encouraged to read on extensive subjects until late in the night. This could probably have been one of the reasons for Milton's total blindness in 1652. Milton thanks his father in *Ad Patrem* for the encouragement to learn five languages- Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French and Italian apart from English.

In 1625, Milton moved to Christ's college, Cambridge. His stay at Cambridge was not altogether a happy one, with Milton developing differences first, with one of his tutors and later with the University's way of awarding degrees which made it mandatory for candidates to sign a written declaration subscribing to the doctrines of the Church of England and acknowledge the supremacy of the King. For unknown reasons Milton had developed differences with his tutor William Chappell and was even sent down from the University. Later, he was readmitted and assigned to a new tutor. On 3rd July, 1632, Milton was awarded his M.A. degree and for Milton, the next six years were devoted to private study, primarily Greek and Latin authors. One of the most decisive influences on his life and his choice of vocation as a poet was the continental tour which Milton took in 1638. He had composed many of his poems in the English language, but the warmth with which they were received in Italy and other parts of Europe cemented his resolution of becoming not only a poet but a national poet.

The years following his return to England in 1639 are crucial as far as his pamphlet writing is concerned. From 1641-1642, Milton wrote five important anti-prelatical tracts; *Of*



Reformation in England, Of Prelatical Episcopacy; Animad versions upon the Remonstrant's Defence; The Reason of Church Government and Apology for Smectymus. However, *Of Education* and a tract on the freedom of the press, *Areopagitica*, both published in 1644 are his most important pamphlets.

Milton's tumultuous life as a public figure during the 1640 and 1650 distracted his activities as a poet, and a series of personal crises disturbed his domestic peace. His contemporaries John Donne and George Herbert never lost faith in the Anglican Church and never doubted that a true Church existed in spite of her superficial divisions and blemishes. However, Milton viewed the institutional Churches as having been corrupted. From 1638 onwards, Milton did not view the Anglican Church as any better than the Roman Catholic Church.

For a man as interested as Milton was in the Church, in personal religion and in marriage, he invokes the biblical marriage trope seldom. He does not attempt to separate the case of human marriage and divorce from its ideal exemplar, the divine marriage of Christ and his Church.

As; he grew increasingly disillusioned with the progress of the Reformation in England, he saw himself coming into the center of all activities political and religious.

After 1660, Milton retired to private life and concentrated on the composition of his epic. *Paradise Lost* (1667). After publishing *Paradise Regained and Samson Agonists* (1671) Milton died early in 1674 and on 12th November was buried in St. Giles' Cripplegate.

1.2 THE EPIC FORM AND PARADISE LOST

An epic is usually described as a long narrative poem, which is exalted in style and heroic in theme and content. Epics are classified into two categories – “primary” epics and “secondary” epics. Early or primary epics, such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer are “written versions of oral legends of a tribe or nation.” Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, Virgil's *Aeneid* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* come under the category of “secondary” or “literary” epic. Primary epics are ancient in their origin and character. Since they were recited or sung orally by bards, who relied on memory and improvisations to produce an evocative effect on their audience, “primary” epics have a spontaneous and free grand style. The poet of the “literary” or “secondary” epic, on the other hand, creates an effect of grandeur by a conscious elevation of his poetic style. *Paradise Lost*, which deals with the lofty subject of justifying “the ways of God to men,” is well-known for. Milton's use of grand style.



Published in 1667, *Paradise Lost* represented for Milton the fulfillment of his two aspirations. For several decades he had wanted to write an epic and had at the same time wanted to recreate the story of the fall of man. To begin with these were to be separate projects as Milton had chosen the tales and adventures of King Arthur to be the subject of his epic. The story of the fall of man was to be treated differently as a tragedy. However, disenchantment about the historicity of Arthur gradually led to the abandonment of the plan to write an Arthuriad. Finally for Milton the two projects merged into the writing of an epic which dealt with the tragedy of the fall of man. Milton decided to explore his theme in the form of an epic and this gave him a licence to range over vast tracts of human experience. Geographically, the poem ranges over the entire world and Milton delights in cataloguing the names of various places. Satan's journey round the Earth in Book IX depicts the names of places presumed to be corners of the earth. Milton supposedly used contemporary atlases, the Bible and Biblical commentaries and several works of classical antiquity for place names and other references.

Milton's choice of writing an epic was a reflection of the Renaissance notion of hierarchies of being. Poetic genres were ranged in an ascending order starting at the lowest rung from simple lyrics up to the highest, the heroic poem or epic. For Dryden "A heroic poem, truly such is undoubtedly the greatest work which the soul of man is capable to perform." Spencer's *Faerie Queene*, while inspirational for Milton, was more of a romance than an epic. For the seventeenth century, Virgil was the writer whose *Aeneid* provided a model for emulation. A classical epic would present a heroic tale of adventure, usually a long journey accompanied by fighting and the hero victorious. In order to revise classical epic upon Christian lines Milton needed to re-evaluate the epic hero. Adam is not a warrior like Aeneas or Odysseus and this was Dryden's objection in calling *Paradise Lost* an epic. For Milton, heroism did not center in military warfare (the theme of classical epics) but was to be found in the spiritual warfare of the active Christian. While Satan's expedition against mankind might look like a heroic mission at a surface level, a deeper analysis shows that it is self-glorifying and inferior to that which glorifies god. Military valour is devalued in comparison to "suffering for truth's sake/(which) is fortitude to highest victory" (Bk. XII. 569-70). By such radical reassessments of heroic values, Milton redefines and revises the epic tradition. Some critics argue that for values military and glorious Milton has substituted the domestic and pastoral ones, for the theme of human greatness, divine greatness. With emphasis on the daily chores of Adam and Eve, Milton makes *Paradise Lost* the first 'domestic epic'. It is not an epic in the traditional sense of the word because Milton does not follow the conventions and norms of a classical epic.



However, Milton does follow some of the conventions of a traditional epic. For instance, the Supernatural intervention is a part of the epic tradition where gods and goddesses intervene in human actions either validating them or disapproving of them. The Invocation to the Muse is another such convention which Milton follows. He invokes Urania to inspire and illuminate him so that he can write good poetry. Beginning the story in 'media res' ('in the middle') is also an epic convention which Milton follows closely. After the statement of his theme and invocation to the Muse in Book I, Milton begins the narration in the middle of the action. Chronologically the story begins in Book V. Milton's use of epic similes, which form an integral part of this grand style, is another epic convention that he follows. Milton invests his poem with complexity and richness of meaning through his use of epic similes.

1.3 THE RELIGIOUS AND THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF THE 17TH CENTURY

The literature of any age is influenced by the social, religious and political factors of the period. Milton's views and his writings demonstrate the deep impact of the events of his age. As David Daiches puts it, "The great debate on religion and politics which divided the English nation in the middle of the seventeenth century helped to determine the course of Milton's career and the shape of his literary ambitions." Religious controversy in the seventeenth century is quite inseparable from political controversy. The Elizabethan government had used the pulpit for political propaganda. Stuart governments also did the same, and as a counter force, were opposed by the Puritans who strove to establish "an alternative politics as well as an alternative religion."

The uncertainty in the post-Elizabethan era was aggravated by the fact that Queen Elizabeth left no natural successor of hers. James VI of Scotland, Lord Essex, Lady Arabella Stuart and many others put their claim to the throne after Queen Elizabeth's death in 1603. With James' accession to power there were several attempts to depose him. The Puritans had never liked the coming to the power of monarch who was a favourable compromise between the Catholic and the Protestant ideas. For the Puritans, their time was ripe in 1642 when Charles I ruled. Under Oliver Cromwell the Civil War was led to a meaningful conclusion for them when Charles I was beheaded in 1649. The Puritans ruled England from 1642-1660 and in these years there was emphasis on thrift, economy, moral exaltation, purity of the self and home. Quite early on Milton had cast his cause with the Puritan revolutionaries and was active politically writing pamphlets which supported the execution of Charles I. One of the



consequences of the Puritan rule was their antipathy towards all forms of fun and entertainment. As a result, all theatres in England were closed down in 1642. Literary activities took a backseat for almost twenty years. The Puritanical strain is obvious in Milton's advocacy for righteousness and moral purpose in his writings. To understand *Paradise Lost* in relation to Milton's age and career, we have to bear in mind that Milton spent almost twenty years between 1641 and 1660, writing prose works which upheld ecclesiastical and civil liberty, and attacked all forms of ecclesiastical and political tyranny. In the years following the Civil War, Milton began to increasingly question the validity of institutional and centralized forms of secular power and external authority. He came to rely more and more the authority found in the Bible, "those written Records pure," as he puts it, in *Paradise Lost* (Book XII, line 513).

The year 1660, which ended the Puritan rule in England got Charles II to the throne. The subsequent years are referred to as the Restoration period—with an obvious reference to the restoration of monarchy and the theatres in England. The Restoration was a period when theatre reopened with a new and added vigour after eighteen years.

1.4 RENAISSANCE HIERARCHY AND COSMOLOGY

Milton follows some of the dominant conventions and beliefs of his age, such as the belief in the hierarchical order of all things in the universe. All beings were arranged in a hierarchy beginning from God at the top to the meanest of the inanimate class. Every speck of creation was a link in the chain of being thus it enhanced the dignity of all creation.

To begin with, there is the inanimate class which includes the elements, liquids and metals. Next in hierarchy was the vegetative class which had both existence as well as life. Next came the sensitive class which had feeling as well. All animals were a part of this. What distinguished man from beasts/ animals is the faculty of reason which man possesses. Higher up, angels and finally God completed the hierarchy. To an ordinary Elizabethan, this hierarchy was a part of divine order which was meant to keep everything in place. So if the Elizabethans believed in an ideal order, they were also afraid it should be upset. Disorder to them meant cosmic anarchy. So when Satan tries to disrupt this natural, hierarchical scheme of things, he is thrown out of heaven.

Milton was exposed to the competing cosmologies of the time- Ptolemaic with its conception of a geocentric view of the universe and Copernican, with its heliocentric view of the Universe. Milton primarily follows the Ptolemaic system of the universe with the earth as



the center though there is ample external evidence to suggest that Milton was familiar with Copernicus' theories very well.

Milton's universe started with the Empyrean Heaven, the abode of God and his angels. Heaven is separated from the New World by a golden chain. This golden chain by which the New World hangs on to the Heaven also serves as an opening for the passage of angels from Heaven to Earth. The center of this New World is the Earth around which revolved the sun, the moon, the seven planets, the fixed stars, the crystalline sphere and finally the premium mobile. Then there was further Chaos and finally Hell at the end. Chaos consisted of shapeless matter whereas the New World was conceived to be made up of the four elements, Earth, Air, Fire and Water.

Milton's Hell is a burning pool of fire where sinners are tortured and punished.

The presence of the two competing theories of the universe is suggestive of the public nature of the poem. He did not use the poem to propagate his own views, rather he allowed it to voice the range of opinions prevalent in England at the time.

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Section-2

Paradise Lost Book-1

Meenakshi Sharma

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This unit aims to:

- Familiarize the reader with John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*.
- Situate the poem in its social, political, and religious context and thus provide the readers with an overview of Milton's time period
- Survey the various methods used by Milton to either follow through or deviate from the literary conventions of the Late Renaissance era of British literary history
- Conduct a brief yet comprehensive textual analysis of Book I of *Paradise Lost* to acquaint the reader to the richness of Milton's verse
- Study the salient features of Milton's style and his use of various techniques and devices to enrich his verse
- Study the allusions within the poem and analyse the conflict between Christian and Classical traditions of thought in Milton's verse

2.2 INTRODUCTION

Paradise lost, divided into XII Books tells us the story of Satan and his followers who have been expelled from Heaven on the charge of rebelling against God. Satan firmly resolves to take revenge upon God by harming God's creation, Adam and Eve. The rest of the poem depicts Satan's craft and deceit as he manages to tempt Eve into eating the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Thus the story of the fall of Man is given to the reader through these XII Books.

The Bible and Biblical commentaries account for substantial part of the poem. Book IX concentrates on the temptation of Eve by Satan. The book begins with a conversation between Adam and Eve where Eve suggests a separation from Adam to cater to the large amount gardening work. Adam, who has been forewarned of the coming danger is unwilling to let Eve go alone. His argument is that the enemy when confronted by two people instead of



one, would find himself weak. Eve sees the argument as Adam's distrust of Eve and insists on moving alone in Eden. The parting takes place and Satan gets his opportunity when he sees Eve alone, taking care of the plants.

Satan enters Eden and takes the shape of a serpent and proceeds towards Eve. He tempts Eve through flattery and is able to convince her that eating of the fruit will make her move up the hierarchy, the way he has moved up from being a beast to possessing the powers of speech and reason. Eve is convinced and she plucks and eats the apple. Immediately she becomes aware of a change in herself and she appears before Adam ready to lie to him. Adam listens to the story and is aware that Eve will now be permanently separated from him. Unable to bear this separation, Adam knowingly plucks the fruit and eats it. An unknown element of lust now enters into the relationship in sharp contrast to the innocence and purity of their earlier married life.

As a Christian poem in classical epic form, *Paradise Lost* reflects the humanist fusion of Christian with classical learning. Its assertion of man's free will with God's omnipotence is a classical irresolvable concern throughout.

2.3 THE INVOCATION

The Invocation is a device used by all epic poets. The purpose of the invocation is the introduction of the theme and seeking inspiration from the Muse. The Muse is invoked for the reason of providing Milton with ideas and expressions which have not been attempted till now. In the light of the narrator's rejection of classical Muses of the Spirit, we can judge how far an epic has been transformed. The narrator provides unity to the Epic by his invocations opening books I, III, IV and IX.

Although claiming the status of literary authorship, the text must display the tenuousness of its spiritual authority. Accordingly, at the narrator's first appearance the prayer for divine inspiration, for the authority to speak truth, involves an equally emphatic reference to blindness, both physical and spiritual. "What in me is dark/ Illumine" (I, 22-3). Constant reference to the reader maintains the reader's sense of the text's construction, its objectives and its problems as well.

The juxtaposition of the narrator's self with hero and heroic epic is a reading clue to his courage in confronting the tragedy of Fall, striving to describe adequately something by which he himself is compromised as a storyteller.



Milton's theme is man's disobedience of God's commandment and the consequences of this Fall. References to "one greater man" and "that Shepherd" are to Christ where the narrator looks up for redemption. He embarks on a feat of spiritual danger, presuming to portray God and his truth despite all the human fallibilities in this postlapsarian world. Without his guide, the Holy Spirit, his flight will fail.

In this alienation from God's sight, as also in his boast of a daring undertaking, the narrator's one counterpart within the narrative quite strongly is Satan himself. Against this sinister parallel, this embodiment of the false speaking and fake authority to which the narrator himself may succumb, the invocations repeatedly announce the narrator's lack of self-sufficiency and the need for God's authorization by way of inspiration.

2.4 BOOK-I LINES 1-26

Book I opens with a statement of the theme and subject of the whole poem: the disobedience of man, his fall and the consequent loss of paradise. Milton goes on to refer to the redemption of mankind by Christ: 'till one greater Man/ Restore us' (11.4-5). For the ambitious task of justifying 'the ways of God to men' (1.26), Milton seeks divine inspiration and help from the Heavenly Muse. The poet believes that his subject is more exalted and heroic than any other epic, as he is writing of 'Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme' (1.16).

In the following notes brief explanations of references in the text and the meaning of difficult words/ phrases are provided:

Line 1 first	: Man's first act of transgression was eating the apple of the forbidden tree of knowledge.
2 mortal	: The word combines a sense of 'human' and 'fatal' or death-producing.
3 Eden	: The garden or beautiful place in the newly-created Earth, where Adam and Eve lived in a state of bliss before the fall.
4 one greater Man	: Christ, in theological tradition 'the second Adam.' Christ provides man with an opportunity to regain bliss by His supreme sacrifice.
5 the blissful seat	: Paradise. When all wickedness is dissolved after the Last Judgment, Earth and Heaven shall be blissful.

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- 6 heavenly Muse : the Spirit of God. Milton follows the epic convention of invocation to the Muse, but with the difference that his Muse is no classical symbol of poetry.
- 7 oreb, or Sinai : the mountain top which was set apart by God for his communication with Moses. Here Moses received the Law from God (the Ten Commandments).
- 8 shepherd : Moses, who was a shepherd. God first spoke to him when he watched sheep on Mount Horeb and gave him the Law when he became the “shepherd” of his people.
- 8 chosen seed : The chose rase of Israel.
- 9-10 in the beginning... : Moses, the supposed author of Genesis, tells us:
- Rose out of Chaos 'In the beginning god created the heaven and the earth.'
'And the earth was without form, and void;... And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.'
(Genesis 1: 1-2).
According to Milton God created out of Chaos.
- 10 Sion hill : Zion, the hill of Jerusalem.
- 11 siloa : the brook and pool near the temple of Jerusalem.
- 15 Aonian mount : Mount Helicon in Boetia, considered sacred to the Muses. Milton's intention is to make his poem, which is inspired by God, excel the great classical poems which were inspired by the Muses.
- 17 spirit : The Spirit of God. Milton now appeals directly to the Spirit of God and seeks divine help and instruction.
- 18 Before all temples : The pure heart is preferred before all temples. Compare Psalm 15:1-2 (Old Testament) and I Corinthians 3:16 (New Testament).
- 21-2 Dove-like ... pregnant : The Spirit of God brooded and brought out the Universe out of the unshaped matter of Chaos (“abyss”), thus putting life into Chaos.



- 24 highth ... argument : Milton wishes to measure up to the demands of his great subject (argument).
- 25 assert : vindicate.
- 26 justify : show the justice of.

Check Your Progress

1. Comment upon the significance of the invocation in Book I of Paradise Lost.
2. How does Milton intend to “justify the ways of God to men.

2.5 LINES 27-83

The rest of Book I follows the angels after their rebellion and the consequent fall from Heaven into Hell, a place designed for their eternal punishment. Milton describes Hell both through Satan’s eyes and through a third person narrator’s point of view. Hell is a place of hopelessness and despair burning with fire all around. As Satan wakes up amidst confusion, he sees his second-in-command, Beelzebub besides him. They talk of the preceding events and their miserable condition. Satan decides that he will never submit to God and instead strive to foil all his plans. He then calls the fallen angels to gather together in battle armour in military formation at a volcanic hill. After a rousing speech by Satan to lift the morale of the angels, they build an opulent council chamber which Milton calls Pandemonium. The fallen angels, infinite in their number, flock together into the large chamber like a swarm of bees. The first council of Hell then begins.

Below is a brief explanation of the text along with the meaning of some allusions:

- 27-28 Heav’n...Hell : Milton exalts the Muse by saying that neither heaven nor Hell is hidden from her view
- 29 Grand Parents : Adam and Eve. “Grand” here is used in the sense of first/original.
- 30-33 Favoured...revolt? : Who made Adam and Eve, favourites of the heaven disobey God’s single command of not eating from the tree of knowledge
- 34 infernal Serpent : Satan. He came to Eve in the form of a serpent

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- 35-40 Stirred...High : Satan was driven by jealousy and revenge to corrupt Eve after he was cast out of Heaven with the other rebel angels. With the help of these angels, he hoped to become superior to everyone else and even challenge God ("the most high")
- 41-44 If he...Almighty Power : Satan and his angels waged a war against God but his attempts were doomed to fail
- 45-46 ethereal sky : God cast Satan out head-first from heaven, the celestial sky into bottomless hell
- 47 perdition : a place where a sinner goes to after death, i.e, hell. The bottomlessness of perdition signifies the eternal nature of the punishment
- 48 adamant : imprisoned in unbreakable chains
- 49 Omnipotent : the omnipotence, i.e, all-powerful God cannot be defeated. This line raises questions about predestination and free will. If God is indeed omnipotent (all-powerful) and omniscient (all-seeing), why did he not prevent the Fall of Man?
- 50-52 Nine...gulf : For nine days Satan and the fallen angels lay defeated
- 53-54 Confounded...thought : Satan was confused and doomed to an eternity of pain due to his immortality. This made him angrier than before.
- 55 lost happiness...lasting pain : Satan was tortured by the thoughts of all the pleasures he was never going to experience again as well as the never-ending pain that plagued him now
- 56-60 round he...wild : Satan looks around his surroundings and sees only doom and decay of his fellow fallen angels. His hatred grows stronger
- 61-62 : everywhere : Satan looked, he only saw flames
- 63 darkness visible : This oxymoron shows that unlike fire which illuminates, the fire of hell is devoid of physical and moral light



- 64-69 A dungeon...unconsumed : The darkness from the fire illuminated sights of suffering, hopelessness, sorrow and unending pain
- 70-75 Such place...they fell : Hell is a prison of dark fire made for those who rebel. It is the furthest from Heaven and from God. This place is completely different from the place of their fall, i.e., heaven
- 76-83 There...began : Among the rebel angels lying in the fire, Satan notices Beelzebub, his second-in-command. Satan thus begins to speak.
- 84-96 If thou...change : Satan's first speech. Satan says to Beelzebub, "in your fallen status, how different you look from the angel whose heavenly brightness would outshine everyone else's light. You once joined me in the plan to overthrow heaven and now yet again we are together in this misery. God with his thunder proved so much stronger than us. Who would have thought there was so much strength in his arms? However, no matter how much suffering the winner of our rebellion inflicts upon me, I do not repent." Through his speech Satan projects himself as a fallen hero who is resilient in the face of adversity. He is resolutely devoted to his mission. Also of importance is the Calvinist notion of repentance by the sinner in exchange for forgiveness by God. Since Satan will not repent, his crime cannot be forgiven
- 97-102 Though...preferring : "I have lost my outer glory but my mind remains fixed against the injustice meted on injured merit" (stronger abilities that are disregarded. The angels were stronger than mankind). Satan portrays his rebellion as a battle against God's bias for mankind who according to him are lesser beings. This fight against a perceived injustice brought together the fallen angels who disliked God's unfair reign and preferred Satan instead.
- 103-110 His utmost...or might : "In heaven we (Satan and the fallen angels) fought against the all-powerful God and managed to shake his throne. So



what if we lost that fight? Everything is still not lost; I still have our free will, valour, courage, revenge, and undying hatred. All these attributes can never be taken from me, neither through strength, nor through anger.

111-115 To bow...beneath : It will be very low of me to kneel before him and ask for forgiveness now that I've shown that I can challenge his empire. Doing so would be more shameful than this downfall.

116-121 This downfall...eternal war : We are immortal because of fate, the strength of God, and due to the celestial substance we are made of. Through our experience of the battle so far, we have gained much foresight and now have better chances of waging an unending war against God either through force or through trickery.

122-124 Irreconcilable...of Heaven : We will forever be apart from God, our "grand Foe" who joyous in his victory, rules heaven tyrannically

125-127 So spake...compeer : Satan spoke in this manner. Even though he was in pain and despair on the inside, he was proud and boastful on the outside. Beelzebub (bold Compeer) answered him in the following manner:

128-133 O Prince...or fate! : "Oh Prince with many powers, you rallied us angels (seraphim) for war. It was under your leadership that we opposed God (heaven's perpetual King) and proved his supremacy. He defeated us maybe through greater strength, by fate, or by chance.

134-142 Too well...endless misery : "I regret that our rebellion has lost us Heaven and cast us into this horrible destruction. We are immortal, our minds and spirits cannot be destroyed, our courage and strength will soon return but our glory is no more and our happiness has been taken over by eternal misery.

143-155 But what...eternal punishment? : I think God might really be all-powerful to have defeated an army like ours. He must have let us have our complete strength and spirits so that we can suffer this



misery eternally and satisfy his vengeance or perhaps so that we carry out his orders in Hell. What good is complete strength or immortality if we must suffer for eternity?"

- 156-168 Where to... aim : To this, Satan (Arch-Fiend) quickly replied, "Fallen angel (cherub) it is a misery to be weak but let us be certain of this, that we shall never commit good deeds again and our only joy will be in doing evil deeds. We will do the opposite of the will of the God we resist. If he seeks to bring good out of our evil deeds, our task will be to do the opposite and bring evil out of good. We shall distract his closest angels from their task.
- 169-177 But see!... Deep : But look! The winner of our rebellion (God) has now called back his angels and has returned to the gates of Heaven. It is now the calm after the storm. The rage of Heaven has died down

Check Your Progress

1. Critically examine the imagery used by Milton to describe Hell in Book I.
2. What does Satan's conversation with Beelzebub tell us about the differences between their respective personalities?

2.6 LINES 178-375

- 178-191 Let... despair : Let us not let this opportunity pass away. Do you see those dark plains with only these flames as their source of light? Let us move there and away from these flames. Let us rest there, if there can be any rest, and gather our weakened strength. Let us plan how we can hurt our enemy and repair our loss, let us plan how to get over this hardship, let's gain strength from hope and if there's none left, courage (for evil deeds) from our hopelessness

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- 192-195 Thus...large : Satan thus replied to his nearest comrade. His head lay above the fire, with his flaming eyes sparkling while the rest of his huge body was floating in the flaming floods
- 196-197 Lay floating...size : Satan looked like a huge figure whose enormous size is described in fables (myths)
- 198 Titanian : In Roman mythology, Titans were powerful primeval deities who were gigantic in size. They were the children of Uranus (Sky) and Gaia (Earth). Satan is being compared to Titans
- 198 Jove : In Roman mythology, Jove or Jupiter overthrew Saturn to become the king of all Gods.
- 199 Briareos or Typhon : Briareos was a giant god of sea storms with hundred hands and fifty heads. Typhon was a child of Gaia and Tartarus who was defeated by Zeus.
- 201 Leviathon : A creature mention in the Bible in Book of Job, Psalms, the Book of Isaiah, and the Book of Amos, here described as a large sea monster
- 202-209 Created...lay : Each of these prominent figures from Roman mythology symbolize the attempt to overthrow the authoritative powers and their subsequent defeat.
- 210-212 Chained...Heaven : Satan would have remained chained and could not have risen if it were not for the will of God
- 213-220 Left...poured : Heaven willed this so that Satan could commit more crimes and be further damned while being enraged by how his evil deeds brought goodness on Man, but to him these deeds brought only confusion, anger, and vengeance
- 221-227 Forthwith...dry land : Thus Satan gets up from the pool of fire, leaving behind him a horrible void where he used to sit. Then he spreads his wings to fly in the polluted air until he is on dry land
- 228-231 He...fire : Satan rests his feet on dry land with solid fire much like the lake with liquid fire
- 232 Pelorus : Cape Pelorus in Sicily



- 233 Aetna : Mt. Etna, a volcanic mountain on the East coast of Sicily
- 234-238 And fuelled...Unblestfeet : Satan rests his unholy feet on the ground singed as if in the aftermath of a volcanic eruption
- 239 Stygian flood : Refers to the River Styx that flows in the Underworld in Greek/ Roman mythology. Here it means Hellish fire
- 240-241 As gods...power : Satan is joined by Beelzebub. They both rejoice at leaving the fiery floods because of their own strength and not because Heaven let them escape
- 242-255 Is this...Heaven : Satan said, "Is this the land that we must exchange for Heaven? This sorrowful darkness in place of celestial light? Then so be it. It's better to be furthest away from him who rules in tyranny, who is our equal but through force, stands above his equals. Farewell heavens and welcome hell! Welcome your new master Hell, one whose mind so resolute that it remains unchanged by place or time. The mind is its own place and can make Heaven feel like Hell, and Hell feel like Heaven."
- 256-258 What...greater : "How does it matter where I am so long as I'm still the same? I'm as great as God who is only mightier in his strength." Here "thunder" metonymically stands for the power and strength of Heaven.
- 259-270 We...Hell : "At least we can be free here. God has not built this place for anything else and therefore, will not force us out of this place. So we can reign safely here. In my opinion, it is better to be the king in Hell than to be a slave in Heaven. Let's not let our friends and comrades in our loss lie in the fiery lake and let's invite them here to share our losses, or rally together to regain what can be salvaged of Heaven or perhaps see what else awaits us in Hell."
- 271-282 So... highth : Beelzebub replied, "Leader of that army which only God to defeat! If our comrades can hear your voice, the same voice that gave them hope in the worst battles, they will soon gain strength and courage even though now they lie confused and defeated in the lake."

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- 283-286 He... : Beelzebub had barely finished speaking when Satan started moving towards the shore with his large and bulky ethereal shield on his back
- 287-289 Tuscan artist : Galileo. Milton compares Satan's shield to an orb observed by Galileo through an optic glass
- 290 Fesole or Valdarno : Fesole is a height close to Florence. Valdarno is the valley of river Arno surrounding Florence
- 291-302 Rivers...brooks : Satan's spear was as long as the mast of a huge ship (Ammiral) and he used it to balance himself over the burning grounds of Hell, so unlike Heaven, while the hot air burned him. Nevertheless, he endured the misery and reached the beach from where he called his fallen angels who were lying like autumn leaves in a lake
- 303-304 Vallombrosa : A valley near Florence, strewn with autumn leaves.
- 305 Orion : A constellation. Associated with stormy weather
- 306-307 Busiris : Egyptian Pharaoh drowned at the Red Sea. Memphian here means Egyptian. Chivalrie refers to the Pharaoh's cavalry & forces
- 308-309 Sojourners of Goshen : Israelites.
- 310-314 From...Resounded: The fallen angels were scattered in the fiery lake, shocked at their ugly changed bodies. Satan called out to them so loudly that his voice echoed throughout the deep and hollow Hell
- 315-330 Princes... Fallen : "The princes that one ruled Heaven, have you chosen this place to rest after battle? Perhaps this place is as comfortable for you as Heaven or perhaps you kneel to your Conqueror who looking at our weakened state will take advantage and send his troops from Heaven to trample us or chain us using thunderbolts to the bottom of Hell. Either rouse up now or stay in this state forever!
- 331-338 They... : The fallen angels heard Satan's call and were ashamed like a night guard on duty were caught sleeping by a



- superior. They shook themselves awake despite the pain to obey their General's (Satan's) orders
- 339-345 Amram's...Hell : The fallen angels flew out from the fiery lake like the swarm of locusts that plagued the land of Nile, Egypt. Like the sheer number of locusts turned the day dark like night, so did the fallen angels' flight swarm Hell.
- 346-350 Twixt...plain : Satan gave these fallen angels direction using his spear until they landed
- 348 Sultan : Implies an un-Christian tyrannical ruler. Satan is compared to a Sultan
- 351-352 : The "multitudes" and "frozen loins" invokes an overflow of fallen angels, especially implying unnatural breeding
- 353-355 Rhene-Sands: They looked like barbarians in a horde trying to conquer Libyan sands
- 356-375 Forthwith...world : Then the leader of each squadron came forward towards Satan. They were powerful beings with superhuman, Godlike shapes and bodies, they were the formerly kings of Heaven even though now their records of ever being in Heaven was erased due to their rebellion. Nor had they received their new names from wandering on Earth to test mankind. Through their lies and deceit they would later corrupt the majority of mankind to worship false idols and compel the Church to forsake God for pompous showoff and greed

Check Your Progress

1. How does Milton describe the fallen angels in Hell?
2. Who does Milton compare Satan to, in his fallen state?
 - a. "The mind is its own place, and in itself/ Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven" (I. 254-255)
 - b. "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven" (I.263)



2.7 LINES 376-533

- 376-385 Say...round : Tell me their names, Muse, who woke up from their sleep in the fiery lake when their emperor (Satan) called them and stood with him. The chief among these fallen angels were those who were worshipped as false Gods on Earth.
- 392-404 First...thence : First there was Moloch who would make the humans sacrifice children by burning them alive to his idol amidst the noise of drums while the parents cried. He was worshipped by the Ammonites in city of Rabba and the neighbouring countries of Argoand Basan. When this did not content him, he corrupted Solomon's heart to build a temple in the valley of Hinnom, Tophet
- 405 Gehenna : Due to the sacrifice of children by fire in the valley of Hinnom, the land was considered cursed and took the name of Gehenna, or Hell
- 406-418 Next...Hell : Next, Chemos came forward. He was worshipped by Maobites. He was also called Peor, who made his devotees perform obscene rituals while passing through Sittim on their journey towards Nile alongside Moloch until Josiah drove them away.
- 419-437 With...foes : These two were accompanied by Baalim and Ashtaroth. Spirits could take the form of any sex because they were not tied to any shape, flesh or body. For them the Israelites abandoned their real Gods and worshipped the false ones
- 438-445 Came... : Astoreth who was called 'Queen of Heaven' came along with them. She had cresecent-shaped horns which were worshipped by maidens of the city of Sidon. Solomon, who had many foreigners as wives and concubines, introduced her worship in Israel and built her temple
- 443 offensive mountain : Mount of Olives, also known as Mountain of Corruption
- 444 uxorious king : Solomon



- 446-456 Thammuz...idolatrics : Next there was Thammuz, the Syrian women believed it was his blood that would discolour the Adonis river once every year. The love-tale of Venus' love for Adonis and his death aroused the women of Sion
- 457-466 Next...bounds : Next was Dagon with upper body of a man and lower of a fish. When Philistines found the ark, they placed it in Dagon's temple only to find his head and hands cut off
- 467-477 Him... renown : Next in line was Rimmon who was worshipped in Damascus. He tempted King Ahaz into building him an altar and worshipping him
- 478-489 After... gods : These were followed by a train of Egyptian gods, Osiris, Isis, Orus and the like. They forced Egypt to worship animal-like gods instead of the human form of the true God. These were borrowed by Jews in the form of the golden calf. The rebel king, Jeroboam made two calves of gold and placed them in Bethel and Dan, thus, doubled the sin
- 490-505 Belial...rape : Belial came last, the most lewd of them all who loved vice for its own sake. He had no temple dedicated to himself but could be found in all the corrupted altars like the sons of high priests of Eli who themselves were priests, or courts and palaces, or the city streets with rioters or drunk men. The sons of Belial attempted to rape a Jew in Gibeah who sent his concubine in place of himself to survive
- 506-521 These...Isles : Milton describes the Greek gods as found in Hesoid's *Theogony*. To Milton, these are false gods because they originate after Heaven and Earth are formed. The birthright of Titan as a god is seized by Saturn, his son, and he in turn loses it to his son, Jove (Jupiter or Zeus in Greek mythology) who ruled in Olympus.
- 522-533 All...standard : These and other devils came to Satan looking dejected but joyful at finding their chief. Satan recollected his lost pride and raised their spirits and commanded them to raise his banner.



Check Your Progress

1. Comment on the Classical allusions used by Milton to describe the fallen angels.
2. Critically analyse the ways in which Milton includes Pagan deities such as Chemos to describe the fallen angels.

2.8 LINES 533-798

- 533-540 That...sounds : Azazel then unfurled the imperial banner bedecked with jewels while the trumpets were blowing
- 541-555 At...retreat : At Satan's loud call, the fallen angels waved thousands of colourful banners and raised their shields, spears and helmets. They moved in a military formation to the sound of flutes. They weren't moved to flight or retreat by any fear of death. Phalanx : military formation of foot soldiers in Greek warfare. Dorian mood: musical mode for military suited for battle.
- 556-572 Nor...strength : Forgetting their pain, fear, and sadness, the fallen angels walked together, united as a single entity. From the front they were a sight of chilling terror with their spears and armour, awaiting the orders of their chief (Satan) while he inspected their ranks, his heart filled with pride.
- 573-587 Glories...beyond : Largest army of men combined with combined with the army of Trojan and Theban wars and the knights of Arthur (Uther's son) were puny and small in front of this army
- 588-615 Compare...heath : Satan stood in front of his mighty army looking like a ruined Archangel who hasn't yet lost his brightness like a rising or an eclipsed sun. His face was scarred but his eyes felt pity for dooming his comrades to eternal pain. He was touched by the loyalty of the fallen angels even though they looked like burnt forests in the aftermath of a fire.



- 615-621 He...way : he fallen angels inched closer in attention as Satan tried to speak, thrice, but each time his eyes filled with angel tears until with deep sighs he spoke:
- 622-662 O...resolved : “O immortal spirits whose powers could only be matched by the almighty, our battle was not without glory even though we face this dire change but who could have known that our mighty forces would be defeated and who can yet believe that our might forces will fail to win back heaven on our own? God is to be blamed for our fall for tempting us to rebel by not revealing his full strength. But now that we know His strength, we can wage a new war with deceit and trickery for to win by strength is only half a victory. There is a rumour that God intends to create a new world (Eden) for creatures he regards as equal to angels. This darkness will not hold us forever but we must ponder on these thoughts and hold a counsel. There is no question of peace because we will not surrender.
- 663-693 He...bane : The fallen angels bellowed against heaven and pulled out their swords. The fallen angels stormed towards a volcanic hill containing metal. They were led by Mammon, the lowliest of them all. Even in heaven, he’d admire the golden floors more than God’s glory. He’d later teach humans to dig gold from Mother Earth. Mammon and his comrades dug the hill to recover plenty of riches
- 694-700 Babel : Tower of Babel. Human race speaking the same language attempts to build a tall tower in Shinar that would reach Heaven. God then confused their language and when they tried to communicate, they only heard each other babble. The Tower of Babel “symbolizes man's pride and marks his attempt to equal God and recreate reality” (Low p. 171)
- 701-715 Nigh...architrove : One team of fallen angels prepared canals to channel molten metal into the plains while a second team separated the different kinds of metals as a third poured these metals into the moulds. Thus they created a huge structure as if

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- symphony playing out of land. Milton compares the palace of Hell to the organ (a musical instrument)
- 715-730 nor...sky : The structure had a roof of gold and was better than any built by the Egyptian kings or in Babylon. When the structure was finished, the doors opened to reveal a huge space with metal cups filled with flammable substances like naphtha and asphaltus (tar) suspended from the arched roof
- 731-740 admiring...Mulciber : The angels entered hastily and praised the Architect for his work, he had earlier built such structures for heaven's angels but later will come to be known as the Greek
- 740-751 Mulciber...Hell : Greek Hephaestus and Roman Vulcan who was thrown out of Heaven by Zeus/Jove. According to Milton, the classical myth of Hephaestus' fall from Olympus is a distortion of the Biblical myth of Mammon's fall from Heaven
- 752-762 Meanwhile...hall : The fallen angel messengers blew their trumpets and announced the meeting will be held in Satan's palace, now to be called Pandemonium. At once, thousands of angels gathered and crowded the spacious palace.
- 756 Pandemonium : Milton coins the term for Satan's palace. In Greek, stands for pan – all, daimon – demon, and –ion stands for a place of worship
- 763-766 Though...lance : A medieval tradition in which Christian knights challenge the strongest knights to a duel.
- 767-776 Thick...seemed : Satan's comrades are compared to bees. In doing so, Milton diminishes their stature
- 777-797 Behold...full : The angels who were once bigger than giants now transformed into the size of small faeries, pygmies, and elves so as to make the crowded hall more spacious while the greatest rebel angels retained their original size and sat on golden seats



797-798 After...began : After a brief moment of silence during which all the fallen angels settled themselves into the new surroundings and shapes, the great counsel finally began.

Check Your Progress

1. Explain in detail the military metaphor used by Milton in his description of the fallen angels.
2. Critically examine the construction of Pandemonium by Moloch and the other angels.
3. How is the Tower of Babel relevant to the construction of Pandemonium?
4. Compare and contrast the Biblical figures mentioned in Book I with their Classical and Pagan counterparts. For example, consider the case of Mulciber who Milton identifies as Hephaestus or Vulcan in Greek and Roman mythology respectively. Why do you think Milton does this?
5. Now that you are familiar with the text, can you identify the various contrasting pairs put forwards by Milton in Book I, for example, Heaven and Hell, God and Satan, Light and Darkness? How does Milton differentiate between these sets of binaries?

2.9 MAJOR CHARACTERS

Satan

Satan is the protagonist and anti-hero of Book I of *Paradise Lost*. Satan is introduced to the readers at his lowest. Rather than beginning his narrative with Lucifer, the angel's disagreement with God in his grand kingdom, Milton begins his narrative in the epic tradition after Satan has rebelled and fallen from grace.

Milton presents Satan as a complex character. While wishing to be the antagonist to God's plans and missions, he serves the very function designed by God. Thus, he never strays away from the scheme of things even when he rebels. For instance, Satan follows the Christian doctrine of 'do not despair', not once; even in his fallen state does he ever despair and give in to his suffering and submitting. In doing so, he never strays from the precepts set by God, his folly being his inability to recognize the source of his power and resilience. On



one hand Milton delves into Satan as a tragic hero who overcomes his own struggles, on the other, he is the primary example of corrupted power and the perils of ambition and pride. In Book I, Satan can be seen as a leader who rallies his troupe and shakes them out of their feeling of hopelessness and misery by providing them a purpose. He is majestic in his grandeur, unafraid in the face of adversity. However, this purpose is meaningless as a force of perpetual destruction as opposed to the forces of Creation by God.

Satan not only stands in opposition to God but also acts as a foil for the heroes – Adam and Eve who will lead to the redemption and salvation of mankind. His fall is paralleled in the later books to the Fall of Adam and Eve as well as all of mankind who are then redeemed by Christ, the “one greater Man”. Milton ascribes Satan certain human qualities in his sense of hurt and betrayal, as well as his sorrow for the state of his fallen angels. His seductive appeal most prominent in Book I, at the very beginning of the events that set the stage for the greatest battle between evil and good. Milton perhaps turns him into a tragic, fallen hero so that the readers can sympathize with him and in doing so; realize the seductive nature of evil. His hamartia (tragic flaw of the hero of an Epic) is his excessive pride. Nevertheless, he is portrayed as heroic in his persistence to achieve the impossible.

Milton portrays Satan as an orator par excellence, the master of rhetoric. In doing so, he cautions against empty words and promises that only serve to lead the listener astray. Below is a brief analysis of Satan’s speeches throughout Book I:

- **Satan’s first speech to Beelzebub** – magnificent leader, sympathizes and identifies himself as one with his followers and their misery. He shows pity on the reduced stature of his friend. He justifies his animosity towards God in his sense of “injur’d merit”. It is a mark of Satan’s eloquence that he makes a ceaseless war with impossible odds seem like their only option
- **Satan’s second speech** – Infuse a sense of courage in his commanders after their defeat, overconfidence in his schemes masks their futile nature because in no way will they help in gaining back what has been lost. Foiling God’s plan will not get them heaven back
- **Satan’s third speech**- Accepting their fate to be eternal adversaries of God, Satan willingly accepts their dismal situation as a rebellion against the servitude of Heaven. “Farthest from him is best” marks not only physical alienation but also the moral distance between himself and God. Milton suffuses Satan’s speech with irony. Milton draws the readers’ attention to how Satan’s speech is “full of ringing phrases expressed with a deliberate sonority”, laying bare the rhetoric.



- **Satan's fourth speech** – Ironically calls these angels 'princes' to rouse their sense of pride
- **Satan's fifth speech** – A war cry which rules out any other options such as surrender or submission to the authority of God, repentance for their rebellion against Heaven, or even the idea of bearing their sufferings due to their punishment with patience and persistence.

Two particularly interesting interpretations of Satan have been touted by critics throughout the many centuries of scholarship since the publication of *Paradise Lost* in 1667. One bases Satan as the villain, the anti-thesis of Adam & Eve on the basis of theological theme, while the second interpretation, brought forward most prominently by William Blake, interprets Satan as the hero of the poem, rebelling against the anarchy of a tyrannical ruler. Alexander Raleigh compares Satan to Prometheus, who stole fire from Zeus for the benefit of mankind. Likewise, Raleigh calls Satan a "fearless antagonist of Omnipotence". On the other hand, Stanley Fish suggests that Milton attempts to 'tempt' the reader as Satan tempted Eve and it becomes the moral and religious duty of the reader to overcome this temptation. The reader who falls before the lures of Satanic rhetoric displays [...] the weakness of Adam and ... [fails] to avoid repeating [Adam's] fall. (Fish, 38)

Check Your Progress

1. Comment on the character of Satan in Book I of *Paradise Lost*.
2. Critically examine the various speeches delivered by Satan in Book I of *Paradise Lost*. What do they tell us about Satan as an orator and leader?
3. "Milton was of the devil's party without knowing it". In light of this statement, critically examine the portrayal of Satan in Book I of *Paradise Lost*.
4. Based on your reading of Book I, do you agree that *Paradise Lost* is a Christian poem? Give reasons for your answer.

Beelzebub

Beelzebub is one of the rebel angels who fell from Heaven alongside Satan. He awakens soon after Satan. He is the first to interact with Satan and listen to his plans. In fact, Beelzebub serves as Satan's most reliable ally and his second-in-command. He functions as a



counselor to Satan and equally adept at diplomacy. He, alongside Satan convinces the other fallen angels into formulating a plan of revenge against the supposed wrongdoings of God. While Satan is proud and boisterous, Beelzebub reasons Satan with rationality and a realistic survey of their situation. He brings to light their dire circumstances and does not shy away from admitting that God indeed is all-powerful (almighty). He offers rational explanations for the situation the angels are in and does not coax the other angels with false promises of going back to their pre-fallen glory.

“Satan, however, has not Beelzebub’s wisdom and practical sense. For example, Satan rejoices at the immortality of the rebel angels, and hopes that they will thus be able to vex god through eternity Beelzebub at once points out that the immortality of the rebel angels also means eternal torture for them. Satan declares that the fallen angels will always be doing evil, thus vexing god. Beelzebub shrewdly observes that their very opposition may be turned by god into the furtherance of his own glory. Bold, proud and ambitious, Satan is at his best on a throne or at the head of an army. The proper place for the wise and sagacious Beelzebub is the council chamber” (“Discuss the character”). He offers a calm rationality to Satan’s brazen call-of-action against their overthrow. Unlike Satan, he isn’t rash in his decisions but cautious. He openly accepts the superiority of God’s forces over the angels and devises that only through trickery and deceit can they win. “Of force believe almighty, since no less/ Than such could have o’erpow’red such force as ours” (I.144). While Satan belittles their Fall using bold metaphors of bravery, Beelzebub instead accepts the great and eternal misfortune that has befallen them. Through his shrewd powers of persuasion, he helps direct Satan’s course of action as his chief lieutenant.

Check Your Progress

1. Critically examine the character of Beelzebub in Book I of *Paradise Lost*.
2. Compare and contrast the characters of Satan and Beelzebub in *Paradise Lost*.

2.10 MAJOR THEMES

Hell and Pandemonium

Milton offers a vivid description of Hell and the creation of Satan’s Palace in the Book I. Hell appears as a singed furnace while the Hellish fire does not illuminate like the ordinary fires but instead spreads further darkness and hence, only “darkness [is] visible” (I.63),



indicating the doomed fate of its inhabitants who have forsaken the light of goodness and of Heaven. It deprives its inhabitants of vision and instils only despair. Hell is a place where any positive feeling of hope or rest does not exist. Milton describes Hell as never-ending as “ever-burning sulphur unconsumed” (I.69) to depict the eternal nature of the punishment of its inhabitants. There is no sense of calm even in the climate with ongoing fiery floods or tempests. Milton compares Hell to a perpetual volcano. There is no sense of stability as the dry land is composed of solid fire and the lake is composed of liquid fire, making it difficult for the angels to walk. Hell isn’t a formless or shapeless landmass; it contains lakes and hills and precious metals using which the capital of Hell – Pandemonium is built.

The Latin meaning of the word Pandemonium is ‘belonging to demons/ evil spirits’ while the contemporary usage identifies it as a situation of wild uproar and confusion. Indeed, Hell is a place of confusion where the flames emit darkness instead of light and hope is born out of sheer despair. It is the capital of Hell that is built to house all the devils. The Pandemonium marks the moral degeneration into materialistic baseness of the devils from the army of Satan to the buzzing bees. The pride and valour of the military transformed into the very mundane. Pandemonium is the name coined by Milton for the capital of Hell. It is built by the fallen angels, lead by Mammon, the angel most invested in materialistic pursuits as well as Mulciber, who Milton identifies as the Greco-Roman god of forgery Hephaestus/ Vulcan. The angels are able to create a greater marvel than the Egyptian pyramids in just an hour, its luxury and splendour is unmatched even by Babylon. Milton describes its creation in terms of visual music – rising like the notes of a musical organ. However, Pandemonium represents Milton’s attitude towards greed and wealth acquisition. He describes the process of building the monument in the crudest of words as “a second multitude/With wondrous Art found out the massie Ore/Severing each kind, and scum’d the Bullion dross” (I.71-73). The Pandemonium serves as a space that functions as a parliament in a faux-democracy of the fallen angels which parodies the religious and political climate of Milton’s time. As a Protestant, Milton was dissatisfied with the corruption and greed of the Catholic Church as well as the political leaders whom he parodies. This monument is a mere façade of grandeur built using worldly materials as a replica of Heaven’s splendours but while it attempts to match the outward glory.



Check Your Progress

1. Write a short note on the following: a. Hell, b. Pandemonium. c. Mammon
2. Write a short note on *Paradise Lost* as a political commentary.
3. Based on your reading of Book I, comment upon the ways in which Milton acts as a poet of the Reformation
4. Critically examine *Paradise Lost* as a Renaissance epic.
5. Identify Milton's views on wealth and materialism as portrayed in the construction of Pandemonium.

2.11 EPIC SIMILE

Epic simile refers to detailed comparisons that are built up over a large course of the text throughout several lines as opposed to the function of simile which points out similarities between two dissimilar concepts in a short and simple manner. These are used to add richness to the narrative but more importantly, to transpose loftier ideas into familiar and acceptable notions. Since these require elaborate and detailed comparisons, they are often digressive in nature, i.e, these comparisons tend to deviate from the actual narrative to discuss at length a specific aspect.

Milton was more concerned with the intellectual function of the simile rather than its aesthetic function. For instance, the various comparisons of Satan to an enormous sea beast (I.199-207) or the fallen angels to a swarm of bees (I.768-776) or the description of Satan's shield to the moon as seen through Galileo's astronomical glass (I.284-291) seek to help the readers understand the abstract concepts in the form of concrete images. Doing so is an important aspect of the narrator (and by extension Milton's) task of justifying the ways of God to men as well as Milton's project of creating a Biblical epic of the scale of the classical epics such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. The buzzing bees present the image of a filthy, undifferentiated swarm lacking individuality as well as a reduction in their stature just like the reduction in their size, in the mind of the reader. At the same time, they represent a certain kind of wildness and chaos which the fallen angels seek to bring to the world of



mankind. The images of sea as well as the swarm of bees portray Hell as a place always in a state of flux and impermanence, in direct contrast to the immutability of Heaven.

Interestingly, Homer, who is credited with the conception of the epic simile, also uses the ‘bee simile’ in his epic, *The Iliad*. Harding notes that, “Milton wanted his readers to recognize the source of his allusion so that they could compare his version with the original and then judge for themselves how skillfully, and with what new creative insights, he had reworked it” (665).

Thus, while Milton’s use of epic similes present decorative, poetic imagery, they are also suffused with deeper meaning of classical scholarship and serve the larger purpose of providing the reader with a means to make the grand events of cosmic proportion more relatable.

Check Your Progress

1. Comment upon the use of Homeric simile in Book I of *Paradise Lost*.
2. What is an epic simile? What function does Milton’s use of the epic simile serve?
3. Comment upon Milton’s use of Epic conventions in Book I of *Paradise Lost*.

2.12 USE OF MYTHS

Throughout Book I, Milton provides various allusions to the Biblical as well as Classical myths. The entire poem is couched within the Christian myth of the loss of Eden (Paradise) by Adam and Eve for disobeying God’s will by eating the forbidden fruit. At the same time, Milton makes several allusions to Greek and Roman (classical) myths. Often, His purpose is to denounce these myths by comparing them to the Biblical myths which he presents as the origin or source of all the other tales. To that effect, he often presents the Pagan deities as falsehoods and fake gods as well as the classical myths as debased replicas of the original, Christian myths. For example, Hephaestus’ fall from Olympus is presented by Milton as a debased form of the fall of Mulciber, the angel due to his rebellion against Heaven. Likewise, he brings together all such deities worshipped across various mythologies and integrates them into his narrative as the fallen angels leading mankind astray into degradation. Allusions help



Milton in transgressing the boundaries of time and space as defined by his chosen subject matter of the fall of Man. He presents himself in the figure of Moses, who seeks to “justify the way of God to men” (I.26).

Check Your Progress

1. Critically examine Milton’s mythological universe in Book I.
2. How does Milton bring out the conflict between Classical and Christian themes in *Paradise Lost*?
3. Briefly examine some of the major allusions in Book I of *Paradise Lost*.

2.13 List of Allusions

The following is the list of some of the major allusions used by John Milton in Book I of *Paradise Lost* arranged in order of their appearance in the text. A brief explanation is also provided alongside the references.

- Jesus Christ - Line 24
- Moses - Line 8; Line 339: In Judaism, Moses is the Prophet, a conduit between God and man. He is the one who narrates God’s word to the people
- Theogony of Hesiod 713 ff. – Line 50; 126 – 139; 197- 200: A poem by Hesiod recounting the creation myth of Greek gods and Greek cosmology
- Metamorphoses by Ovid – Lines 197- 200: A poem by the poet Ovid recounting classical Greek myths
- Leviathan – Line 201: From Isaiah 27: 1 “In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.” and Job 41:34 “It looks down on all that are haughty; it is king over all that are proud.”
- Exodus 10:13-5 – Line 338 : The Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt
- 1 Kings 11:1-9 – Lines 383-391: “But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites...”



- Aeneid by Virgil 3.570-7 – Lines 230-237: A poem by the poet Virgil recounting the journey of Aeneas, a Trojan hero who founds Rome
- Iliad by Homer – Line 576; 740-746; 768 – 770: account of the Trojan war
- Genesis 11:4 – Line 694 : Tale of the Tower of Babel

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