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UNIVERSITY OF JAMMU  
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B.A. Semester-I

Subject: English Literature

Unit: I-V

Course No.: EL -101

Lesson No.1-17

OLD & MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE

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## ENGLISH LITERATURE

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## SYLLABUS ENGLISH LITERATURE

(Session:2025-26, 2026-27, 2027-28)

Course No.: EL-101

Title: Old & Middle English Literature

Duration of Exam.: 3 Hrs

Total Marks:100

Credits- 06

Theory Examination : 80

Internal Assessment:20

Objective: The objective of this paper is to acquaint the learners with the beginning of English literature and to familiarize them with the figures of speech & literary terms required for the better understanding of various literary works prescribed.

### Unit-I: INTRODUCTION TO LITERARY TERMS

Alliteration Assonance, imagery, Metaphor, Simile, Rhyme, Blank Verse, Meter, Couplet, Prologue, Epilogue, Personification, Soliloquy, Farce, Satire, Irony, Sonnet, Comedy, Tragedy.

### Unit-II: HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE: OLD & MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE

- Literature in the Age of Chaucer
- Literature of the Revival
- Origin of Drama
- University Wits

### Unit-III : POETRY

Chaucer Selections from Prologue-characters of Wife of Bath and Monk

### Unit-IV: SONNET

- Development of English Sonnet  
Sir Thomas Wyatt: 'Who so List to Hunt'
- Phillip Sydney: O Grammar Rules (Sonnet 63)

## Unit-V : DRAMA

- a. Ralph Roister Doister: Nicholas Udall.

### MODE OF EXAMINATION

Internal Assessment (Total Marks: 20):

Two written Assignments of 10 marks each shall be given.

### **External End Semester University Examination:**

### **THIS PAPER WILL BE DIVIDED INTO SECTIONS A, B & C.**

#### Section-A: MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Section-A will have 12 MCQs covering all the Units.

Students will write the correct answers of any 8 in the answer sheets. (8×1=8Marks)

#### Section-B: SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

Section-B will have short answer questions from Unit I to Unit V. Four out of Five questions will have to attempted by the students. (4×4=16Marks)

#### Section-C: LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

Section-C A will have four long answer type questions from Unit II to Unit V with internal choice from the same unit. Candidate will be required to attempt all in about 250-300 words. (14×4=56Marks)

#### SUGGESTED READING:

1. Legouis, Emile and Louis Cazamian. History of English Literature. New Delhi: Macmillan, 2011.
2. Daiches, David. A Critical History of English Literature. New Delhi: Supernova Publishers, 2012.
3. Long William J. English Literature. New Delhi: Aitbs Publishers, 2013.
4. Alexander, Michael. A History of English Literature. New Delhi: Macmillan Press, 2020.
5. Sanders Andrews. The Short Oxford History of English Literature. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012.
6. Peck, John & Martin Coyle, A Brief History of English Literature. New York: Palgrave, 2014.
7. Abrams, M.H. A Glossary of Literary Terms. Madras: Macmillan 2013.
8. Quinn, Edward. A Dictionary of Literary & Thematic Terms. London: OUP, 2021.
9. Murfin, Rose & Supriya M. Ray. A Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms. Macmillan: New York, 2021.
10. Lever, J.W. The Elizabethan Love Sonnet. London: Methuen, 2018.

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UNIT-I	COURSE NO. EL-101
LESSON NO. 1	Title: Old & Middle English Literature

## **INTRODUCTION TO LITERARY TERMS**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Objectives & Outcome
- 1.3 Literary Terms
- 1.4 Glossary
- 1.5 Self Assessment Questions
- 1.6 Examination Oriented Questions
- 1.7 Suggested Reading
- 1.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.9 Model Test Paper
- 1.10 Answer Key

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Literary terms are words used in discussions, classification, criticism and analysis of poetry, novels, and other works of literature.

### **1.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME**

The objective of this lesson is:

- To introduce the learner to the literary terms.
- To help learner differentiate various forms of writing and literary devices.
- So that the learner is able to define the literary terms.

### **1.3 LITERARY TERMS**

#### **1.3.1 Alliteration**

“Alliteration” is derived from the Latin word “litera”, meaning “letters of the alphabet”. Alliteration is a figure of speech in which words or stressed syllable especially at the beginning are repeated. This repetition of sounds brings attention to the lines in which it is used, and creates more aural rhythm. In poems, alliteration can also refer to repeated consonant sound in the stressed syllables of a line. Alliteration has been used as a literary device in the English language for many hundreds of years, prevalent in works of literature all the way back to Beowulf, the eighth-century Old English poem. In Old English poetry alliteration was a continual and essential part of the metrical scheme and until the late Middle Ages was often used thus. A number of Middle English poems, such as William Langland’s *Piers Plowman* and the romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, both written in the fourteenth century, continued to use and play variations upon the old alliterative meter. In the opening lines of *Piers Plowman*, for example, all four of the stressed syllables alliterate:

In a somerseson, when soft was the sonne

In later English versification, however, alliteration is used only for special stylistic effects, such as to reinforce the meaning, to link related words, or to provide tone, colour and enhance the palpability of enunciating the words. Alliteration is most common in poems, though it can be found in prose and drama as well. It is often used in the real world in things like nursery rhymes, famous speeches, and advertising slogans.

### **Common Examples of Alliteration**

Many common tongue twisters contain examples of alliteration. For instance:

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

She sells sea shells by the seashore.

### **1.3.2. Assonance**

It is the repetition of vowel sounds to create internal rhyming within phrases or sentences, and together with alliteration and consonance serves as one of the building blocks of verse. Assonance does not have to be a rhyme; the identity of which depends merely on sequence of both vowel and consonant sounds. Thus, assonance is a resemblance of units that are generally less than a syllable. Sometimes it is also called ‘vocalicrhyme’; it consists of the repetition of similar vowel sounds to



achieve a musical effect. Assonance occurs more often in verse than in prose. It is used in (mainly modern) English-language poetry, and is particularly important in Old French, Spanish and the Celtic languages.

### **Common Examples of Assonance**

Several proverbs in English contain examples of assonance. The assonance in these phrases helps to make them more memorable in a subtler way than through rhyming words. A few of these proverbs are highlighted below:

The early bird catches the worm.

Honesty is the best policy.

A stitch in time saves nine.

### **1.3.3 Imagery**

As a literary device, imagery consists of descriptive language that can function as a way for the reader to better imagine the world of the piece of literature and also add symbolism to the work. Imagery draws on the five senses, namely the details of taste, touch, sight, smell, and sound. Imagery can also pertain to details about movement or a sense of a body in motion (kinesthetic imagery) or the emotions or sensations of a person, such as fear or hunger (organic imagery or subjective imagery). Using imagery helps the reader develop a more fully realized understanding of the imaginary world that the author has created.

Imagery examples are prevalent in all types of literature from cultures around the world. Poets, novelists, and playwrights use imagery for many reasons. One of the key usages is that the imagery in a piece can help create mood, such as the clichéd opening “It was a dark and stormy night.” While this line is too hackneyed for any author to actually use it, it is a good example of imagery in that the reader immediately pictures the kind of setting in which the story may take place. This particular imagery also creates a mood of foreboding. Indeed, even Shakespeare used this type of opening for his famous play *MacBeth*: in which the three witches in the beginning speak of the “thunder, lightning [and] rain” and the “fog and filthy air.” While an author may use imagery just to help readers understand the fictive world, details of imagery often can be read symbolically. In the example of

MacBeth, the thunder and lightning that open the play symbolize both the storm that is already taking place in Scotland and the one that is about to begin once MacBeth takes over the throne. Thus, when analyzing literature it is important to consider the imagery used so as to understand both the mood and the symbolism in the piece.

### **Common Examples of Imagery**

We use imagery in everyday speech to convey our meaning. Here are some examples of imagery from each of the five senses:

Taste: The familiar tang of his grandmother's cranberry sauce reminded him of his youth.

Sound: The concert was so loud that her ears rang for days afterward.

Sight: The sunset was the most gorgeousthey've ever seen; the clouds were Edged with pink and gold.

Smell: After eating the curry, his breath reeked of garlic.

Touch: The tree bark was rough against her skin.

### **1.3.4 Metaphor**

A metaphor is a rhetorical figure of speech that compares two subjects without the use of "like" or "as." Metaphor is often confused with simile, which compares two subjects by connecting them with "like" or "as" (for example: "She's fit as a fiddle"). While a simile states that one thing is like another, a metaphor asserts that one thing is the other, or is a substitute for the other thing.

A metaphor asserts a correlation or resemblance between two things that are otherwise unrelated. The English word "metaphor" originates from the Greek *metaphorá*, which means "to transfer" or "to carry over." Indeed, a metaphor transfers meaning from one subject on to another so that the target subject can be understood in a new way. Rhetoricians have further elaborated on the definition of metaphor by separating and naming the two key elements. There are a few different sets of names for these two parts: they can be called the "tenor" and the "vehicle" the "ground" and the "figure," or the "target" and the "source." Consider this famous example of a metaphor from Shakespeare's "As You Like It":

“All the world’s a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players.”

In this example, the world is the primary subject, and it gains attributes from the stage (ie, from theater). Thus, in the binary pairs, the world is the “tenor,” the “ground,” and the “target,” while the stage is the “vehicle,” the “figure,” and the “source.”

Metaphor is a key component of all forms of literature, including poetry, prose, and drama. This is not only because metaphor is a highly useful literary device, but also because it is such a vital part of all language and communication. Many cognitive theorists have researched and written about the importance of metaphor in the way we understand the world around us. For example, in western culture the phrase “time is money” is quite prevalent. This is not just cliché, though; we talk about time in terms of wasting it, spending it, saving it, and soon. The metaphorical comparison of these two concepts ends up influencing the way people in cultures actually perceive time.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that there are examples of metaphor in literature from every culture. The use of metaphor allows authors to present unfamiliar ideas or situations in ways that the reader is able to comprehend by comparing unknown things to known things. This can be a good technique for fantasy writers or science fiction writers to make the worlds they create seem more familiar to the reader. Metaphors can also be used, however, to compare very common things to one another. This type of usage forges a cognitive link between previously unrelated objects and makes readers appreciate them in a new way.

### ACTIVITY

1. Define Alliteration. Give two examples of alliteration.

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2. Define Metaphor. Give one example of metaphor.

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### 1.3.5 Simile

Simile is an explicit comparison between two unlike things through the use of connecting words, usually “like” or “as.” The technique of simile is known as a rhetorical analogy, as it is a device used for comparison. Simile can be an excellent way for an author either to make an unusual thing seem more familiar (i.e., “The planet Zenoth was as cold as ice”) or a familiar thing seem more unique (i.e., “Her smile was jagged like a broken zipper”). In this way, similes can help the reader imagine the fictive world of a piece of literature. Good similes can also make readers think about things in a new way, and can sometimes create a lasting effect. Scottish poet Robert Burns’ declaration that his “love’s like a red, red rose” has linked the concepts of love and red rose in our minds forever.

Simile can also sometimes be used to show a comparison, though with the conclusion that these two things really are unlike or even at odds with each other. This can either be a negative simile, or an ironic simile, which communicates the opposite of what is expected at the beginning of the statement. For example, the famous feminist quote popularized by Gloria Steinem, “A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle,” ultimately concludes that a woman has no need for a man.”

Simile can help to make new connections for the reader. One of literature’s purposes is to help better explain the world around us, and the technique of simile is one of those ways in which we are able to see things in a new way. All types of analogies are cognitive processes of transferring meaning from one thing to another, and thus the use of simile in literature has real evoking effects. For this reason, and for aesthetic purposes, simile has been a popular literary technique for many hundreds of years.

#### Common Examples of Simile

There are many clichéd similes in the English language that we use regularly. Here are some examples:

Strong as an ox

Fit as a fiddle

Bright as the sun

### **1.3.6 Rhyme**

Rhyme is a popular literary device in which the repetition of the same or similar Sounds occurs in two or more words, usually at the end of lines in poems or songs. In a rhyme in English, the vowel sounds in the stressed syllables match while the preceding consonant sound does not match. The consonants after the stressed syllables must match as well. For example, the words “gaining” and “straining” rhyme in English because they start with different consonant sounds, but the first stressed vowel is identical, as is the rest of the word. Rhyme has played a huge part in literature over many millennia of human existence. Indeed, rhyme has been found in many cultures and many eras. Rhyme also plays different parts in different cultures, holding almost mystical meaning in some cultures.

#### **Types of Rhyme**

There are many different ways to classify rhyme. Many people recognize “perfect rhymes” as the only real type of rhyme. For example, “mind” and “kind” are perfect rhymes, whereas “mind” and “line” are an imperfect match in sounds. Even with in the classification of “perfect” rhymes, there are a few different types:

Single: This is a rhyme in which the stress is on the final syllable of the words (“mind” and “behind”).

Double: This perfect rhyme has the stress on the second-to-last, syllable (“toasting” and “roasting”).

Dactylic: This rhyme, relatively uncommon in English, has the stress on the third-from-last, syllable (“terrible” and “wearable”).

Here are some other types of general rhymes that are not perfect:

Imperfect or near rhyme: In this type of rhyme, the same sounds occur in two words but in unstressed syllables (“thing” and “missing”).

Identical rhymes: Homonyms in English don’t satisfy the rules of perfect rhymes because while the vowels are matching, the preceding consonants also match and therefore the rhyme is considered inferior. For example, “way,” “weigh,”

and “whey” are identical rhymes and are not considered to be good rhymes.

Eye rhyme: This is common in English because so many of our words are spelled in the same way, yet have different pronunciations. For example, “good” and food” look like they should rhyme, but their vowel sounds are different.

Children’s songs and poems of ten contain rhymes, as they make lines easier to remember and pleasant to listen to. It is used as a literacy skill with young children for them to hear phonemes. Authors often use rhyme to make their lines more memorable and to signal the ends of lines.

### **1.3.7 Blank Verse**

Blank verse is a type of poetry written in a regular meter that does not contain rhyme. Blank verse is most commonly found in the form of iambic pentameter. Many famous English writers have used blank verse in their works, such as William Shakespeare, John Milton, and William Wordsworth. There is a strong tradition of using blank verse in English poetry; blank verse became popular in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare began incorporating it into their works. If you read Shakespeare’s plays carefully, you will soon begin to notice that much of the dialogue is written in unrhymed iambic pentameter, i.e., in blank verse. The famous work *Paradise Lost* by John Milton is also written in blank verse. Blank verse was also popular with Romantic English poets, as well as some contemporary American poets.

Blank verse allows an author to not be constricted by rhyme, which is limited in English. Yet it still creates a more poetic sound and sense of pattern due to the regular use of stressed and unstressed syllables. Meter is generally easier to use in English than rhyme since the majority of words are short (one or two syllables), unlike in Romance languages. Thus, it was in favor with English poets for nearly half a millennium. Free verse has replaced blank verse in popularity in the most recently written poetry, however.

### **Difference between Blank Verse and Free Verse**

Though blank verse and free verse sound like similar concepts, there are some notable differences. The definition of blank verse stipulates that, while there is no rhyme, the meter must be regular. Free verse, on the other hand, has no rhyme

scheme and no pattern of meter. Free verse generally mimics natural speech, while blank verse still carries a musical quality due to its meter.

### **1.3.8 Meter**

Meter is the rhythm of syllables in a line of verse or in a stanza of a poem. Depending on the language, this pattern may have to do with stressed and unstressed syllables, syllable weight, or number of syllables. Many older and more formal poems contain strict meter, which either continues throughout the entire poem or alternates in a specified rhythm. The study of meter forms as well as the use of meter in poetry is called prosody.

The earliest known example of meter is in a collection of Vedic Sanskrit hymns called the Rigveda, which dates back to between 1700 and 1100 BC. There are many other examples of meter from the Iron Age in multiple cultures. All poetry from the medieval period was written in meter, regardless of the literary tradition, from Tang Dynasty Chinese poetry to Classical Persian poetry to the Bardic poetry of Europe. It is unknown why meter became so ubiquitous at this period in world history, but this fact certainly leads many literary scholars to determine that meter is indeed a fundamental element of poetry. Not all poetry contains meter, especially in more contemporary times. However, it contributes a rhythmic unity to the verse and highlights the difference between the elevated language of poetry and normal speech patterns.

### **Common Forms of Meter in English**

Many forms of meter are broken into feet, which is a specific group of syllable types. In English, these feet are combinations of two to three stressed and unstressed syllables, which are then repeated to form a line of verse. In Classical Latin and Classical Greek, a metrical foot contains a combination of long and short syllables. Here are the most common metrical feet in English:

Iamb: Two syllables, the first of which is unstressed and the second of which is stressed. For example: comPUTE, disPEL, aGREE.

Trochee: Two syllables, the first of which is stressed and the second of which is unstressed. For example: ARgue, BISHop, DOctor.

Spondee: Two syllables, both of which are stressed. For example: ICE CREAM,

HOT LINE, CELL PHONE.

Dactyl: Three syllables, the first of which is stressed and the next two of which are unstressed. For example: ELephant, POSSible, TRINity.

Anapest: Three syllables, the first two of which are unstressed and the third of which is stressed. For example: of a KIND, souvenIR, underSTAND.

#### **1.4 GLOSSARY**

1. Ubiquitous-existing everywhere at the same time.
2. Palpability-obvious and noticeable.
3. Enunciating-to make a clear statement.
4. Clichéd-something that has become overly familiar; in use for a longtime.
5. Hackneyed-not interesting because of being in use for a longtime.
6. Rhetorical-concerned with heart of speaking or writing as a way to influence people.
7. Explicit-very clear and complete.
8. Analogy-a comparison of two things based on their being alike in some way.
9. Homonyms-one of two or more words spelled and pronounced alike but different in meaning.
10. Millennia-a period of thousand years counted from the beginning of the Christian era.
11. Aesthetic-relating to art or beauty, pleasing in appearance.
12. Cognitive-including conscious mental activities such as thinking, understanding, learning and remembering.

#### **1.5 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS (SAQs)**

Q1. What is the difference between a blank verse and free verse?

Answer: Both blank verse and free verse are similar concepts, yet the



reare some no able differences. Blank verse requires that, while there is no rhyme, the meter must be regular. Free verse, on the other hand, has no rhyme scheme and no pattern of meter. Free verse generally mimics natural speech, while blank verse still carries a musical quality due to its meter.

Q2. Discuss different types of Rhyme.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Q3. How is Alliteration different from Assonance?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Q4. Define Imagery.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## 1.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

### 1.6.1 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)

- i) Repetition of the same or similar consonant sounds at the beginning of words\_\_\_\_\_
- a) Metaphor                                      c) Assonance
- b) Alliteration                                    d) Simile
- i) A figure of speech where in a comparison is made between two unlike quantities without the use of the words ‘like’ or ‘as’ \_\_\_\_\_
- a) Oxymoron                                      c)Metaphor
- b) Freeverse                                      d)Farce
- ii) The use of senses to create images\_\_\_\_\_
- a) Dialogue                                      c) Allusion
- b) Imagery                                         d) Symbol
- iv) Unrhymed verse but with a consistent metrical pattern is known as\_\_\_\_\_
- a) Free verse                                      c) Hexameter
- b) Eyerhyme                                      d) Blankverse

### 1.6.2 Short Answer Type Questions

- Q1. Define Alliteration.
- Q2. Differentiate between a Simile and Metaphor.
- Q3. What is a Blank Verse?

## 1.7 SUGGESTED READING

1. Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory by J.A Cuddon 2015.
2. A Glossary of Literary Terms by M.H. Abrams 11<sup>th</sup> ed., Cengage, 2013.

## 1.8 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson you have been exposed to literary terms to gain insights into a writer's works. Literary terms add layers of meaning to a writer's works.

### **1.9 MODEL TEST PAPER**

Q1. What is the difference between a blank verse and free verse?

Q2. How is Alliteration different from Assonance?

Q3. Define Metaphor.

Q4. Define Alliteration.

Q5. Differentiate between a Simile and Metaphor.

Q6. What is a Blank Verse?

### **1.10 ANSWER KEY (MCQs)**

i) Alliteration

i)

Metaphor

ii) Imagery

iv)

Blankverse

**INTRODUCTION TO LITERARY TERMS****STRUCTURE**

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Objectives & Outcome
- 2.3 Literary Terms
- 2.4 Glossary
- 2.5 Self Assessment Questions
- 2.6 Examination Oriented Questions
- 2.7 Suggested Reading
- 2.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.9 Model Test Paper
- 2.10 Answer Key

**2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Literary terms are words used in discussions, classification, criticism and analysis of poetry, novels, and picture books.

**2.2 OBJECTIVES & OUTCOME**

The objective of this lesson is:

- To introduce the learner to the literary terms.
- To help learner differentiate various forms of writing and literary devices.

So that the learner is able to define the literary terms.

**2.3 LITERARY TERMS****2.3.1 Couplet**

The definition of couplet comes from the French word couple, which means “a little pair.” A couplet is a successive pair of lines in a poem. The pair of lines that comprise a couplet generally rhyme with each other and contain the same meter. Couplets are either closed, which is to say that both lines are end-stopped, or open, which is to say that there is enjambment involved and the meaning of the line runs on past the end of the line. The couplet is one of the main verse units in Western literature and is a form of great antiquity. Chaucer was one of the first Englishmen to use it, in *The Legend of Good Women* and for most of *The Canterbury Tales*. Couplets have been a part of the literary traditions of many different cultures. The couplets is an attractive form because it can contain so much meaning in a short pair of lines yet also lend itself to developing a longer whole. The first line often posits something that the second line answers.

### **Types of Couplets**

**Elegiac Couplet:** This example of couplet was used primarily in ancient Greek poetry for themes on a smaller scale than the epic. Each couplet must make sense on its own, but also contribute to the larger meaning. An elegiac couplet is comprised of a hexameter line (i.e., six poetic feet) followed by a line in pentameter (i.e., five poetic feet). This creates a sense of rising action in the first line and falling action in the second. Ancient Greek elegy was always written with this type of couplet.

**Heroic Couplet:** A heroic couplet is fairly similar to the elegiac couplet in that it is generally closed and self-contained, and thus has meaning on its own. Heroic couplets came into popularity in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century in English epic and narrative poetry. The meter of heroic couplets is usually iambic pentameter, though some poets took liberties with changing the meter at times to provide a sort of closure.

Closed couplets are also known as formal couplets, while open couplets are sometimes called run-on couplet.

The term couplet generally only refers to poetry, though it can be found in folk songs even.

### **2.3.2 Prologue**

The prologue, Greek *prologos* (meaning: be foreword), is an opening of a

story that establishes the setting and gives background details. Generally speaking, the main function of a prologue tells some earlier story and connects it to the main story. Similarly, it serves as a means to introduce characters of a story and throws light on their roles. In its modern sense, a prologue acts as a separate entity and is not considered part of the current story that a writer ventures to tell.

It is the opening section of a work, a kind of introduction which is part of the work and not prefatory. It was common in drama in the 17th and 18th c., when it was often in verse. One of the earliest prologue examples is Chaucer's General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. His prologue was built on the conventional pattern. He used it to introduce all his characters or pilgrims in dramatic details before each of them told their story on their way to Canterbury to visit the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket. As previously mentioned, the primary function of a prologue is to let the readers/audience be aware of the earlier part of the story and enable them to relate it to the main story. This literary device is also a means to present characters and establish their roles.

### **2.3.3 Epilogue**

An epilogue or epilog taken from Greek 'epilogos' meaning conclusion or in addition is a piece of writing at the end of a work of literature, usually used to bring closure to the work. It is presented from the perspective of within the story. When the author steps in and speaks indirectly to the reader, which is more properly considered an afterword. An epilogue is the final chapter at the end of a story that often serves to reveal the fates of the characters. Some epilogues may feature scenes only tangentially related to the subject of the story. They can be used to hint at a sequel or wrap up all the loose ends. They can occur at a significant period of time after the main plot has ended. In some cases, the epilogue is used to allow the main character a chance to "speak freely".

An epilogue can continue in the same narrative style and perspective as the preceding story, although the form of an epilogue can occasionally be drastically different from the overall story. It can also be used as a sequel. The opposite is a prologue—a piece of

writing at the beginning of a work of literature or drama, usually used to open the story and capture interest.

### **2.3.4 Personification**

Personification is a figure of speech in which a thing, an idea or an animal is given human attributes. Then non-human objects are portrayed in such a way that we feel they have the ability to act like human beings. Personification is a figure of speech where human qualities are given to animals, objects or ideas. It is the opposite of a metaphor but is very similar. In arts, personification means representing a non-human thing as if it were human. Personification gives human traits and qualities, such as emotions, desires, sensations, gestures and speech, often by way of a metaphor.

Personification is much used in visual arts. Examples in writing are "the leaves waved in the wind", "the ocean heaved a sigh" or "the Sun smiled at us". In easy language personification is just giving an example of a living being for a non-living thing. "The wind shouted". Obviously the wind cannot shout, only people can. This is what is called personification.

Another commonly used personification is found in storybooks where animals are commonly attributed names or labels for recognition. This is called anthropomorphism. Organisms may also be used as embodiment or incarnations of a concept.

Another word for comparing a person with an object is Objectification.

For example, when we say, "The sky weeps" we are giving the sky the ability to cry, which is a human quality. Thus, we can say that the sky has been personified in the given sentence.

Common Examples of Personification

Look at my car. She is a beauty, isn't it so?

The wind whispered through dry grass.

The fire swallowed the entire forest.

We see from the above examples of personification that this literary device helps us relate actions of inanimate objects to our own emotions.

The wind whispered through dry grass.

The fire swallowed the entire forest.

We see from the above examples of personification that this literary device helps us relate actions of inanimate objects to our own emotions.

### **2.3.5 Soliloquy**

A soliloquy is a popular literary device often used in drama to reveal the innermost thoughts of a character. It is a great technique used to convey the progress of action of the play by means of expressing a character's thoughts about a certain character or past, present or upcoming event while talking to himself without acknowledging the presence of any other person. The word soliloquy is derived from Latin word "solo" which means "to himself" and "loquor" means "to speak" respectively. A soliloquy is often used as a means of character revelation or character manifestation to the reader or the audience of the play. Due to a lack of time and space, it was sometimes considered essential to present information about the plot and to expose the feelings and intentions of the characters. Dramatists made extensive use of soliloquies in their plays but it has become outdated, though some playwrights still use it in their plays. Soliloquy examples abound during the Elizabethan era.

### **Soliloquy and Monologue**

Sometimes soliloquy is wrongly mixed up with monologue and aside. These two techniques are distinctly different from a soliloquy. Although, like soliloquy, a monologue is a speech, the purpose and presentation of both is different. In a monologue, a character usually makes a speech in the presence of other characters, while in a soliloquy, the character or speaker speaks to himself. By doing so, the character keeps these thoughts secret from the other characters of the play. An aside on the other hand, is a short comment by a character towards the audience for another character usually without his knowing about it.

### **Examples of Soliloquy from Literature**

Shakespeare made extensive use of soliloquies in his plays. But before Shakespeare, we find considerable use of this significant dramatic technique in Christopher Marlow's



play Doctor Faustus. Modern plays do not have as much examples of soliloquy as the Renaissance era.

Example “Yet art thou still but Faustus and a man”

In the first soliloquy of Doctor Faustus, Marlowe has nicely summed up Faustus' life, motives, intentions and growth of his idea that took place before the start of action. An extra-ordinary ambitious soul of Doctor Faustus is revealed here who was not satisfied with the existing branches of knowledge and needed something beyond the powers of man.

Soliloquies were frequently used in dramas but went out of fashion when drama shifted towards realism in the late 18th century.

### **2.3.6 Farce**

In theatre, a farce is a comedy that aims at entertaining the audience through situations that are highly exaggerated, extravagant, and thus improbable. The word derives from the Latin *Farcire*, 'to stuff'. The object of farce is to provoke mirth of the simplest and most basic kind: roars of laughter rather than smiles. It is associated with burlesque though it must be distinguished from burlesque with clowning, buffoonery, slapstick comedy. The basic elements of farce are exaggerated physical action, exaggeration of character and situation, absurd situations and improbable events and surprises in the form of unexpected appearances and disclosures. Farces are often highly incomprehensible plot-wise (due to the many plot twists and random events that occur), but viewers are encouraged not to try to follow the plot in order to avoid confusion. Farce is also characterized by physical humor, the use of deliberate absurdity or nonsense, and broadly stylized performances. Farces have been written for the stage and film. Furthermore, a farce is also often set in one particular location, where all events occur.

The absolute origins of farce are obscure and at its simplest it could be described as a form of prehistoric horseplay. In classical literature farcical elements are to be found in the plays of Aristophanes and Plautus. The first play to be described as farces were French and belong to the late middle ages. These poked fun at the follies and vices of everyday life.

### 2.3.7 Satire

Satire is a genre of literature, and sometimes graphic and performing arts, in which vices, follies, abuses, and shortcomings are held up to ridicule, ideally with the intent of shaming individuals, corporations, government or society itself, into improvement. Although satire is usually meant to be humorous, its greater purpose is often constructive social criticism, using wit to draw attention to both particular and wider issues in society. A feature of satire is strong irony or sarcasm—"in satire, irony is militant"—but parody, burlesque, exaggeration, juxtaposition, comparison, analogy, and double entendre are all frequently used in satirical speech and writing. This "militant" irony or sarcasm often professes to approve of (or at least accept as natural) the very things the satirist wishes to attack.

Satire is a technique employed by writers to expose and criticize foolishness and corruption of an individual or a society by using humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule. It intends to improve humanity by criticizing its follies and foibles. A writer in a satire uses fictional characters, which stand for real people, to expose and condemn their corruption. A writer may point a satire toward a person, a country or even the entire world. Usually, a satire is a comical piece of writing which makes fun of an individual or a society to expose its stupidity and shortcomings. In addition, he hopes that those he criticizes will improve their characters by overcoming their weaknesses.

Satire is nowadays found in many artistic forms of expression, including literature, plays, commentary, television shows, and media such as lyrics.

#### ACTIVITY

1. How many types of Couplets are there?

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2. What is a Prologue?

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3. Define Farce.

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### **2.3.8 Irony**

Irony from Ancient Greek, meaning "dissimulation, feigned ignorance" in its broadest sense, is a rhetorical device, literary technique, or event in which what appears, on the surface, to be the case, differs radically from what is actually the case. Irony may be divided into categories such as verbal, dramatic, and situational.

Irony is a figure of speech in which words are used in such a way that their intended meaning is different from the actual meaning of the words. It may also be a situation that may end up in quite a different way than what is generally anticipated. In simple words, it is a difference between the appearance and the reality.

#### **Types of Irony**

On the ground of the above definition, we distinguish two basic kinds of irony i.e.

- a) Verbal irony – A verbal irony involves what one does not mean. When in response to a foolish idea, we say, “what a great idea!” it is a verbal irony.
- b) Situational irony – A situational irony occurs when, for instance, a man is chuckling at his misfortune of the other even when the same misfortune, incomplete unawareness, is befalling him. When you laugh at a person who slipped stepping on a banana peel and the next thing you know, you slipped too.

#### **Difference between Dramatic Irony and Situational Irony**

Dramatic irony is a kind of irony in a situation, which the writers frequently employ in their works. In situational irony, both the characters and the audience are fully unaware of the implications of the real situation. In dramatic irony, the characters are oblivious of the situation but the audience is not. For example, in “Romeo and Juliet”, we know much before the characters that they are going to die.

In real life circumstances, irony may become comical, bitter or sometimes unbearably offensive.

Verbal, dramatic, and situational irony are often used for emphasis in the assertion of a truth. The ironic form of simile, used in sarcasm, and some forms of litotes can

emphasize one's meaning by the deliberate use of language which states the opposite of the truth, denies the contrary of the truth, or drastically and obviously understates a

factual connection.

Common Examples of Irony

The name of Britain's biggest dog was "Tiny".

The butter is as soft as a marble piece.

"Oh great! Now you have broken my new camera."

### **2.3.8 Sonnet**

The sonnet is a popular classical form that has compelled poets for centuries. Traditionally, the sonnet is a fourteen-line poem written in iambic pentameter, employing one of several rhyme schemes, and adhering to a tightly structured thematic organization. The name is taken from the Italian sonetto, which means "a little sound or song."

### **Types of Sonnets**

#### **Petrarchan Sonnet**

The first and most common sonnet is the Petrarchan, or Italian. Named after one of its greatest practitioners, the Italian poet Petrarch, the Petrarchan sonnet is divided into two stanzas, the octave (the first eight lines) followed by the answering sestet (the final six lines). The tightly woven rhyme scheme, abba, abba, cdecde or cdcdcd, is suited for the rhyme-rich Italian language, though there are many fine examples in English. Since the Petrarchan presents an argument, observation, question, or some other answerable charge in the octave, a turn, or volta, occurs between the eighth and ninth lines. This turn marks a shift in the direction of the foregoing argument or narrative, turning the sestet into the vehicle for the counterargument, clarification, or whatever answer the octave demands.

Sir Thomas Wyatt introduced the Petrarchan sonnet to England in the early sixteenth century. His famed translations of Petrarch's sonnets, as well as his own sonnets, drew fast attention to the form. Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, a contemporary of Wyatt's, whose

own translations of Petrarch are considered more faithful to the original though less fine to the ear, modified the Petrarchan, thus establishing the structure that became known as the Shakespearean sonnet. This structure has been noted to lend itself much better to the comparatively rhyme-poor English language.

### **Shakespearean Sonnet**

The second major type of sonnet, the Shakespearean, or English sonnet, follows a different set of rules. Here, three quatrains and a couplet follow this rhyme scheme: abab, cdcd, efef,

gg. The couplet plays a pivotal role, usually arriving in the form of a conclusion, a amplification, or even refutation of the previous three stanzas, often creating an epiphanic quality to the end. In Sonnet 130 of William Shakespeare's epic sonnet cycle, the first twelve lines compare the speaker's mistress unfavorably with nature's beauties, but the concluding couplet swerves in a surprising direction.

### **Variations on the Sonnet Form**

John Milton's Italian-patterned sonnets (later known as "Miltonic" sonnets) added several important refinements to the form. Milton freed the sonnet from its typical incarnation in a sequence of sonnets, writing the occasional sonnet that often expressed interior, self-directed concerns. He also took liberties with the turn, allowing the octave to run into the sestet as needed. Both of these qualities can be seen in "When I Consider How My Light is Spent."

The Spenserian sonnet, invented by sixteenth century English poet Edmund Spenser, cribs its structure from the Shakespearean—three quatrains and a couplet—but employs a series of "couplet links" between quatrains, as revealed in the rhyme scheme: abab, bcbc, cdcd,

ee. The Spenserian sonnet, through the interweaving of the quatrains, implicitly reorganized the Shakespearean sonnet into couplets, reminiscent of the Petrarchan. One reason was to reduce the often excessive final couplet of the Shakespearean sonnet, putting less pressure on it to resolve the foregoing argument, observation, or question.

### **2.3.9 Comedy**

In the most common literary application, a comedy is a fictional work in which the materials are selected and managed primarily in order to interest and amuse us: the characters and their discomfitures engage our pleasurable attention rather than our profound

concern, we are made to feel confident that no great disaster will occur, and usually the action turns out happily for the chief characters. The term “comedy” is customarily applied only to plays for the stage or to motion pictures and television dramas; it should be noted, however, that the comic form of plot, as just defined, also occurs in prose fiction and narrative poetry.

Within the very broad spectrum of dramatic comedy, the following types are frequently distinguished:

1. Romantic comedy was developed by Elizabethan dramatists on the model of contemporary prose romances such as Thomas Lodge’s *Rosalynde* (1590), the source of Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* (1599). Such comedy represents a love affair that involves a beautiful and engaging heroine (sometimes disguised as a man); the course of this love does not run smooth, yet overcomes all difficulties to end in a happy union. Many of the boy-meets-girl plots of later writers are instances of romantic comedy, as are romance novels and many motion pictures, from *The Philadelphia Story* to *Sleepless in Seattle*. In *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), Northrop Frye points out that some of Shakespeare’s romantic comedies manifest a movement from the normal world of conflict and trouble into “the green world”—the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It*, or the fairy-haunted wood of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*—in which the problems and injustices of the ordinary world are dissolved, enemies reconciled, and true lovers united. Frye regards that phenomenon (together with other aspects of these comedies, such as their frequent conclusion in the social ritual of a wedding, a feast, or a dance) as evidence that comic plots derive from primitive myths and rituals that celebrated the victory of spring over winter.

2. Satiric comedy ridicules political policies or philosophical doctrines, or else attacks deviations from the accepted social order by making ridiculous the violators of its standards of morals or manners. (See satire.) The early master of satiric comedy was the Greek Aristophanes, c. 450–c. 385 BC, whose plays mocked political, philosophical, and literary matters of his age. Shakespeare’s contemporary, Ben Jonson, wrote satiric or (as it is

sometimes called) “corrective comedy.” In his *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*, for example, the greed and ingenuity of one or more intelligent but rascally swindlers, and the equal greed but stupid gullibility of their victims, are made grotesquely or repulsively ludicrous rather than lightly amusing.

3. The comedy of manners originated in the New Comedy of the Greek Menander, c. 342–292 BC (as distinguished from the Old Comedy represented by Aristophanes, c. 450–c. 385

BC) and was developed by the Roman dramatists Plautus and Terence in the third and second centuries BC. Their plays dealt with the vicissitudes of young lovers and included what became the stock characters of much later comedy, such as the clever servant, old and stodgy parents, and the wealthy rival. The English comedy of manners was early exemplified by Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost* and *Much Ado about Nothing*, and was given a high polish in Restoration comedy (1660–1700). The Restoration form owes much to the brilliant dramas of the French writer Molière, 1622–73. It deals with the relations and intrigues of men and women living in a sophisticated upperclass society, and relies for comic effect in large part on the wit and sparkle of the dialogue—often in the form of repartee, a witty conversational give-and-take which constitutes a kind of verbal fencing match—as well as on the violations of social standards and decorum by would-be wits, jealous husbands, conniving rivals, and foppish dandies. Excellent examples are William Congreve’s *The Way of the World* and William Wycherley’s *The Country Wife*. A middle-class reaction against what had come to be considered the immorality of situation and indecency of dialogue in the courtly Restoration comedy resulted in the sentimental comedy of the eighteenth century. In the latter part of that century, however, Oliver Goldsmith (*She Stoops to Conquer*) and his contemporary Richard Brinsley Sheridan (*The Rivals* and *A School for Scandal*) revived the wit and gaiety, while deleting the indecency, of Restoration comedy. The comedy of manners lapsed in the early nineteenth century, but was revived by many skillful dramatists, from A. W. Pinero and Oscar Wilde (*The Importance of Being Earnest*, 1895), through George Bernard Shaw and Noel Coward, to Neil Simon.

### **2.3.10 Tragedy**

The term is broadly applied to literary, and especially to dramatic, representations of serious actions which eventuate in a disastrous conclusion for the protagonist (the chief character). More precise and detailed discussions of the tragic form properly begin—although they should not end—with Aristotle’s classic analysis in the *Poetics* (fourth century BC). Aristotle based his theory by reference to the only examples available to him, the tragedies of Greek dramatists such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. In the subsequent two thousand years and more, various new types of serious plots ending in a catastrophe have been developed—types that Aristotle had no way of foreseeing. The many attempts to stretch Aristotle’s analysis to apply to later tragic forms serve merely to blur his critical categories and to obscure important differences among a diversity of plays, all of which have proved to be dramatically effective.

When flexibly managed, however, Aristotle’s discussions apply in some part to many tragic plots, and his analytic concepts serve as a suggestive starting point for identifying the distinctive attributes of various non-Aristotelian modes of tragic construction. Aristotle defined tragedy as “the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself,” in the medium of poetic language and in the manner of dramatic rather than of narrative presentation, involving “incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish the catharsis of such emotions.” Precisely how to interpret Aristotle’s catharsis—which in Greek signifies “purgation,” or “purification,” or both—is much disputed. On two matters, however, many commentators agree. Aristotle in the first place sets out to account for the undeniable, though remarkable, fact that many tragic representations of suffering and defeat leave an audience feeling not depressed, but relieved, or even exalted. In the second place, Aristotle uses this distinctive effect on the reader, which he calls “the pleasure of pity and fear,” as the basic way to distinguish the tragic from comic or other forms, and he regards the dramatist’s aim to produce this effect in the highest degree as the principle that determines the choice and moral qualities of the tragic protagonist and the organization of the tragic plot.

Accordingly, Aristotle says that the tragic hero will most effectively evoke both our pity



and terror if he is neither thoroughly good nor thoroughly bad but a mixture of both; and also that this tragic effect will be stronger if the hero is “better than we are,” in the sense that he is of higher than ordinary moral worth. Such a man is exhibited as suffering a change in fortune from happiness to misery because of his mistaken choice of an action, to which he is led by his hamartia—his “error” or “mistake of judgment” or, as it is often, although misleadingly and less literally translated, his tragic flaw.

The tragic hero, like Oedipus in Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*, moves us to pity because, since he is not an evil man, his misfortune is greater than he deserves; but he moves us also to fear, because we recognize similar possibilities of error in our own lesser and fallible selves. Aristotle grounds his analysis of “the very structure and incidents of the play” on the same principle; the plot, he says, which will most effectively evoke “tragic pity and fear” is one in which the events develop through complication to a catastrophe in which there occurs (often by an anagnorisis, or discovery of facts hitherto unknown to the hero) a sudden peripeteia, or reversal in his fortune from happiness to disaster.

Senecan tragedy was written to be recited rather than acted; but to English playwrights, who thought that these tragedies had been intended for the stage, they provided the model for an organized five-act play with a complex plot and an elaborately formal style of dialogue. Senecan drama, in the Elizabethan Age, had two main lines of development. One of these consisted of academic tragedies written in close imitation of the Senecan model, including the use of a chorus, and usually constructed according to the rules of the three unities, which had been elaborated by Italian critics of the sixteenth century; the earliest English example was Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton’s *Gorboduc* (1562). The other and much more important development was written for the popular stage, and is called the revenge tragedy, or (in its most sensational form) the tragedy of blood. This type of play derived from Seneca’s favorite materials of murder, revenge, ghosts, mutilation, and carnage, but while Seneca had relegated such matters to long reports of offstage actions by messengers, Elizabethan dramatists usually represented them on stage to satisfy the appetite of the contemporary audience for violence and horror. Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*

(1586) established this popular form; its subject is a murder and the quest for vengeance, and it includes a ghost, insanity, suicide, a play-within-a-play, sensational incidents, and a gruesomely bloody ending. Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (c. 1592) and Shakespeare's early play *Titus Andronicus* (c. 1590) are in this mode; and from this lively but unlikely prototype came one of the greatest of tragedies, *Hamlet*, as well as John Webster's fine horror plays of 1612–13, *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The White Devil*.

## 2.4 GLOSSARY

1. Enjambment-running over of a sentence from one couplet to another, continuation without pause.
2. Antiquity-matters relating to the life or culture of ancient times.
3. Venture-to start to do something new or different that usually involves risk.
4. Prefatory-included at the beginning of a book, speech, etc., as an introduction.
5. Anthropomorphism-an interpretation of what is not human or personal in terms of human or personal characteristics; humanization.
6. Embodiment-someone or something that is a perfect representative or example of a quality or idea.
7. Revelation-an act of making something known, an act of revealing something in a surprising way.
8. Exaggerated-to make/describe something beyond bounds or the truth.
9. Burlesque-a play, story, novel, etc., that makes a serious subject seem funny or ridiculous.
10. Buffoonery-a foolish or playful behavior.
11. Absurd-having no rational or orderly relationship to human life.
12. Obscure-difficult or impossible to know completely and with certainty.
13. Parody-a bad or unfair example of something.
14. Sarcasm-the use of words that mean the opposite of what you really want

to say especially in order to insult someone, to show irritation, or to be funny.

## 2.5 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Q1. Differentiate between verbal irony and situational irony.

Answer: A verbal irony involves what one does not mean. When in response to a foolish idea, we say, "what a great idea!" it is a verbal irony. Whereas, a situational irony occurs when, for instance, a man is chuckling at the misfortune of the other even when the same misfortune, in complete unawareness, is befalling him. When you laugh at a person who slipped stepping on a banana peel and then the next thing you know, you slipped too.

Q2. How is soliloquy different from monologue?

Ans.

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Q3. Discuss the various elements involved in Farce.

Ans.

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Q4. Discuss the major types of Couplet.

Ans.

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## **2.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

### **2.6.1 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)**

- i) The result of an action which is the reverse of what we expect \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) Understatement      c) Situational Irony
  - b) Postmodernism      d) Oxymoron
- ii) The contrast between the literal meaning of what is said and what is meant is \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) Analogy      c) Paradox
  - b) Verbal Irony      d) Juxtaposition
- iii) When a character is alone on stage and speaks his or her thoughts aloud is \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) Free verse      c) Soliloquy
  - b) Myth      d) Metonymy
- iv) “The wind was blowing so hard, the sun was scared to come out” is an example of \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) Synecdoche      c) Satire
  - b) Personification      d) Farce

### **2.6.2 Short Answer Type Questions**

- Q1. What is Personification?
- Q2. What do you mean by Satire?
- Q3. Define Irony.
- Q4. Differentiate between Epilogue and Prologue.

## **2.7 SUGGESTED READING**

- 1. Dictionary of LITERARY TERMS & LITERARY THEORY by J.A. Cuddon 2015.
- 2. A Glossary of Literary Terms by M.H. Abrams 2013 .

## **2.8 LET US SUM UP**

In this lesson you have again read frequently used literary terms. These terms are significant to appreciate English Literature as these terms help in analyzing literary works focusing on the work's plot structure, characters, narration, themes, etc.

## **2.9 MODEL TEST PAPER**

- Q1. How is soliloquy different from monologue?
- Q2. What is Personification?
- Q3. What do you mean by Satire?
- Q4. Define Irony.
- Q5. Differentiate between Epilogue and Prologue.
- Q6. Define Farce.

## **2.10 ANSWER KEY (MCQs)**

- i) Situational Irony
- ii) Verbal Irony
- iii) Soliloquy
- iv) Personification

UNIT-II	COURSE NO. EL-101
LESSON NO. 3	Title: Old & Middle English Literature

HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE :  
 OLD AND MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE  
 LITERATURE IN THE AGE OF CHAUCER

**STRUCTURE**

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Objectives & Outcome
- 3.3 Life of Chaucer
- 3.4 Works of Chaucer
- 3.5 Contemporaries of Chaucer
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 Glossary
- 3.8 Self Assessment Questions
  - 3.8.1 Short Answer Type Questions
  - 3.8.2 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 3.9 Answer Key
- 3.10 Examination Oriented Questions
- 3.11 Suggested Reading

**3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The social structure of England in the fourteenth century was feudal, that is to say power radiated from the king, through his nobles and through their subjects, with little of the King's power reaching the lower strata of the society. The King and his nobles owned the land, which was divided into agricultural estates, and these provided the

men, money and the material. The society was organized into a hierarchical form, one's wealth and power being a matter of what position one occupied in the hierarchical ladder.

The plague or Black Death entered England in mid-century with dreadful consequences. It is said that half of the population of England was wiped out, and while this may be an exaggeration, it is not an exaggeration to say that a medieval man lived with constant fear of its ravages. One of the effects of plague was to inflate the prices and further depress the already grim living conditions of those at the bottom of the economic ladder. This initiated the peasant revolt (1381), in which the infuriated murdered a good many of those whom they regarded as their exploiters. The Hundred Years War continued, with the French threatening to invade England. The Church was at the centre stage of everyday life be it social, political or religious. Church itself was divided at that time, one faction having a Pope at Rome and the other at Avignon.

The fourteenth century is remarkable historically for the decline of feudalism, for the growth of the English national spirit during the wars with France, for the growth of the English national spirit during the wars with France, for the prominence of the House of Commons, and for the growing power of the working classes, who had earlier been in a quite deplorable condition. The age produced remarkable writers, of whom Geoffrey Chaucer is one of the greatest of English writers.

### **3.2 OBJECTIVES & OUTCOME**

After studying this lesson, the learner will be able to enumerate:

- a) the Age of Chaucer
- b) Chaucer's life.
- c) Chaucer's works
- d) Chaucer's contemporaries

### **3.3 LIFE OF CHAUCER**

For our convenience the life of Chaucer is divided into three periods. The first, of thirty years, includes his youth and early manhood, in which time he was influenced almost exclusively by French literary models. The second period, of fifteen years, covers Chaucer's active life as diplomat and man of affairs; and in this the Italian

influence seems stronger than the French. The third, of fifteen years, generally known as the English period, is the time of Chaucer's richest development. He lives at home, observes life closely but kindly, and while the French influence is still strong, as shown in the *Canterbury Tales*, he seems to grow more independent of foreign models and is dominated chiefly by the vigorous life of his own English people.

#### a) First Period

Chaucer was born about in 1343 of a prosperous family and reared in London. His father, a wine-merchant, was able to find him a position as a page boy in the household of King Edward III's daughter-in-law, Elizabeth of Ulster, and from this period on, Chaucer enjoyed the uninterrupted favor of the members of the court of successively, Edward, Richard II, and Henry IV, both as a man of affairs and as a poet. He served as a soldier in France, in the campaigns of the Hundred Years War in 1359-1360 and was sent abroad on the least seven occasions between 1368 and 1387, either to France or Italy, on diplomatic missions. He was married to Philippa Roet of Flanders, who was lady-in-waiting to Queen Philippa and later to John of Gaunt's second wife Constance.

Chaucer's boyhood was spent in London, on Thames Street, which was the hub for commercial activities. Of his education, we know nothing, except that he was a great reader. At nineteen he was sent by the king on one of the many expeditions and saw chivalry and all pageantry of the medieval war at the height of their outwards splendor. Taken prisoner at the unsuccessful siege of Rheims, he is said to have been ransomed by money out of the royal purse. A few years after returning to England, he became a squire of the royal household, the personal attendant and confidant of the king. It was during his first period that he married a maid of honor to the queen. This was probably Philippa Roet, sister of John of Gaunt, the famous Duke of Lancaster.

#### b) Second Period

In 1370, Chaucer was sent abroad on the first of these diplomatic missions that were to occupy the greater part of the next fifteen years. Two years later, he made his first official visit to Italy, to arrange a commercial treaty with Genoa, and from this time is noticeable a rapid development in his literary powers and development in missions he filled various offices at home, chief of which was Comptroller of Customs at the port of London.



### c) Third Period

In 1386, Chaucer was elected as a Member of Parliament from Kent, marking a beginning of his best literary works. Though exceedingly busy in public affairs and as receiver of customs, his heart was still with his books, from which only nature could win him. In the fourteenth century politics seems to have been, for honest men, a very uncertain business. The last period of his life, though outwardly most troubled, was the most fruitful of all. Chaucer died in 1400 and was buried with honour in Westminster Abbey.

## 3.4 WORKS OF CHAUCER

For the chronological convenience, works of Chaucer can be roughly divided into three periods, corresponding to the three periods of his life. It should be remembered, however, that it is impossible to fix the exact dates for most of his works. Moreover, it is somewhat difficult to read Chaucer largely due to obsolete and archaic diction. But these difficulties are more apparent than real. On the other hand, any modern reworking of the poet's works runs the risk of losing the charm and dry humor of the original.

### a) First Period

The best known, though not the best, poem of the first period is the *Romaunt of the Rose*. It is a translation from the French, *Roman de la Rose* - a graceful but exceedingly tiresome allegory of the whole course of love. Chaucer translated this universal favourite, putting in some original English touches; but of the present *Romaunt*, only the first seventeen hundred lines are believed to be Chaucer's own work.

Perhaps the best poem of this period is the "De theof the Blanche the Duchesse", best known as the "Boke of the Duchesse", a poem of considerable dramatic and emotional power, written after the death of Blanche, the wife of Chaucer's patron, John of Gaunt. Additional poems are "Compleynt to Pite", a graceful love poem; the "AB C", a prayer to the virgin, translated from the French of a Christian Monk, and a number of what Chaucer calls "ballads, roundels, and virelays." The latter were imitations of the prevailing French love ditties.

### b) Second Period

The chief work of these second or Italian period (Italian writers, Dante, Petrarch

and Boccaccio being the major influences) is *Troilus and Criseyde*, a poem of eight thousand lines. The original story was a favorite of many authors during the Middle Ages, which Shakespeare makes use of in his *Troilus and Cressida*. The “House of Fame” (The House of Fame) is one of Chaucer’s unfinished poems, having the rare combination of lofty thought and simple, homely language showing the influence of the great Italian master. In the poem the author is carried away in a dream by a great eagle from the brittle temple of Venus, in a sandy wilderness, up to the hall of fame. To this house come all rumors of earth, as the sparks fly upward.

The third great poem of the period is the *Legend of Good Women*. As he is resting in the fields among the daisies, he falls asleep and a gay procession draws near. First comes the love God, leading by the hand *Alceste*, and a model of all wifely virtues, whose emblem is the daisy; and behind them follow a troupe of glorious women, all of whom have been faithful in love. They gather about the poet; and God upbraids him for having translated the *Romance of the Rose*, and for his early poems reflecting on the vanity and fickleness of women. Chaucer promises, and as soon as he awakes sets himself to the task. Nine legends were written of which “*Thisbe*” is perhaps the best. It appears in all probability that Chaucer intended to make this his masterpiece, devoting many years to the stories of famous women who were true to love. But either because he wearied of his theme, or the plan of the *Canterbury Tales* was growing in his mind, he abandoned the task in the middle of his ninth legend. Perhaps, this is the reason why his prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* holds greater sway in the mind of his readers than any of the legends.

#### c) Third Period

Chaucer’s masterpiece, the *Canterbury Tales*, one of the most famous and widely read works of literature, fills the third or English period of his life. The plan of the work is magnificent: to represent the wide sweep of English life by gathering a motley company together and letting each class of society tell its own favorite stories. Though the great work was never finished, Chaucer succeeded in his purposes so well that in the *Canterbury Tales* he has given us a picture of contemporary English life in all its facets be it work and play, its deeds and dreams, its fun and sympathy and hearty joy of living. Such a rich variety of social documentation is rarely found in literary works.

### 3.5 CONTEMPORARIES OF CHAUCER

#### i. WILLIAM LANGLAND

He was born probably near Malvern, in Worcestershire, the son of a poor freeman, and in his early life lived in the fields as a shepherd. Later he went to London with his wife and children, getting a hungry living as a clerk in the church. His real life meanwhile was that of a seer, a prophet after Isaiah's own heart, if we may judge by the prophecy which soon found a voice in *Piers Plowman*. In 1399, after the success of his great work, he was possibly writing another poem called *Richard the Redeless*, a protest against Richard II, but nothing can be said about the authorship of this poem with certainty, which was left unfinished by the assassination of the king. After 1399, Langland disappears utterly, and the date of death is unknown.

#### ii. JOHN WYCLIF

Wyclif, as a man, is by far the most powerful English figure of the fourteenth century. His great work, which earned him the title of "father of English prose", is the translation of the Bible. Wyclif himself translated the gospels, and much more of the New Testament; the rest was finished by his followers, especially by Nicholas of Hereford. Though Wyclif's works are now unread, except by occasional scholars, he still occupies a very high place in the English literature.

#### iii. JOHN MANDEVILLE

About the year 1365, there appeared in England an extraordinary book called the *Voyage and Travail of Sir John Maundeville*, written in excellent style in the Midland dialect, which was then becoming the literary language of England. The original work was probably in French, which was speedily translated into Latin, then into English and other languages; and wherever it appeared, it became extremely popular. Its marvelous stories of the western land is perfectly suited to the credulous spirit of the age. At the present times there are said to be more than three hundred copied manuscripts of "Mandeville" in various languages.

### 3.6 LET US SUM UP

The above chapter tried to look at Chaucer's life and his work. It makes an attempt to study Chaucer's work by broadly dividing it into three phases. In his early or French period, he translated "The Romance of the Rose" and wrote many minor poems; his middle or Italian period, of which the chief poems are "Troilus and Cressida"

and “The Legend of Good Women”; his late or English period, in which he worked at his masterpiece, the famous Canterbury Tales. The contemporaries of Chaucer viz. William Langland, John Wyclif, and John Mandeville are also discussed here.

### **3.7 GLOSSARY**

Feudal – pertaining to feudal system

Strata – social level

Estate – landed property

Hierarchy – system of persons or things arranged in a graded order  
Plague – an epidemic disease

Inflate – increase

Depress – deject

Diplomat – ambassador

Prosperous – flourishing, well-off

Commercial – relating to commerce

Expeditions – journey

Chivalry – courteous behaviour

Confidant – trust worthy, loyal

Obsolete – no longer in use  
Archaic – ancient, out of date  
Allegory –

a story which is symbolic  
Brittle –

likely to break

### **3.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

#### **3.8.1 SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS**

- a) Briefly discuss the Age of Chaucer.

Answer: The fourteenth century is remarkable historically for the

decline of feudalism, for the growth of the English national spirit during the wars with France, for the growth of the English national spirit during the wars with France, for the prominence of the House of Commons, and for the growing power of the working classes. The age produced remarkable writers, of whom Geoffrey Chaucer is one of the greatest of English writers.

b) What do you know about the life of Chaucer?

Answer: For our convenience the life of Chaucer is divided into three periods. The first, of thirty years, includes his youth and early manhood, in which time he was influenced almost exclusively by French literary models. The second period, of fifteen years, covers Chaucer's active life as diplomat and man of affairs; and in this the Italian influence seems stronger than the French. The third, of fifteen years, generally known as the English period, is the time of Chaucer's richest development.

c) Discuss the works of Chaucer.

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d) Write a note on the contemporaries of Chaucer.

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### 3.8.2 MULTIPLECHOICEQUESTIONS (MCQs)

- 1) In which century was Chaucer born? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) 12<sup>th</sup>
  - b) 13<sup>th</sup>
  - c) 14<sup>th</sup>
  - d) 15<sup>th</sup>
- 2) Chaucer's father and grandfather were both what? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) Bakers
  - b) Brewers
  - c) Butchers
  - d) Vintners
- 3) What name is now given to the language in which Chaucer worked? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) Early English
  - b) Middle English
  - c) New English
  - d) Old English
- 4) What is the title of the earliest of Chaucer's poems written sometime between 1369 and 1372? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) The Book of the Duchess
  - b) The Book of the Abbeſs
  - c) The Book of the Counteſs
  - d) The Book of the Governeſs
- 5) What is the title of Chaucer's beſt known work? \_\_\_\_
  - a) The Canterbury Tales
  - b) The Salisbury Tales
  - c) The Wincheſter Tales
  - d) The York Tales

### 3.9 ANSWER KEY (MCQs)

- 1) c                      2)d                      3)b  
4) a                      5)a

### 3.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- 1) Discuss in detail the Age of Chaucer.
- 2) Write a detailed note on the life and work of Chaucer.

### **3.11 SUGGESTED READING**

1. A Critical History of English Literature (Volume One)-David Daiches, 2012.
2. English Literature: Its History and its Significance for the life of the English Speaking World– William J. Long, 2013.
3. History of English Literature-Andrew Sanders, 2012.
4. A History of English Literature–Legouis and Cazamian, 2011.

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**LITERATURE OF THE REVIVAL**

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**STRUCTURE**

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Objectives & Outcome
- 4.3 The Revival of Learning
- 4.4 The Impact of Renaissance on Literature
- 4.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.6 Glossary
- 4.7 Self-Assessment Questions
  - 4.7.1 Short Answer Type Questions
  - 4.7.2 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 4.8 Answer Key
- 4.9 Long Answer Type Questions
- 4.10 Suggested Reading

**4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Dear Learner, Revival in simple terms means the state of being revived. In English Literature the term Revival of Learning holds a lot of significance as it refers to the enlightenment of the human mind after the darkness of the Middle Ages. The term Revival of Learning covers the whole movement, whose essence was, according to Lamartine, that “man discovered himself and the universe,” and, according to Taine, that man, so long blinded, “had suddenly opened his eyes and seen.”

**4.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME**

After reading this lesson, the learner will be able to:

- a) Explain the revival of Learning



- b) Explain Renaissance and Humanism
- c) appreciate the impact of Renaissance on literature viz. Prose, Poetry and Drama.

#### 4.3 THE REVIVAL OF LEARNING

The Revival of Learning denotes, in its broadest sense, the gradual enlightenment of the human mind after the darkness of the Middle Ages. The names Renaissance and Humanism are often applied to the same movement. The term Renaissance, though used by many writers "to denote the whole transition from the Middle Ages to the modern world" is more correctly applied to the revival of art resulting from the discovery and imitation of classic models in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Humanism applies to the revival of classic literature and was so called by its leaders because they held that the study of classics was the best means of promoting the largest human interests. The term Revival of Learning is used as an umbrella term to cover the whole movement.

Renaissance etymologically means "rebirth" and transformed European culture from the mid 14<sup>th</sup> century in Italy to the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century in England. Strongly influenced by the rediscovery of the classical, Greek and Latin literature, it was greatly accelerated by the development of printing. Broadly speaking, the Renaissance implies that re-awakening of learning which came to Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The Renaissance was not only English but a European phenomenon, and basically considered, it signalled a thorough substitution of the medieval habit of thought by new attitudes. The dawn of Renaissance came first to Italy and a little later to France. To England it came much later, roughly about the beginning of the sixteenth century. In Italy, the impact of Greek learning was felt after the Turkish conquest of Constantinople the Greek scholars fled and took refuge in Italy carrying with them a vast treasure of ancient Greek literature in manuscript. The study of this literature fired the soul and imagination of the Italy of that time and created a new kind of intellectual and aesthetic culture quite different from the Middle Ages.

Firstly, the Renaissance meant the death of the mediaeval scholasticism which had for long been keeping human thoughts in bondage. This school of thought got themselves entangled in useless controversies and tried to apply the principles of Aristotelian philosophy to the doctrines of Christianity, thus giving birth to vast literature. Secondly, it signalled a revolt against spiritual authority—the authority of the Pope. The

Reformation though not a part of the revival of learning, was yet a companion movement in England. This defiance, of spiritual authority went hand in hand with that of intellectual authority, Renaissance intellectuals distinguished themselves by their flagrant anti-authoritarianism.

Thirdly, the Renaissance implied a greater perception of beauty and polish in the Greek and Latin scholars. This beauty and this polish were sought by Renaissance men of letters to be incorporated in their native literature. Further, it meant the birth of a kind of imitative tendency implied in the term "classicism". Lastly, the Renaissance marked a change from the theocentric to the homocentric conception of the universe. Human values came to be recognized as permanent values, and they were sought to be enriched and illuminated by the heritage of antiquity. This marked the rise of humanism and also by implication, materialism.

#### **4.4 THE IMPACT OF RENAISSANCE ON LITERATURE**

##### **a) Prose**

The most important prose writers who exhibit the influence of the Renaissance on English prose are Erasmus, Sir Thomas More, John Lyly, and Philip Sidney. Erasmus was a Dutchman who came to Oxford to learn Greek. His chief work was *The Praise of Folly* which is the English translation of his most important work written in England. Erasmus wrote this work in 1510. Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* was the "true prologue to the Renaissance". It was the first book written by an Englishman which achieved European fame; but it was written in Latin (1516) and only later (1555) was translated into English. The word "utopia" is derived from the Greek word "outopos" meaning no place. More's *Utopia* is an imaginary island which is the habitat of ideal republic. By the picture of the ideal state is implied a kind of social criticism of contemporary island. More's indebtedness to Plato's *Republic* is quite obvious. However, More seems also to be indebted to the then recent discoveries of the explorers and navigators like Vasco da Gama - who were mostly of Spanish and Portuguese nationalities. In *Utopia*, More discredits medievalism in all its implications and exalts the ancient Greek culture.

Passing on to the prose writers of the Elizabethan age - the age of the flowering of the Renaissance - we find them markedly influenced both in their style and thought-content by the revival of antique classical learning. Sidney in *Arcadia*, Lyly in *Euphues*, and Hooker in *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* write the English which is away

from the language of common speech; and is either too heavily laden—as in case of Lyly and Sydney—with bits of classical finery, or modeled on Latin syntax. Further in his own career and his Essays, Bacon stands as a representative of the materialistic, Machiavellian facet of the Renaissance, particularly of the Renaissance Italy. He combines in himself the dispassionate pursuit of truth and the keen desire for material advance.

#### b) Poetry

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-42) and the Earl of Surrey (1517-47) were pioneers of the new poetry in England. After Chaucer the spirit of English poetry had slumbered for a century. The change in pronunciation in the fifteenth century had created a lot of confusion in prosody which in the practice of such important poets as Lydgate and Skelton had been reduced to a mockery. Wyatt had travelled extensively in Italy and France and had come under the spell of Italian Renaissance. It must be remembered that the work of Wyatt and Surrey does not reflect the impact of the Rome of antiquity alone, but also that of modern Italy. So far as the versification is concerned, Wyatt and Surrey imported into England various new Italian metrical patterns. Moreover, they gave poetry a new sense of grace, dignity, delicacy, and harmony, which was found by them lacking in the works of Chaucer and the Chaucerian's alike. Further, they were highly influenced by the love poetry of Petrarch and they did their best to imitate it. Petrarch's love poetry is of the country kind, in which the pining lover is shown as a "servant" of his mistress with his heart tempest-tossed by her neglect and his mood varying according to her absence or presence.

It goes to the credit of Wyatt and Surrey to have introduced the Sonnet into the English literary scene. Their poems appeared in Tottel's Miscellany in 1557. They in particular brought the sonnet and blank verse, which were later to be practiced by a vast number of the best English poets. Though in his sonnets, Wyatt did not employ regular iambic pentameters yet he created a sense of discipline among the poets of his times who had forgotten the lesson and example of Chaucer and, like Skelton, were writing "ragged" and "jagged" lines which jarred so unpleasantly upon the ear. Wyatt wrote in all thirty-two sonnets, out of which seventeen are adaptations of Petrarch. Most of them (twenty-eight) have the rhyme scheme of Petrarch's sonnets; that is, each

has the octave a b b a a b b a and twenty-six out of these twenty eight have the c d d c e e s e t e t. Only in the last three he comes near what is called the Shakespearean formula, that is, three quatrains and a couplet. In the thirteenth sonnet, he exactly produced it; this sonnet rhymes a b a b, a b a b, a b a b, c c. Surrey wrote about fifteen or sixteen sonnets out of which ten use the Shakespearean formula which was to enjoy the greatest popularity among the sonneteers of the sixteenth century. Surrey's work is characterized by exquisite grace and tenderness which we find missing from that of Wyatt. Moreover, he is a better craftsman and gives greater harmony to his poetry. Surrey employed blank verse in his translation of the fourth book of The Aeneid, the work which was first translated into English verse by Gavin Douglas a generation earlier in heroic couplets.

### c) Drama:

The revival of ancient classical learning scored its first clear impact on England drama in the middle of the sixteenth century. Previous to this impact there had been a pretty vigorous native tradition of drama, particularly comedy. This tradition had its origin in the liturgical drama and had progressed through the miracle and the mystery, and later the morality, to the interlude. John Heywood had written quite a few vigorous interludes, but they were altogether different in tone, spirit, and purpose from the Greek and Roman drama of antiquity. The first English regular tragedy Gorbuduc and comedy Ralph Roister Doister were very much imitations of the classical tragedy and comedy. Gorbuduc is a slavish imitation of Senecan tragedy and has all its features without much of its life. Like Senecan tragedy it has revenge as the tragic motive, has most of its important incidents, narrated on the stage by messengers, has much of rhetoric and verbose declamation, has a ghost among its dramatis personae, and so forth. It is indeed a good instance of the "blood and thunder" kind of tragedy.

Later on, the "University Wits" struck a note of independence in their dramatic works. They refused to copy Roman drama as slavishly as the writers of Gorbuduc and Roister Doister. In their imagination, they were all fired by the new literature which showed them new dimensions of human capability. In this respect, Marlowe stands in the fore-front of the University Wits. Rightly he has been called "the true child of the Renaissance".

#### **4.5 LETUSSUMUP**

In this lesson we have studied the Revival of Learning, what it was, and the significance of the terms Humanism and Renaissance. We have looked at the influence of Renaissance on different genres of literature viz. prose, drama and poetry. The important prose writers of the Renaissance and their works are Erasmus's Praise of Folly, More's Utopia, Sydney's Arcadia and Lyly's Eupheus. Sir Thomas Wyatt and Earl of Surrey introduced sonnet to the English poetry.

#### **4.6 GLOSSARY**

Revival—restoration

Enlightenment—philosophical movement stressing the importance of reason and logic

Renaissance—revival of intellectual or artistic achievement

Humanism—a system of thought that focuses on humans and their values, capacities and worth

Transition – shift

Imitation—copy, mimicry

Classics—a literary work of ancient Greece or Rome

Medieval – belonging to Middle ages

Aesthetic - attractive or appealing

Bondage—one who is bound as a slave

Controversy – dispute, argument

Anti—authoritarianism—opposition to authority

Incorporate – combined into one body

Theocentric—centring on God as the prime concern

Homocentric – centring on humans

Materialism—concern for possessions or material wealth

## 4.7 SELFASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

### 4.7.1 SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

Q.1 Explain the term “Renaissance”.

Answer: Renaissance etymologically means “rebirth” and transformed European culture from the mid 14<sup>th</sup> century in Italy to the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century in England. Strongly influenced by the rediscovery of the classical, Greek and Latin literature, it was greatly accelerated by the development of printing. Broadly speaking, the Renaissance implies that re-awakening of learning which came to Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The Renaissance was not only English but a European phenomenon, and basically considered, it signalled a thorough substitution of the medieval habits of thought by new attitudes. The dawn of Renaissance came first to Italy and a little later to France. To England it came much later, roughly about the beginning of the sixteenth century. In Italy, the impact of Greek learning was felt after the Turkish conquest of Constantinople; the Greek scholars fled and took refuge in Italy, carrying with them a vast treasure of ancient Greek literature in manuscript. The study of this literature fired the soul and imagination of the Italy of that time and created a new kind of intellectual and aesthetic culture quite different from the Middle Ages.

Q.2 What do you understand by Humanism?

Answer: The names Renaissance and Humanism are often applied to the same movement. The term Renaissance, though used by many writers “to denote the whole transition from the Middle Ages to the modern world” is more correctly applied to the revival of art resulting from the discovery and imitation of classic models in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Humanism applies to the revival of classic literature and was so called by its leaders because they held that the study of classics was the best means of promoting the largest human interests.

The term Revival of Learning is used as an umbrella term to cover the whole movement.

Q.3 Write a note on the important prose writers of the Renaissance.

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#### 4.7.2 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

- Q4. Wyatt and Surrey's sonnets appeared where? \_\_\_\_\_  
a) Tottel's Miscellany                      b) Eupheus  
c) Arcadia                                      d) The Aeneid
- Q5. Which is famous work by Thomas More? \_\_\_\_  
a) Eupheus                                      b) Arcadia  
c) Utopia                                        d) The Aeneid
- Q6. Praise of Folly is written by whom? \_\_\_\_\_  
a) Sydney                                        b) Lyly  
c) Surrey                                        d) Erasmus
- Q7. Which is the first English regular tragedy? \_\_\_\_\_  
a) Gorboduc                                      b) Ralph Roister Doister  
c) Doctor Faustus                              d) Hamlet
- Q8. Which is the first English comedy? \_\_\_\_\_

- a) Gorboduc
- b) Ralph Roister Doister
- c) As You Like It
- d) None of the Above

Q9. What does antique classical learning refer to? \_\_\_\_\_

- a) ancient Greek and Roman literature
- b) Anglo-Saxon literature
- c) Chaucer's work
- d) None of the above

#### **4.8 ANSWER KEY (MCQs)**

- A4.a
- A5.c
- A6.d
- A7.a
- A8.b
- A9.a

#### **4.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- 1) Discuss in detail the revival of learning.
- 2) Discuss the impact of Renaissance on English literature.
- 3) What is the contribution of Sir Thomas Wyatt and Earl of Surrey to English poetry?

#### **4.10 SUGGESTED READING**

1. A Critical History of English Literature (Volume One) - David Daiches, 2012.
2. English Literature: Its History and its Significance for the life of the English Speaking World – William J. Long, 2013.
3. History of English Literature - Andrew Sanders, 2012.



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**ORIGIN OF DRAMA**

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**STRUCTURE**

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Objectives & Outcome
- 5.3 Drama and the folk ritual
- 5.4 Drama with the Church
- 5.5 Mystery and Miracle Plays
- 5.6 Morality Plays
- 5.7 Interludes
- 5.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.9 Glossary
- 5.10 Self Assessment Questions
  - 5.10.1 Short Answer Type Questions
  - 5.10.2 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 5.11 Answer Key
- 5.12 Examination Oriented Questions
- 5.13 Suggested Reading

**5.1 INTRODUCTION**

Drama was introduced to Britain from Europe by the Romans. English drama's origin can be traced from church in the medieval period. The four periods of history of English drama are Emergence, English Renaissance, Interregnum and Victorian era, William Shakespeare is addressed as the father of English Drama.

**5.2 OBJECTIVES & OUTCOME**

After studying this lesson, the learner will be able to enumerate:

- a) Drama and the folk ritual
- b) Drama within the Church
- c) Miracle Plays
- d) Mystery plays or Mystery Cycles
- e) Morality Plays
- f) Interludes

### **5.3 DRAMA AND THE FOLK RITUAL**

Drama had its earliest beginnings in the community life of the village, the predominant form of settlement that took place in England in c.450, with the coming of the Anglo-Saxons. The villagers had to undertake the communal task of ploughing, sowing, harvesting and clearing the wasteland. This pattern of work and the survival of the community were determined by cycles of cultivation and change of seasons. And this in turn expressed itself in rituals that fed into mythologies. The rituals were performed as types of worship that both ensured the continuity of the cycles and acknowledged its significance. With the coming of Christianity in 597, these rituals were demythologized in accordance with Christian beliefs and at the same time their communal functions acquired new forms. The rituals retained a lot of their vigour through the Middle Ages developing itself into the folk play. What is interesting is that the Church always disapproved of the element of 'playing' in these folk customs. The church was intolerant of what they perceived as hidden dramatic elements in folk customs. This kind of censorship continued well into the Elizabethan period, with theatre being associated with the hellish art of feigning, license and misrule. The fact that it survived despite the continuous suppression speaks immensely for its vitality.

The native drama grew out of the activities of minstrels, strolling players, storytellers and entertainers who worked outside any formal tradition of theatre. They were part of processions, pageants and tournaments, using the village green and town square as the playing area or open acting space. Most of their performances were ritualistic in nature, using for instance, the fertility myth to celebrate the spirit of fecundity and regeneration. Later, with the domination of the Christian myth the pagan ritual lost its primary function. As community activities these rituals did not require texts, so that many folk plays survived as mimetic actions alone. It was only much later that they were reinscribed into

texts as rationalization for performances that may have taken place.

Recently, critics have challenged the theory that the history of drama marks an evolution from a primitive human activity that had to be polished and refined into the unique dramatic achievement of the Renaissance. Nothing could be further from truth, they insist. The religious drama of the medieval period had a distinct shape and content; it was also flourishing when the church and the authorities stopped it. As community drama, English folk plays were enacted by "amateurs" and performers like jugglers, acrobats, tumblers, rope-dancers and animal trainers. The ballad singers, storytellers and minstrels added to the imaginative quality of the performances with their songs and tales.

#### **5.4 DRAMA WITHIN THE CHURCH**

In Europe, the drama had a distinctly religious origin. There is little doubt that the church was at the centre of the medieval life. It catered to both the social and spiritual needs of people. But what is truly fascinating is the way that it harnessed drama for its own purpose. It found in the dramatic form an ideal vehicle for conveying its sermons. In fact, the rituals observed in the church had all the ingredients of drama. Notable among them was the Mass. It had colorful robes and vestment; a procession from the churchyard to the inner sanctuary led by the bishop and his attendants and often accompanied by the comic figure of the boy bishop. The central nave of the church had the pulpit and space for the choir, while the church could hold a compact congregation.

In many ways, the architecture of the building was like a natural theatre. It had choralsinging and on special occasions as Christmas and Easter, the atmosphere was heightened by the use of candlelight, incense and music. By the tenth century words were added to the singing to give additional meaning. The first characters were drawn from the New Testament, and the object of the first plays was to make the church service more impressive or to emphasize the moral lessons by showing the reward of the good and the punishment of the evil doer. During the later days of the Roman Empire, the Church found the stage possessed by frightful plays. The debased drama was driven from the stage and plays of every kind were forbidden. Later the Church itself provided a substitute for the forbidden plays in the famous Mysteries and Miracles.

#### **5.5 MYSTERY AND MIRACLE PLAYS**

In France, the name miracle was given to any play representing the lives of saints, while mystery represented scenes from the life of Christ or stories from the Old

Testament associated with the coming of Messiah. In England this distinction was almost unknown, then the name Miracle was used indiscriminately for all plays having their origin in the Bible or in the lives of the saints; and then the name Mystery, to distinguish a certain class of plays, was not used until long after the religious drama had passed away.

### Origin

As early as the fifth century living tableaux were introduced into sacred services. The plays originated as simple tropes, verbal embellishments of liturgical texts, and slowly became more elaborate. At an early period chants from the service of the day were added to the prose dialogue. As these liturgical dramas increased in popularity, vernacular forms emerged, as travelling companies of actors and theatrical productions organized by local communities became more common in the later Middle Ages. These primitive forms were later elaborated with dialogue and dramatic action. Eventually the dramas moved from church to the exterior - the churchyard and the public marketplace. These early performances were given in Latin, and were preceded by a vernacular prologue spoken by a herald who gave a synopsis of the events. The writers and directors of the earliest plays, were probably monks. Religious drama flourished from about the ninth century to the sixteenth.

Miracle plays, on the subject of miracles performed by saints, developed in the twelfth century in both England and on the continent. Typically, these plays focused on Virgin Mary and Saint Nicholas, both of whom had strong followings during the medieval period. Mary is often portrayed as helping those in need and danger - often at the last minute. Some of those she saved may have seemed unsavory sinners to a pious audience, but the point was that the saint saved all who truly wished to be saved.

In 1210, suspicious of the growing popularity of miracle plays, Pope Innocent III issued a papal edict forbidding clergy from acting on a public stage. This had the effect of transferring the organization of the drama to town guilds, after which several changes followed. Once outside the church, the drama flourished, and soon became independent, although its themes continued to be religious and its services which connected with religious festivals. Although they quickly became public entertainers removed from the church building, and were popular as Corpus Christi entertainers throughout the fifteenth century, few miracle plays survive in English because King Henry VIII banned

them in the middle of the sixteenth century, during his reformation of the church. The craft guilds, professional organizations of the workers involved in the same trade – carpenters, wool merchants, and so on – soon began competing with each other in producing plays which could be performed during the feast of Corpus Christi.

Most of their plays derived from the biblical stories and the life of Christ. Because the Bible is silent on many details of the life of Christ, some plays invented new material and illuminated dark areas, thereby satisfying the intense curiosity medieval Christians had about events the Bible omitted. Vernacular texts replaced Latin, and non-Biblical passages were added along with comic scenes. Acting and characterization became more elaborate. These vernacular religious performances were, in some of the larger cities in England such as York, performed and produced by guilds, with each guild taking responsibility for a particular piece of scriptural history.

The mystery play developed, in some places, into a series of plays dealing with all the major events in the Christian calendar, from the Creation to the Day of Judgment. They were divided into two classes: the first given at Christmas, included all plays connected with the birth of Christ; the second at Easter, included the plays related to his death and triumph. By the beginning of the fourteenth century all these plays were in various localities united in single cycles beginning with the Creation and ending with the Final Judgement. The complete cycle was presented every spring beginning on Corpus Christi day.

By the end of the 15th century, the practice of acting these plays in cycles on festival days was established in several parts of Europe. Sometimes, each play was performed on a decorated pageant cart that moved about the city to allow different crowds to watch each play as well as provided actors with a dressing room as well as a stage. The entire cycle could take up to twenty hours to perform and could be spread over a number of days. Taken as a whole, these are referred to as Corpus Christi cycles. These cycles were often performed during the Feast of Corpus Christi and their overall design drew attention to Christ's life and his redemption for all of mankind. The plays were performed by a combination of professionals and amateurs and were written in highly elaborate stanza forms; they were often marked by the extravagance of the sets and "special effects", but could also be stark and intimate. The variety of theatrical and poetic styles, even in a single cycle of plays, could be remarkable.

## Major Cycles of plays

There are four complete English biblical collections of plays; although these collections are sometimes referred to as “cycles,” it is now believed that this term may be attributed to these collections more for coherence than they in fact possess. Probably every important town in England had its own cycle of plays for its own guilds to perform, but nearly all have been lost. At the present day only four cycles exist and these are:

- 1) the Chester cycle - 25 plays
- 2) the York cycle - 48 plays
- 3) the Towneley or Wakefield cycle - 30 plays
- 4) the Coventry cycle - 42 plays

The Chester cycle has 25 plays, the Wakefield 30, the Coventry 42, and the York 48. The York plays are generally considered to be the best; but those of Wakefield show more humour and variety, and better worksmanship. The most famous plays of the Towneley collection are attributed to the Wakefield Master, an anonymous playwright who wrote in the fifteenth century. The Wakefield Master gets his name from the geographic location where he lived, the market-town of Wakefield in Yorkshire. He may have been a highly educated cleric there, or possibly a friar from a nearby monastery at Woodkirk, four miles north of Wakefield. It was once thought that this anonymous author wrote a series of 32 plays (each averaging about 384 lines) called the Towneley Cycle. The Master's contribution to this collection is still much debated, and some scholars believe he may have written fewer than ten of them.

The best known pageant in the Towneley manuscript is The Second Shepherds' Pageant, a burlesque of the Nativity featuring Mak the sheepstealer and his wife Gill, which more or less explicitly compares a stolen lamb to the Saviour of mankind. The Harrowing of Hell, derived from the apocryphal Acts of Pilate, was a popular part of the York and Wakefield cycles. The dramas of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods were developed out of mystery plays.

## 5.6 MORALITY PLAYS

Morality Plays were never a part of any cycle but developed independently as

moraltales in thefourteenth or earlyfifteenth centuryon the Continentandin England. TheydonotillustratemomentsintheBible,nordotheydescribethelifeofChristor thesaints.Instead,theydescribethelives ofpeoplefacing the temptations of the world. Theplaysarecarefultopresentawarningtotheunwarythattheirsoulsarealwaysin peril,thattheDevilisonconstantwatch,andthatpeople must behaveproperlyifthey aretobesaved.TheMoralitygenerallyendedinthetriumphofthevirtue,the devil leapinginto hell-mouthwithViceon itsback.

Onefeatureofthemoralityplaysistheirrelianceonthetechniqueofallegory, afavoritemedievaldevice.Allegoryisthe techniqueofgivingabstract ideasorvalues aphysicalrepresentation. Inmoralityplays, abstractions suchasgoodness became characters in the drama. The use of allegory permitted the medieval dramatists to personifyabstractvaluessuchasSloth,Greed,Vanity,Strength,andHopebymaking them characters and putting them on stage inaction.

The dramatistsspecifiedsymbols,clothing,andgesturesappropriatetothese abstractfigures,thushelpingtheaudiencerecognizetheideas,thecharactersrepresented. Theuseofallegorywasanextremelydurabletechniquethatwasalreadyestablishedin medievalpaintings,printedbooksandbooksofemblem,inwhich,forexample,sloth wouldbeshownasamanreclininglazilyonabedorgreedwouldberepresentedas overwhelminglyfatandvanityasafigurecompletelyabsorbedinamirror.Usingallegory torepresentabstractqualitiesallowedthedidacticplaywrightstodrawclear-cutlines ofmoralforce:Satanwasalwaysbad;angelswerealwaysgood.Theallegorieswere clear, direct, and apparent to all who witnessed theplays.

Thecentralobjectiveinthemoralityplaywasthesalvationofhumanbeings, representedbyanindividual'sstruggletoavoidsinanddamnationandachievesalvation intheotherworld.AsinEveryman,(c.1495),alatemedievalplaythat isbest known ofthemoralityplays,thesubjectswereusuallyabstractbattlesbetweenspecificvices andcertainvirtuesforthe possessionofhumansoul. Inmanywaysthemoralityplay wasadramatizedsermondesignedtoteachamorallesson.Markedbyhighseriousness, itwasneverthelessentertainingandgavefreescopetotheimaginationfornewplotsand incidents.

## **5.7 INTERLUDES**

The Interludes signify the important transition from symbolism to realism. It appeared towards the end of the fifteenth century but it could not displace the morality which continued enjoying popularity, as we have pointed out above, till the end of sixteenth century. It dispensed with the allegorical figures of the morality play almost completely and affected a complete break with the religious type of drama, even though retaining some of its didactic character. It was purely secular and fairly realistic, though quite crude and somewhat grotesque.

## **5.8 LET US SUM UP**

The above lesson tried to look at the origin of drama from the folk rituals and its origin within the Church. It makes an attempt to study in detail the Mystery and Miracle plays, Moralities and the Interludes.

## **5.9 GLOSSARY**

Mythologies – collection of myths

Rituals – the body of ceremonies or rites

Minstrel – a medieval entertainer

Pageant – any magnificent or showy display

Fecundity – fertility

Regeneration – rebirth

Pagan – heathen

Mimetic – imitative

Pulpit – an elevated platform in Church

Congregation – an act of assembling

Messiah – here, Jesus Christ

Embellishment – decoration



Vernacular– native

Easter–aChristianfeastcommemoratingthe RessurrectionofJesus

Didactic– morallyinstructive

Salvation– redemption

Symbolism– a systemof symbols or representations

Realism–aninclinationtowardliteraltruthandpragmatism

Grotesque– ludicrous,ugly,bizarre

## **5.10 SELFASSESSMENTQUESTIONS**

### **5.10.1 SHORTANSWERTYPEQUESTIONS**

Q.1 WheredoestheDramaoriginatedinEngland?

Answer:InEurope,thedrama had adistinctlyreligiousorigin. Thereislittledoubtthatthechurchwas atthecentreofthemedievallife. Itcateredtoboththesocialandspiritualneedsofpeople.Butwhat is trulyfascinatingisthewaythatit harnessed dramafor itsownpurpose. Itfoundinthe dramatic formanidealvehicle forconveying its sermons. Infact,theritualsobervedinthechurchhadalltheingredientsofdrama. NotableamongstthemwastheMass.It hadcolorfulrobesandvestment; a procession from the churchyard to the inner sanctuary led by the bishopandhisattendantsandoftenaccompaniedbythecomicrofigureof theboybishop.Thecentralnaveofthechurchhadthepulpitand space forthechoir,whilethechurchcould hold acompact congregation.

Q.2 NametheimportantMysteryCycles.

Answer:Therearefourcomplete Englishbiblical collections of plays;althoughthesecollectionsare sometimes referredto as“cycles,” it is nowbelievedthatthis term may attribute to these collections more coherencethantheyinfactpossess.Probablyeveryimportanttownin Englandhaditsowncycleofplaysforitsownguildstoperform,butnearly allhavebeenlost.Atthepresentdayonlyfourcyclesexistandtheseare:

- 1) theChestercycle -25plays
- 2) theYorkcycle-48plays
- 2) theTowneleyorWakefieldcycle-30plays
- 3) theCoventrycycle-42plays

The Chester cycle has25 plays, the Wakefield30, the Coventry42, and the York48.TheYorkplaysaregenerallyconsideredtobethebest;butthoseofWakefield showmore humourand variety,andbetterworksmanship.

Q.3 WhatisaMiracleplay?

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Q4. ExplainwhatisaMysteryplay?

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#### **5.10.2 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)**

1. Which of these is a Morality play? \_\_\_\_\_  
 a) Everyman                      b) Ralph Roister Doister  
 c) Spanish tragedy              d) Utopia
2. Which technique is primarily used by a dramatist in a Morality play? \_\_\_\_\_  
 a) Allegory                      b) Satire  
 c) Farce                      d) None of the above
3. How many plays are attributed to the Chester cycle?  
 a) 42                      b) 30  
 c) 25                      d) 48
4. The York cycle developed in which town? \_\_\_\_\_  
 a) Yorkshire                      b) Towneley  
 c) Coventry                      d) Chester
5. What do the Mystery plays represent? \_\_\_\_\_  
 a) the life of Christ              b) revenge tragedies  
 c) rural life                      d) None of the above

#### **5.11 ANSWER KEY (MCQs)**

- |      |      |      |
|------|------|------|
| 1) a | 2) a | 3) c |
| 4) a | 5) a |      |

#### **5.12 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- 1) Discuss in detail the origin of drama in England.
- 2) Write a detailed note on Mystery and Miracle plays.

#### **5.13 SUGGESTED READING**

1. A Critical History of English Literature (Volume One) - David Daiches, 2012.

2. English Literature: Its History and its Significance for the life of the English Speaking World – William J. Long, 2013.
3. History of English Literature - Andrew Sanders, 2012.

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UNIT-II	COURSE NO. EL-101
LESSON NO. 6	Title: Old & Middle English Literature

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## UNIVERSITY WITS

### STRUCTURE

- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Objectives & Outcome
- 6.3 Theatre in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century England
- 6.4 University Wits
- 6.5 University Wits: Their Contribution to Drama
- 6.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.7 Glossary
- 6.8 Self Assessment Questions
  - 6.8.1 Short Answer Type Questions
  - 6.8.2 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 6.9 Answer Key
- 6.10 Examination Oriented Questions
- 6.11 Suggested Reading
- 6.12 Model Test Paper

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The term “University Wits” was coined by literary historian George Saintsbury in the 19th century to refer to a group of writers who were educated at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and who played an influential role in the development of English drama.

The University Wits were among the first English playwrights to write in the style of the classical authors of Greece and Rome and were instrumental in the growth of the theatre industry in London, which became a major cultural and economic force during the Elizabethan era.

The University Wits created some of the most memorable and iconic characters in English drama in Marlowe's plays. And also exhibited a significant influence on the writers who came after them, including William Shakespeare.

## **6.2 OBJECTIVES & OUTCOME**

After studying the lesson, the learner will be able to explain:

- a) Theatre in the 16th century England
- b) The University Wits and their contribution to drama.

## **6.3 THEATRE IN THE 16<sup>th</sup> CENTURY ENGLAND**

The transition in theatres from the medieval to the Renaissance is more readily apparent in England than in Italy or France. As the rediscovered classics gradually found their way to England, English plays did begin to reflect their influence. Religious and political controversies and religious strife between Catholic and Protestant following the separation of England from the Catholic Church by Henry VIII in 1534, were the forces shaping the mid 16th century English drama. However, when Elizabeth came to throne in 1588 she wanted no religious dissent and outlawed drama of a religious nature.

At the start of Elizabeth's reign noblemen might maintain a group of actors; otherwise actors were very much considered vagabonds. In 1559, Elizabeth decreed a license which was also required to perform plays. Thus acting became a profession, the English theatre directly under the control of the government, and the licensed acting companies still in the patronage of wealthy nobles. This essentially made acting more secure, with daily performances stimulating the building of permanent theatres and the assembling of larger companies.

## **6.4 UNIVERSITY WITS**

By the last decade of the 16th century acting had achieved a satisfactory level of financial and social stability. Actors were paid a yearly fee by the court plus other expenses. Most troupes self-governed themselves by sharing risk and profit. Some members of troupes owned theatre buildings, and whereas 'householders', and hired 'hirelings' on salary. Troupes were all male, men or young playing women's roles, and members might specialize in particular types of roles.

Such large repertories needed a supply of new plays. Some of these new plays

came from 'The University Wits', an informal, well-educated group of Scholars cum-men of letters. All of them were actively associated with the theatre and the plays written by them mark a pronounced stage of development over the drama which existed before them. There seems to have been some rivalry between this group and the newcomers Shakespeare and Jonson, who did not have University education. 'The University Wits' included-

1. John Lily
2. Robert Greene
3. George Peele
4. Thomas Lodge
5. Thomas Nashe
6. Thomas Kyd
7. Christopher Marlowe

They were termed as "The University Wits" because they had training at one or other of the two Universities – Oxford and Cambridge. Apart from academic training, they had numerous characteristics in common. They were members of learned societies and rather liberal in their views concerning God and Morality.

## **6.5 UNIVERSITY WITS: THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO DRAMA**

### **1) Christopher Marlowe (1564-93)**

Marlowe, from the Cambridge University is today the most critically acclaimed of all 'The University Wits'. His focus was on the protagonist, using episodic stories to illuminate complex motivations. Marlowe's contribution to English tragedy is very vital and manifold. He himself seems to be aware of having scored an advance over the previous drama. His plays are:

1. Tamburlaine, the Great;
2. Doctor Faustus
3. The Jew of Malta
4. Edward, the Second, and

5. PartsoftheMassacreatParisandDidoQueenofCarthage.Firstofall,

Marloweexaltedand variedthesubject-matteroftragedy.Forthe Senecan motive ofrevenge he substitutedthe more interesting theme ofambition- ambitionforpowerasinTamburlaine,ambitionforinfiniteknowledgeas inDoctor Faustus, andambitionfor goldas inTheJewofMalta. Secondly,heput forwarda newkindofthetragichero.The medievalconceptoftragedywasthe fallofagreat man.MarlowerevivedtheAristotelianconceptionofthetragic hero inso farashe introducedacertainflaworflawsinhischaracter,mainlyanover-weaningambition.

Marlowe'sestablishmentofblankverseisaneffectiveandpliant mediumof tragicutterance. Hisblank verseisimmenselysuperior to the blank verseofGorboduc, thefirsttragedywhichemployedthismeasure.Hefounditwoodenandmechanical,and substitutedtheend-stoppedlinesofGorboducwithrunonlinesformingverseparagraphs. WithMarlowe, indeed beginsa newera inthe historyofEnglishDrama.

2) ThomasKyd

HisonlyplayTheSpanishTragedyismodeled onSeneca'srevengetragedies which before Kyd had been initiated by some scholars. Of course there are murdersandbloodshed,suicidesandhorrifyingincidentslikethebitingoffthe man'stonguebyhimself,theghostandmanyothersSenecanfeatures,yetThe SpanishTragedybreaksawayfromtheSenecantraditiononmanypoints. For example,thereismuchoftheactiononthestageitself.Moreover,though,after Seneca,ithasforitsleitmotifrevenge(Heironimo'srevengeforthemurderof his son), yet there is externalaction.

Kyd'scontributiontoEnglishtragedyistwofold.First,hegaveanewkindof tragichero whowasneitheraroyalpersonagenorasuperman,butanordinary person.Secondly,heintroducedtheelementofintrospectioninthehero.Along withtheexternalconflictintheplay,thereaderisconsciousofakindofintrospective self-analysis withinHeironimohimself.Inthis respect Kyd was pavingthe way for Shakespeare's Hamlet.

(3) ThomasNashe(1588-1625)

(4) ThomasLodge(1567-1601)



Their dramatic work is inconsiderable. Lodge how was, according to Gosson, "little better than a vagrant, looser than liberty, lighter than vanity itself." He has left only one play, *The Wounds of Civil War*. Both Nashe and Lodge are much more important for their fiction than dramatic art.

(5) George Peele (1558-97)

The plays of Peele extant today are:

- (i) *The Arrangement of Paris* (a pastoral play)
- (ii) *The Battle of Alcazar* (a romantic tragedy)
- (iii) *The Famous Chronicle of King Edward, the first* (a chronicle history)
- (iv) *The Love of King David and Fair Bathsheba* (a kind of mystery play, for it has a biblical theme)
- (v) *The Old Wives Tale* (a romantic satire on the current dramatic taste)

The list shows Peele's versatility as a dramatist. However, his plays are not marked by any technical brilliance. What is of interest to us is his excellence as a poet.

(6) Robert Greene (1558-92)

Greene wrote some five plays in all;

- (i) *The Comical History of Alphonsus King of Aragon*
- (ii) *A Looking Glass for London and England*
- (iii) *The Honorable History of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*.
- (iv) *The History of Orlando Furioso*
- (v) *The Scottish History of James, the Fourth*

Out of the most important and interesting are *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*. Greene contributed substantially towards the establishment of romantic comedy.

(7) John Lyly

Lyly is better known for his prose romance *Euphues* than his dramatic productions. It must be remembered that he himself was a courtier and wrote for the discerning

courtiers. He had no intention to charm the eyes and ears of the masses or to win their acclamation. His plays are rather of the nature of masques which were very popular with the queen and the court. He gave comedy a touch of sophistication and intellectual tone lacking in the native comedy which was predominantly of the nature of rough-and-tumble farce. Lily wrote eight plays in all out of which *Compaspe*, *Endimion*, and *Gallathea* are the best known.

In his plays, Lyly used a mixture of verse and prose. This mixing of the two is suggestive of his mixing of the world of reality and the world of romance. Lyly found as suitable blank verse for comedy as Marlowe did for tragedy. Whereas Marlowe's blank verse is characterized by consuming intensity and mouthfilling bombast, Lyly's is by its lightness of touch suitable for comedy.

## 6.6 LET US SUM UP

The above lesson tried to explore the theatre in the 16th century England. It also makes an attempt to study the University Wits viz. Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Kyd, Thomas Nashe, Thomas Lodge, Robert Greene, George Peele, John Lyly and their contribution to the 16th century English literature.

## 6.7 GLOSSARY

Apparent – readily visible

Strife – conflict

Dissent – difference of opinion

Outlawed – habitual criminal

Vital – important

Manifold – many

Revenge – vindictiveness

Ambition – strong desire to achieve something

Effective – productive

Pliant – flexible  
Introspective

–self-examining Vagrant – a

wanderer

Vanity–excessive pride

Extant – extinct

Versatility– capable of doing many things

Discerning–showing good judgement and understanding

## **6.8 SELFASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

### **6.8.1 SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS**

Q.1 Briefly discuss Theatre in the 16th Century England.

Answer: The transition in theatres from the medieval to the Renaissance is more readily apparent in England than in Italy or France. As the rediscovered classics gradually found their way to England, English plays did begin to reflect their influence. When Elizabeth came to throne in 1588 she wanted no religious dissention and outlawed drama of a religious nature. At the start of Elizabeth's reign noblemen might maintain a group of actors; otherwise actors were very much considered vagabonds. In 1559, Elizabeth decreed a license which was also required to perform plays. Thus acting became a profession, the English theatre directly under the control of the government, and the licensed acting companies still in the patronage of wealthy nobles. This essentially made acting more secure, with daily performances stimulating the building of permanent theatres and the assembling of larger companies.

Q.2 Briefly discuss the University Wits.

Answer: University Wits were actively associated with the theatre and the plays written by them mark a pronounced stage of development over the drama which existed before them. There seem to have been some rivalry between this group and the newcomers Shakespeare and Jonson, who did not have University education. "The University Wits" included:

- |                        |                  |
|------------------------|------------------|
| 1. John Lily           | 2. Robert Greene |
| 3. George Peele        | 4. Thomas Lodge  |
| 5. Thomas Nashe        | 6. Thomas Kyd    |
| 7. Christopher Marlowe |                  |
- They were termed as “The University Wits” because they had training at one or other of the two Universities – Oxford and Cambridge. Apart from academic training, they had numerous characteristics in common.

Q3. Discuss briefly Thomas Kyd's contribution to English Tragedy.

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### 6.8.2 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

- 1) The Jew of Malta is written by whom? \_\_\_\_\_  
 a) Christopher Marlowe                      b) Thomas Kyd  
 c) George Peele                                d) Robert Greene
- 2) Which of these is a famous play by Christopher Marlowe? \_\_\_\_\_  
 a) The Spanish Tragedy                      b) Doctor Faustus  
 c) The Arrangement of Paris                d) The Battle of Alcazar
- 3) The Spanish Tragedy is written by whom? \_\_\_\_\_  
 a) Christopher Marlowe                      b) Thomas Kyd  
 c) George Peele                                d) Robert Greene
- 4) The famous prose romance Eupheus is written by whom? \_\_\_\_\_

- a) John Lyly
- b) Thomas Nashe
- c) Thomas Lodge
- d) George Peele

- 5) Which of these plays is written by Robert Greene? \_\_\_\_\_
- a) The History of Orlando Furioso
  - b) The Spanish Tragedy
  - c) Doctor Faustus
  - d) The Battle of Alcazar

#### **6.9 ANSWERKEY (MCQs)**

- 1. Christopher Marlowe
- 2. Doctor Faustus
- 3. Thomas Kyd
- 4. John Lyly
- 5. The History of Orlando Furioso.

#### **6.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

Q) Discuss in detail the Contribution of University Wits to the English Drama?

#### **6.11 SUGGESTED READING**

- 1. A Critical History of English Literature (Volume One) - David Daiches, 2012.
- 2. English Literature: Its History and its Significance for the life of the English Speaking World – William J. Long, 2013
- 3. History of English Literature - Andrew Sanders, 2012.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE AGE OF CHAUCER

**STRUCTURE**

- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Objectives & Outcome
- 7.3 Age of Chaucer
- 7.4 Geoffrey Chaucer
  - (i) His Life
  - (ii) His Works
- 7.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.6 Self Assessment Questions
  - 7.6.1 Short Answer Type questions
  - 7.6.2 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 7.7 Answer Key
- 7.8 Examination Oriented Questions
- 7.9 Suggested Reading

**7.1 INTRODUCTION**

Dear Learner, in this lesson you will read in detail about the the Age of Chaucer which moves from the historical context of 'The world Chaucer knew', through the beginnings of English poetry, historical changes in the poet's reputation (including the Pre-Raphaelite medieval revival) to recent developments in Chaucer criticism.

The "Age of Chaucer," also known as the "Middle English Period," refers to the 14th century in English literature, primarily dominated by the works of Geoffrey Chaucer. This period marks a transition from Old English to Modern English and is considered a foundational era in the development of the English language and its literary traditions.

**7.2 OBJECTIVES & OUTCOME**

After studying this lesson, the learner will be able to discuss:

- a) the age of Chaucer
- b) Chaucer's life
- c) Chaucer's works

### 7.3 AGE OF CHAUCER

The social structure of England (and all Europe) in the fourteenth century was feudal, that is to say power radiated from the king, through his nobles, and through their subjects, with little kingly power reaching the lower echelons of society. The king and his nobles owned the land, which was divided into great agricultural estates, and these provided the men, material, and money which supported the crown and its wars. Society was organized in a hierarchical form, one's wealth and power being a matter of what position one occupied on the hierarchical ladder. This ladder extended from the king, through the great noblemen-landlords (like Chaucer's patron, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster), down through lesser landlords and their various executive officers with, at the bottom, the serfs who worked the land for their masters. It is perhaps important to note that while we may regard this system as unjust and oppressive, the medieval people would conceive of no other. Each level of society had its rights and privileges, and each had its duties and obligations. Despite the occasional abuse they regarded the system as right and proper.

Three groups of Chaucer's pilgrims may be isolated to suggest how this system worked. The first represent agricultural feudalism (the first and basic kind) founded on land ownership and service. The Knight, who is highest on the scale, is a landowner, and has therefore served in the wars for his king, and he will be followed in this by his son, the Squire. The Knight's Yeoman is a servant, whose only duty is to the Knight. The Franklin also holds land, perhaps "in fee" from some noble, but more probably in his own right. His service is the direction of his farm, his obligation to the noble or king being doubtless in the form of the yearly harvest, and men in time of need. The Miller does not himself own land but has been given the right to mill all grain on a seigniorial estate; the Reeve manages an estate. They are both servants, but of an exalted kind, and make shrewd and profitable use of their power, as we shall see. The lowest in the hierarchy is the Plowman, who simply tills the land.

England was changing in the fourteenth century, and one of the most important changes was the growth of a new, urban society (mainly in London) where the feudal

structure was somewhat modified. Neither the Doctor nor the Sergeant of the Law owned the land, although they were both men of substance. The Doctor (Chaucer tells us) made money out of the plague, and the Lawyer made money out of almost everything. They were the beginning of a new class, today called professional men. The Manciple and the Merchant even the Wife of Bath (who is a clothmaker) also represent the urbanization process. They were not directly commanded by anyone, and in time they became the mercantile middle class who overthrew the monarchy and the last vestiges of feudalism in the civil war of the seventeenth century. It is also significant that the Haberdasher, the Carpenter, the Weaver, and the Dyer are represented together, in that they are all members of one of the great parish guilds. It was through these craft and parish guild associations that the new urban artisans achieved the power that they lacked through not belonging to the land-hierarchy.

There is yet a third group, constituting a kind of feudal system of its own, and representing one of the most powerful elements of medieval society—the church. Nine of Chaucer's thirty pilgrims belong to the clergy, and it would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the Roman Catholic Church to the lives of the people of Eastern Europe in the fourteenth century. They might disregard its teaching (as some of the pilgrims do) or complain of its abuses (as Chaucer does) but from baptism, through confirmation and marriage, to the funeral rites, it was intimately connected with their lives. It was a visibly potent force throughout England, from the great cathedrals—such as Canterbury—and the religious houses, down to the humble parish churches.

Despite the worldly aspects of life that so often appear in *The Canterbury Tales* we should not forget that the people Chaucer gathers together are pilgrims, and that occasion for their gathering is the spring pilgrim age to the shrine of “the holy blissful martyr,” St. Thomas Becket, at Canterbury. We can gauge the importance of the church in men's lives by noting how many varieties of belief or simulated belief Chaucer presents. They run all the way from the dedicated holiness of the Parson, through the superficial observances of the Prioress, to the outright hypocrisy of the Summoner and Pardoner. Chaucer, looking about him, sees fit to define a large proportion of his characters by where they stand with regard to the church.

It is sometimes suggested that the medieval world was a happier, simpler, and less troubled time than our own. In some ways this is true—certainly Chaucer's pilgrims are



free from many of our modern anxieties - yet the fourteenth century had its own troubles, and it is an oversimplification to regard it as a time of innocent good humour. In fact it is the overall good humour of Chaucer's treatment that has fostered this view, and while he is basically optimistic, he would be unlikely to accept it.

The plague, or Black Death (to which Chaucer occasionally alludes) entered England in mid-century with dreadful consequences. It is said that half the population was wiped out, and while this may be an exaggeration, it is not an exaggeration to say that medieval man lived with constant fear of its ravages. One of the effects of the plague was to inflate the prices and further depress the already grim living conditions of those at the bottom of the economic ladder. This in turn produced the insurrection known as the Peasants' Revolt (1381), in which the infuriated mob murdered a good many of those whom they regarded as their exploiters. Chaucer - as a justice of the peace and a member of parliament - might be expected to be bitter about this unprecedented attack on the social order. It may be a measure of his magnanimity that only a few years after the rebellion his portrait of the Plowman in the Prologue for its praise of the peasant virtues.

The Hundred Years War continued, with the French threatening to invade England; this is one of the reasons for the war-like nature of Chaucer's Shipman, whose merchant ship was obliged to be a fighting vessel, and it also accounts for the Merchant's anxiety about trade if the shipping route between Middleburg in the Netherlands and Orwell in England is broken. The church itself was divided at the time, one faction having a pope at Rome and the other at Avignon, with some of Europe (including England) supporting the first and some (including Scotland) the second. The confusion resulting from this situation was probably in part the cause of the clerical abuses that produced so much complaint (some of it in the Canterbury Tales) during the period.

If we set these disruptions alongside the achievements of art and literature, the security of a stable society, and the calm that comes from faith (the qualities usually presented as typical of the Middle Ages), we shall probably be somewhere near the truth. At any rate it was a time of transition and great variety: an appropriate time for the creation of a work as carried and multicoloured as *The Canterbury Tales*.

## **7.4 GEOFFREY CHAUCER**

Geoffrey Chaucer has often been called the father of the English poetry. Chaucer, one of the greatest English writers, made his living as a civil servant and composed

poetry as a vocation. His career, however, was such as to contribute to his literary growth. He was born about 1343 of a prosperous family and reared in London. For our convenience the life of Chaucer can be divided into three periods. The first, of thirty years, includes his youth and early manhood, in which time he was influenced almost exclusively by the French literary models. The second period, of fifteen years, covers Chaucer's active life as a diplomat and man of affairs; and in this the Italian influence seems stronger than the French. The third, of fifteen years, generally known as the English period, is the time of Chaucer's richest development. He lives at home, observes life closely but kindly, while the French influence is still strong, as shown in the *Canterbury Tales*, he seems to grow more independent of foreign models and is dominated chiefly by the vigorous life of his own English people.

#### (i) **His Life**

For our convenience the life of Chaucer is divided into three periods. The first, of thirty years, includes his youth and early manhood, in which time he was influenced almost exclusively by French literary models. The second period, of fifteen years, covers Chaucer's active life as diplomat and man of affairs; and in this the Italian influence seems stronger than the French. The third, of fifteen years, generally known as the English period, is the time of Chaucer's richest development. He lives at home, observes life closely but kindly, and while the French influence is still strong, as shown in the *Canterbury Tales*, he seems to grow more independent of foreign models and is dominated chiefly by the vigorous life of his own English people.

##### a) **First Period**

Chaucer was born about in 1343 of a prosperous family and reared in London. His father, a wine-merchant, was able to find him a position as a page boy in the household of King Edward III's daughter-in-law, Elizabeth of Ulster, and from this period on, Chaucer enjoyed the uninterrupted favors of the members of the court of successively, Edward, Richard II, and Henry IV, both as a man of affairs and as a poet. He served as a soldier in France, in the campaigns of the Hundred Year of War in 1359-1360 and was sent abroad on the least seven occasions between 1368 and 1387, either to France or Italy, on diplomatic missions. He was married to Philippa Roet of Flanders, who was lady-in-waiting to Queen Philippa and later to John of Gaunt's second wife Constance.

Chaucer's boyhood was spent in London, on Thames Street, which was the hub for commercial activities. Of his education, we know nothing, except that he was a great reader. At nineteen he was sent by the king on one of the many expeditions and saw chivalry and all pageantry of the medieval war at the height of their outward splendor. Taken prisoner at the unsuccessful siege of Rheims, he is said to have been ransomed by money out of the royal purse. A few years after returning to England, he became a squire of the royal household, the personal attendant and confidant of the king. It was during his first period that he married a maid of honor to the queen. This was probably Philippa Roet, sister of John of Gaunt, the famous Duke of Lancaster.

#### b) Second Period

In 1370, Chaucer was sent abroad on the first of these diplomatic missions that were to occupy the greater part of the next fifteen years. Two years later, he made his first official visit to Italy, to arrange a commercial treaty with Genoa, and from this time is noticeable a rapid development in his literary powers and development missions he filled various offices at home, chief of which was Comptroller of Customs at the port of London.

#### c) Third Period

In 1386, Chaucer was elected as a Member of Parliament from Kent, marking a beginning of his best literary works. Though exceedingly busy in public affairs and as receiver of customs, his heart was still with his books, from which only nature could win him. In the fourteenth century politics seems to have been, for honest men, a very uncertain business. The last period of his life, though outwardly most troubled, was the most fruitful of all. Chaucer died in 1400 and was buried with honour in Westminster Abbey.

#### (ii) His Works

The works of Chaucer are roughly divided into three periods, corresponding to the three periods of his life. It should be remembered, however, that it is impossible to fix exact dates for most of his works. Some of his Canterbury Tales were written earlier than the English period, and were only grouped with the others in his final arrangement. The maturation of Chaucer's genius can be illustrated by four works. In *The Book of the Duchess* the poet dreams that he shares the grief of a lonely young knight, who

proved to be John of Gaunt mourning his newly lost first wife. The conception is original and the expression of sympathy is gracefully tender, but the framework of the dream-vision and the knight's description of his love are strongly influenced by French models.

The best known, though not the best, poem of the first period is the *Romaunt of the Rose*, a translation from the French *Roman de la Rose*, the most popular poem of the Middle Ages, - a graceful but exceedingly tiresome allegory of the whole course of love. The *Rose* growing in its mystic garden is typical of the lady Beauty. Gathering the *Rose* represents the lover's attempt to win his lady's favour; and the different feelings aroused - Love, Hate, Envy, Jealousy, Idleness, Sweet Looks - are the allegorical personsof the poet's drama. Chaucer translated this universal favourite, putting in some original English touches; but of the present *Romaunt* only the first seventeen hundred lines are believed to be Chaucer's own work.

Perhaps the best poem of this period is the "Death of Blanche the Duchesse," better known as the "Boke of the Duchesse," a poem of considerable dramatic and emotional power, written after the death of Blanche, wife of Chaucer's patron, John of Gaunt. Additional poems are the "Compleynt to Pite," a graceful love poem; the "ABC," a prayer to the Virgin, translated from the French of a Cistercian monk, its verses beginning with the successive letters of the alphabet; and a number of what Chaucer calls "ballads, roundels, and virelays," with which, says his friend Gower, "the land was filled." The latter were imitations of the prevailing French love ditties.

The chief work of the second or Italian period is *Troilus and Criseyde*, a poem of eight thousand lines. The original story was a favourite of many authors during the Middle Ages, and Shakespeare makes use of it in his *Troilus and Cressida*. The immediate source of Chaucer's poem is Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, "the love-smitten one"; but he uses his material very freely, to reflect the ideals of his own age and society, and so gives to the whole story a dramatic force and beauty which it had never known before.

The "House of Fame" is one of Chaucer's unfinished poems, having the rare combination of lofty thought and simple, homely language, showing the influence of the great Italian master. In the poem the author is carried away in a dream by a great eagle from the brittle temple of Venus, in a sandy wilderness, up to the hall of fame. The self-confident and domineering eagle was suggested by Chaucer by his reading Dante's *Paradiso* but here plays a novel comic role in a work which tends to parody the

artificiality of medieval courtly love conventions. To this house come all rumor and so fear, as the sparks fly upward. The house stands on a rock of ice. Many of these have disappeared as the ice melted; but the old names are clear as when first written. For many of his ideas Chaucer is indebted to Dante, Ovid, and Virgil; but the unusual conception and the splendid workmanship are all his own.'

The third great poem of the period is the *Legende of Goode Wimmen*. As he is resting in the fields among the daisies, he falls asleep and a gay procession draws near. First comes the love God, leading by the hand Alceste, model of all wifely virtues, whose emblem is the daisy; and behind them follow a troop of glorious women, all of whom have been faithful in love. They gather about the poet; the God upbraids him for having translated the *Romance of the Rose*, and for his early poems reflecting on the vanity and fickleness of women. Alceste intercedes for him, and offers pardon if he will atone for his errors by writing a "glorious legend of good women." Chaucer promises, and as soon as he awakes sets himself to the task. Nine legends were written, of which "Thisbe" is perhaps the best. It is probable that Chaucer intended to make this his masterpiece, devoting many years to stories of famous women who were true to love; but either because he wearied of his theme, or because the plan of the *Canterbury Tales* was growing in his mind, he abandoned the task in the middle of his ninth legend, - fortunately, perhaps, for the reader will find the Prologue more interesting than any of the legends.

Chaucer's masterpiece, the *Canterbury Tales*, one of the most famous works in all literature, fills the third or English period of his life. The plan of the work is magnificent: to represent the wide sweep of English life by gathering a motley company together and letting each class of society tell its own favourite stories. Though the great work was never finished, Chaucer succeeded in his purposes so well that in the *Canterbury Tales* he has given us a picture of contemporary English life, its work and play, its deeds and dreams, its fun and sympathy and hearty joy of living, such as no other single work of literature has ever equalled.

#### CHAUCER'S POETRY: ITS FORM

There are three principal meters to be found in Chaucer's verse. In the *Canterbury Tales*, he uses lines of ten syllables and five accents each, and the lines run in couplets:

His eyes twinkled in the heedaright  
As doon the sterres in the frostynight

This same musical measure, arranged in seven-line stanzas, but with a different rime, called the Rime Royal, is found in its most perfect form in *Troilus*.

Oblis full light, of which the beemesclere Adorneth al the  
thridde hevenefaire!

The third meter is the eight-syllable line with four accents, the lines riming in couplets, as in the “Boke of the Duchesse”:

Thereto she coudes owel pleye Whan that hir liste,  
that I darsye

Besides these principal meters, Chaucer in his short poems, used many other poetical forms modeled after the French. Chief among them are the difficult but exquisite rondel, “Now welcom Somer with thy sonnes ofte”, which closes the “Parliament of Fowls”, and the ballad “Flee fro the prees”. Chaucer’s poetry is extremely musical and must be judged by the ear rather than by the eye. To the modern reader the lines appear broken and uneven; but if one reads them over a few times, he soon catches the perfect swing of the measure, and finds that he is in the hands of a master whose ear is delicately sensitive to the smallest accent. He is the first to show the poetic possibilities of language. He discovered the music in English speech and had a remarkable influence in fixing the Midland dialect as the literary language of England.

## **7.5 LET US SUM UP**

This topic covers briefly the socio-political structure of Medieval England during the age of Chaucer and the professional changes that followed along with the representation of the social hierarchies as depicted through the pilgrims. Chaucer’s life has been discussed in detail and his literary works have been divided into three periods on the basis of their publication or the year in which they were written in.

## **7.6 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

### **7.6.1 SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS**

Q1. Describe the social structure in England during the fourteenth century.

Answer: The social structure of England (and all Europe) in the fourteenth century was feudal, that is to say power radiated from the king, through his nobles, and through their subjects, with little kingly power reaching the lower echelons of society. The king and his nobles owned the land, which was divided into great agricultural estates, and these provided them with men, material, and money which supported the crown and its wars. Society was organized in a hierarchical form, one's wealth and power being a matter of what position one occupied on the hierarchical ladder. This ladder extended from the king, through the great noblemen-landlords (like Chaucer's patron, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster), down through lesser landlords and their various executive officers with, at the bottom, the serfs who worked the land for their masters. It is perhaps important to note that while we may regard this system as unjust and oppressive, the medieval people would conceive of no other. Each level of society had its rights and privileges, and each had its duties and obligations.

#### Q2. Describe the consequences of the Black Death.

Answer: The plague, or Black Death (to which Chaucer occasionally alludes) entered England in mid-century with dreadful consequences. It is said that half the population was wiped out, and while this may be an exaggeration, it is not an exaggeration to say that medieval man lived with constant fear of its ravages. One of the effects of the plague was to inflate the prices and further depress the already grim living conditions of those at the bottom of the economic ladder. This in turn produced the insurrection known as the Peasants' Revolt (1381), in which the infuriated mob murdered a good many of those whom they regarded as their exploiters. Chaucer-as a justice of the peace and a member of parliament-might be expected to be bitter about this unprecedented attack on the social order. It may be a measure of his magnanimity that only a few years after the rebellion his portrait of the Plowman in the Prologue for its praise of the peasant virtues.

#### Q3. How did Chaucer contribute in the Hundred Years' War?

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Q4. Why is Chaucer known as the father of English poetry?

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Q5. Briefly discuss three important works of Chaucer.

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### 7.6.2 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

- 1) In which century was Chaucer born? \_\_\_\_\_
- a) 12<sup>th</sup>                      b) 13<sup>th</sup>
- c) 14<sup>th</sup>                      d) 15<sup>th</sup>
- 2) Chaucer's father and grandfather were both what? \_\_\_\_\_
- a) Bakers                      b) Brewers
- c) Butchers                      d) Vintners
- 3) What name is now given to the language in which Chaucer worked? \_\_\_\_\_



- a) EarlyEnglish      b) MiddleEnglish
  - c)NewEnglish      d) OldEnglish
- 4) WhatisthetitleoftheearliestofChaucer'spoemswrittensometimebetween 1369 and1372?\_\_\_\_\_
- a) TheBookoftheDuchess
  - b) TheBookoftheAbbess
  - c) TheBookoftheCountess
  - d) TheBookoftheGoverness
- 5) WhatisthetitleofChaucer'sbestknownwork?\_\_\_\_\_
- a) TheCanterburyTales
  - b) TheSalisburyTales
  - c) TheWinchesterTales
  - d) TheYorkTales

### **7.7 ANSWERKEY (MCQs)**

- 1) c
- 2) d
- 3) b
- 4) a
- 5) a

### **7.8 EXAMINATIONORIENTEDQUESTIONS**

1. DiscussindetailtheageofChaucer.
2. Writea detailednoteontheLifeand worksofGeoffreyChaucer.

### **7.9 SUGGESTED READING**

1. ACriticalHistoryofEnglishLiterature(VolumeOne)-DavidDaiches, 2012
2. EnglishLiterature:ItsHistoryand itsSignificance for the life ofthe

EnglishSpeakingWorld– WilliamJ.Long, 2013

3. ChaucerandHisWorld–F.E.Halliday
4. TheCanterburyTales:ASelectionofCriticalEssays –Editedby  
J.J.Anderson
5. ACriticalHistoryofEnglishPoetry–GreieronandSmith

## INTRODUCTION TO THE CANTERBURY TALES

**STRUCTURE**

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Objectives &amp; Outcome

8.3 Canterbury Tales: An Overview

8.4 The Prologue

8.5 Pilgrims in The Prologue

8.6 Let Us Sum Up

8.7 Self Assessment Questions

8.7.1 Short Answer Type Questions

8.7.2 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)

8.8 Answer Key

8.9 Examination Oriented Questions

8.10 Suggested Reading

**8.1 INTRODUCTION**

The narrator opens the General Prologue with a description of the return of spring. He describes the April rains, the burgeoning flowers and leaves, and the chirping birds. Around this time of year, the narrator says, people begin to feel the desire to go on a pilgrimage. Many devout English pilgrims set off to visit shrines in distant holy lands, but more pilgrims choose to travel to Canterbury to visit the relics of Saint Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral, where they thank the martyr for having helped them when they were in need.

The narrator further tells us that as he prepared to go on such a pilgrimage, staying at a tavern in Southwark called the Tabard Inn, a great company of

twenty-nine travelers entered. The travelers were a diverse group who, like the narrator, were on their way to Canterbury. They happily agreed to let him join them. That night the group spent at the Tabard, and woke up early the next morning to set off on their journey. Before continuing the tale, the narrator declares his intent to list and describe each of the members of the group.

## **8.2 OBJECTIVES & OUTCOME**

After studying this lesson, the learner will be able to:

- a) gain an insight into the Prologue and its background.
- b) get acquainted with the pilgrims in the Prologue

## **8.3 THE CANTERBURY TALES: AN OVERVIEW**

Chaucer's master-piece, The Canterbury Tales is one of the most famous works in all literature. The scheme of the work is magnificent: to represent the wide sweep of English life by gathering a motley company together and letting each class of society tell its own favourite stories. Though the great work was never finished, Chaucer succeeded in his purpose so well that in the Canterbury Tales he has given us a picture of the contemporary English life, its work and play, its deeds and dreams, its fun and sympathy and hearty joy of living, such as no other single work of literature has ever equalled.

In The Canterbury Tales, a masterpiece even greater than Troilus though uncompleted, a richly assorted group of pilgrims entertain themselves by telling stories on the way from London to Canterbury. Through his descriptions in the General Prologue and dramatizations in the links connecting the tales he portrays in detail seven members, of the feudal order, thirteen people associated with religious life and fourteen townspeople—the chivalrous Knight, the aristocratic Prioress, the fraudulent Pardoner, the impoverished Canon's Yeoman, the amorous Wife of Bath, the reticent civil servant who is Chaucer himself, and the rest who have gained an independent identity as real as that of Falstaff, Tom Jones, or Becky Sharp. And the tales which Chaucer has supplied match the tellers in their rich variety—the Knight's courtly romance, the Miller's racy fabliau, the second Nun's pious saint's life, the Nun's Priest's smock-heroic fable, the Pardoner's hypocritical sermon, and the Parson's sincere one.

## 8.4 THE PROLOGUE

The narrator opens the General Prologue with a description of the return of spring. He describes the April rains, the burgeoning flowers and leaves, and the chirping birds. Around this time of year, the narrator says, people begin to feel the desire to go on a pilgrimage. Many devout English pilgrims set off to visit shrines in distant holy lands, but even more choose to travel to Canterbury to visit the relics of Saint Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral, where they thank the martyr for having helped them when they were in need. The narrator tells us that he prepared to go on such a pilgrimage, staying at a tavern in Southwark called the Tabard Inn, a great company of twenty-nine travellers entered. The travellers were a diverse group who, like the narrator, were on their way to Canterbury. They happily agreed to let him join them. Before continuing the tale, the narrator declares his intent to list and describe each of the members of the group.

A pilgrimage is a religious journey undertaken for penance and grace. As pilgrimages went, Canterbury was not a very difficult destination for an English person to reach. It was, therefore, very popular in the fourteenth-century England, as the narrator mentions. Pilgrims travelled to visit the remains of Saint Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, who was murdered in 1170 by knights of King Henry II. Soon after his death, he became the most popular saint in England. The pilgrimage in *The Canterbury Tales* should not be thought of as an entirely solemn occasion, because it also offered the pilgrims an opportunity to abandon work and take a vacation.

The poet makes us acquainted with the various characters of his drama. Until Chaucer's day popular literature had been busy chiefly with the gods and heroes of a golden age; it had been essentially romantic, and so had never attempted to study men and women as they are, or to describe them so that the reader recognizes them, not as ideal heroes, but as his own neighbours. Chaucer not only attempted this new realistic task, but accomplished it so well that his characters were instantly recognized as true to life, and they have since become the permanent possession of our literature. Chaucer is the first English writer to bring the atmosphere of romantic interest about men and women and the daily work of one's own world, - which is the aim of nearly all modern literature.

Then the narrator ends the introductory portion of his prologue by noticing that he has “tyme and space” to tell his narrative. His comments underscore the fact that he is writing sometimes after the events of his story, and that he is describing the characters from memory. He has spoken and met with these people, but he has waited a certain length of time before sitting down and describing them. His intention to describe each pilgrim as he or she seemed to him is also important, for it emphasizes that his descriptions are not only subject to his memory but are also shaped by his individual perceptions and opinions regarding each of the characters. He positions himself as a mediator between two groups: the group of pilgrims, of which he was a member, and us, the audience, whom the narrator explicitly addresses as “you” in lines 34 and 38.

He spends considerable time characterizing the group members according to their social positions. The pilgrims represent a diverse cross section of fourteenth-century English society. Medieval social theory divided society into three broad classes, called “estates”: the military, the clergy, and the laity. (Thenobility, not represented in the General Prologue, traditionally derives its title and privileges from military duties and service, so it is considered part of the military estate). In the portraits that we will see in the rest of the General Prologue, the Knight and the Squire represent the military estate. The clergy is represented by the Prioress (and her nun and three priests), the Monk, the Friar, and the Parson. The other characters, from the wealthy Franklin to the poor Plowman, are the members of the laity. These lay characters can be further subdivided into landowners (the Franklin), professionals (the Clerk, the Man of Law, the Guildsmen, the Physician, and the Shipman), labourers (the Cook and the Plowman), stewards (the Millers, the Manciple, and the Reeve), and church officers (the Summoner and the Pardoner). As we will see, Chaucer’s descriptions of the various characters and their social roles reveal the influence of the medieval genre of the estates satire. Chaucer is a model for all those who would put out human life into writing.

## 8.5 PILGRIMS IN THE PROLOGUE

The Narrator-Then the narrator makes it quite clear that he is also a character in his book. Although he is called Chaucer, we should be wary of accepting his words and opinions as Chaucer’s own. In the General Prologue, the narrator presents himself as a gregarious and naïve character. Later on, the Host accuses him of being silent and sullen. Because the narrator writes down his impressions of the pilgrims from memory,

whom he does and does not like, and what he chooses and chooses not to remember about the characters, tells us as much about the narrator's own prejudices as it does about the characters themselves.

**The Knight**-The first pilgrim Chaucer describes in the General Prologue, and the teller of the first tale. The Knight represents the ideal of a medieval Christian man-at-arms. He has participated in no less than fifteen of the great crusades of his era. Brave, experienced, and prudent, the narrator greatly admires him.

**The Wife of Bath**-Bath is an English town on the Avon River, not the name of this woman's husband. Though she is seamstress by occupation, she seems to be a professional wife. She has been married five times and had many other affairs in her youth, making her well practiced in the art of love. She presents herself as someone who loves marriage and sex, but, from what we see of her, she also takes pleasure in rich attire, talking, and arguing. She is deaf in one ear and has a gap between her front teeth, which was considered attractive in Chaucer's time. She has travelled on pilgrimages to Jerusalem three times and elsewhere in Europe as well.

**The Pardoner**-Pardoners granted papal indulgences- reprieves from penance in exchange for charitable donations to the Church. Many pardoners, including this one, collected profits for themselves. In fact, Chaucer's Pardoner excels in fraud, carrying a bag full of fake relics- for example, he claims to have the veil of the Virgin Mary. The Pardoner has long, greasy, yellow hair and is beardless. These characteristics were associated with shiftiness and gender ambiguity in Chaucer's time. The Pardoner also has a gift for singing and preaching whenever he finds himself inside a church.

**The Miller**-Stout and brawny, the Miller has a wart on his nose and a big mouth, both literally and figuratively. He threatens the Host's notion of propriety when he drunkenly insists on telling the second tale. Indeed, the Miller seems to enjoy overturning all conventions: he ruins the Host's carefully planned storytelling order; he rips doors off hinges; and he tells a tale that is somewhat blasphemous, ridiculing religious clerks, scholarly clerks, carpenters, and women.

**The Prioress**- Described as modest and quiet, this Prioress (a nun who is head of her convent) aspires to have exquisite taste. Her table manners are dainty, she knows French (though not the French of the court), she dresses well, and she is charitable and compassionate.

The Monk- Most monks of the Middle Ages lived in monasteries according to the Rule of Saint Benedict, which demanded that they devote their lives to "work and prayer." This Monk cares little for the Rule; his devotion is to hunting and eating. He is large, loud, and well-clad in hunting boots and furs.

The Friar- Roaming priests with no ties to a monastery, friars were a great object of criticism in Chaucer's time. Always ready to befriend young women or rich men whom might need his services, the friar actively administers the sacraments in his town, especially those of marriage and confession. However, Chaucer's worldly Friar has taken to accepting bribes.

The Summoner- The Summoner brings persons accused of violating Church law to ecclesiastical court. This Summoner is a lecherous man whose face is scarred by leprosy. He gets drunk frequently, is irritable, and is not particularly qualified for his position. He spouts the few words of Latin he knows in an attempt to sound educated.

The Host- The leader of the group, the Host is large, loud, and merry, although he possesses a quick temper. He mediates among the pilgrims and facilitates the flow of the tales. His title of "host" may be a pun, suggesting both an innkeeper and the Eucharist, or Holy Host.

The Parson- The only devout churchman in the company, the Parson lives in poverty, but is rich in holy thoughts and deeds. The pastor of a sizable town, he preaches the Gospel and makes sure to practice what he preaches. He is everything that the Monk, the Friar, and the Pardoner are not.

The Squire- The Knight's son and apprentice. The Squire is curly-haired, youthfully handsome, and loves dancing and courting.

The Clerk- The Clerk is a poor student of philosophy. Having spent his money on books and learning rather than on fine clothes, he is threadbare and wan. He speaks little, but when he does, his words are wise and full of moral virtue.

The Man of Law- A successful lawyer commissioned by the king. He upholds justice in matters large and small and knows every statute of England's law by heart.

The Manciple- A manciple was in charge of getting provisions for a college or court. Despite his lack of education, the Manciple is smarter than the thirty lawyers he



feeds.

The Merchant- The Merchant trades in furs and other cloths, mostly from Flanders. He is part of a powerful and wealthy class in Chaucer's society.

The Shipman- Brown-skinned from years of sailing, the Shipman has seen every bay and river in England, and exotic ports in Spain and Carthage as well. He is a bit of a rascal, known for stealing wine while the ship's captain sleeps.

The Physician- The Physician is one of the best in his profession, for he knows the cause of every malady and can cure most of them. Though the Physician keeps himself in perfect physical health, the narrator calls into question the Physician's spiritual health: he rarely consults the Bible and has an unhealthy love of financial gain.

The Reeve- A reeve was similar to a steward of a manor, and this reeve performs his job shrewdly- his lord never loses so much as a ram to the other employees, and the vassals under his command are kept in line. However, he steals from his master.

The Plowman- The Plowman is the Parson's brother and is equally good-hearted. A member of the peasant class, he pays his tithes to the Church and leads a good Christian life.

The Guildsmen- Listed together, the five Guildsmen appear as a unit. English guilds were a contribution of labour unions and social fraternities: craftsmen of similar occupations joined together to increase their bargaining power and live communally. All five Guildsmen are clad in the livery of their brotherhood.

The Cook- The Cook works for the Guildsmen. Chaucer gives little detail about him, although he mentions a crusty sore on the Cooks' leg.

The Yeoman- The servant who accompanies the Knight and the Squire. The narrator mentions that his dress and weapons suggest he may be a forester.

The Second Nun- The Second Nun is not described in the General Prologues, but she tells a saint's life for her tale.

The Nun's Priest- Like the Second Nun, the Nun's Priest is not described in the General Prologue. His story of Chanticleer, however, is well crafted and suggests that he is a witty, self-effacing preacher.

## 8. 6 LETUSSUMUP

The Canterbury Tales is one of Chaucer's most magnificent and important literary works produced during the fourteenth century. It occupies an important position in English literature as it throws light on the contemporary English conditions. As explained in The Prologue, the pilgrimage begins during the spring season and the special purpose for the pilgrimage. The writer acquaints us with the various pilgrims in the story and explains how each character plays an important symbolic significance.

## 8.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

### 8.7.1 SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

Q1. What is the significance of the Canterbury Tales?

Answer: Chaucer's master-piece, The Canterbury Tales is one of the most famous works in all literature. The scheme of the work is magnificent: to represent the wide sweep of English life by gathering a motley company together and letting each class of society tell its own favourite stories. Though the great work was never finished, Chaucer succeeded in his purposes so well that in the Canterbury Tales he has given us a picture of the contemporary English life, its work and play, its deeds and dreams, its fun and sympathy and hearty joy of living, such as no other single work of literature has ever equalled.

Q2. Where are pilgrims going on a pilgrimage?

Answer: Many devout English pilgrims set off to visit shrines in distant holy lands, but even more choose to travel to Canterbury to visit the relic of Saint Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral, where they thank the martyr for having helped them when they were in need. The narrator tells us that he prepared to go on such a pilgrimage, staying at a tavern in Southward called the Tabard Inn, a great company of twenty-nine travellers entered. The travellers were a diverse group who, like the narrator, were on their way to Canterbury. They happily agreed to let him join them. Before continuing the tale, the narrator declares his intent to list and describe each of the members of the group.

Q3. What is the purpose of the pilgrimage to the Canterbury?

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Q4. Which characters in the Prologue represent the clergy?

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Q5. Briefly discuss any five pilgrims from the prologue.

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### 8.7.2 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

- 1) What is the title of Chaucer's best-known work? \_\_\_\_\_
- a) The Canterbury Tales                      b) The Salesbury  
c) The Winchester                              d) The York
- 2) In the Canterbury Tales, what is the name of the inn where the pilgrims meet before their journey? \_\_\_\_\_
- a) The Tabard                                      b) The Tablot  
c) The Trevoli                                      d) The Tolbooth
- 3) In the Canterbury Tales, a group of pilgrims travel from Southwark to the shrine

of which Saint? \_\_\_\_\_

- |                         |                   |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| a) Saint Thomas Beckett | b) Saint Louis    |
| c) Saint Martin         | d) Saint Cardinal |

4) The Wife of Bath belongs to which place? \_\_\_\_\_

- |               |             |
|---------------|-------------|
| a) Canterbury | b) Flanders |
| c) Italy      | d) Bath     |

5) Who is the knight's son? \_\_\_\_\_

- |                 |               |
|-----------------|---------------|
| a) The pardoner | b) the Squire |
| c) The merchant | d) the Reeve  |

### 8.8 ANSWERKEY (MCQs)

- 1) a
- 2) a
- 3) a
- 4) d
- 5) b

### 8.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- 1. Write an essay on Chaucer's art of characterisation in the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales.
- 2. Discuss how Chaucer's group of pilgrims constitute a picture of the society of his times.

### 8.10 SUGGESTED READING

- 1. A Critical History of English Literature (Volume One) - David Daiches, 2012
- 2. English Literature: Its History and its Significance for the life of the English Speaking World – William J. Long, 2013..
- 3. Chaucer and His World – F.E. Halliday

4. The Canterbury Tales: A Selection of Critical Essays—Edited by J.J. Anderson
5. A Critical History of English Poetry—Greerson and Smith

## WIFE OF BATH AND THE MONK

**STRUCTURE**

9.1 Introduction

9.2 Objectives &amp; Outcome

9.3 Character sketch of the Wife of Bath

9.4 Character sketch of the Monk

9.5 Let Us Sum Up

9.6 Glossary

9.7 Self Assessment Questions

9.7.1 Short Answer Type Questions

9.7.2 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)

9.8 Answer Key

9.9 Suggested Reading

**9.1 INTRODUCTION**

In *The Canterbury Tales*, written by Geoffrey Chaucer and published after his death in the 1400s, the Wife of Bath is a seamstress and professional wife who has been married five times. She is a strong woman who has found that she can use her body to control her husband, whom she likens to slaves.

The Wife of Bath represents feminism and the belief that women should be given power and control. She also represents the idea that women do not need to conform to the norms of the time.

Besides, Chaucer portrays *the Monk* as a man who enjoys the pleasures of life, even though he is supposed to live a simple and religious life. Unlike the traditional view of monks, who are expected to live in monasteries and follow strict religious rules, this Monk does not believe in following such restrictions. He prefers to live freely and comfortably, which makes him stand out among the religious figures in the pilgrimage.

## 9.2 OBJECTIVES & OUTCOME

After studying this lesson, the learner will be able to appreciate:

- a) the character of Wife of Bath in the Prologue
- b) the character of the Monk in the Prologue

## 9.3 CHARACTER SKETCH OF THE WIFE OF BATH

The Wife of Bath is one of Chaucer's most famous characters. He makes her a vivid presence here in the Prologue, and enlarges the portrait later in The Canterbury Tales in her own prologue to her wontale. Bath is an English town on the Avon River, not the name of this woman's husband. Though she is a seamstress by occupation, she seems to be a professional wife. She has been married five times and had many other affairs in her youth, making her well practiced in the art of love. She presents herself as someone who loves marriage and sex, but, from what we see of her, she also takes pleasure in rich attire, talking, and arguing. She is deaf in one ear and has a gap between her front teeth, which was considered attractive in Chaucer's time. She has travelled on pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times and elsewhere in Europe as well.

The Wife's great talent is for cloth-making, and we get Chaucer's tongue-in-cheek touch again when he asserts her superiority over the cloth-makers "of Ypres and of Gaunt," an opinion that we suspect came straight from the Wife herself. There follows an illuminating little touch concerning her character. Now a woman in the parish, Chaucer says, ought to precede the Wife to the "offryng" in church. And if any did "certeyn sowrooth" was she/That she was out alle charitee. "We can well imagine it, and so the tone is set for the development of this boisterous, egotistical, but fundamentally very likeable character later in the Tales.

Two points are made about the Wife: her amorous nature and her habit of going on pilgrimages. But the striking thing about the line is the number of mates the Wife has had. In part the reason is economic—the Wife is a woman of property and the possessor of a commercially valuable skill. The Middle Ages were more romantic in their literature than in life, and just as a dowryless woman found it difficult to get married, so one with money found it easy. But the main reasons for the many marriages is simply that the Wife enjoyed the company of men. Here we are told that she is "somdel deef," but later in the Tales we discover that this is because her fifth husband once became so infuriated with her that he beat her about the head and impaired her hearing.

There is no real inconsistency in a woman of the Wife's worldly nature going on a series of pilgrimages to holy shrines. By the fourteenth century the pilgrimage had become for some as social excursion as well as a religious act, a fact reflected in some of Chaucer's other less-than-devout pilgrims. Some of the contemporary writers complain of married women going on pilgrimages, and it may well have been a device for escaping the restrictions imposed by a husband. Jerusalem was, of course, the principal destination for pilgrimages, and it may well have been a device for escaping the restrictions imposed by a husband. The Wife has been there three times, where she would have been shown the white stone on which the True Cross stood, and near which the first crusaders were buried. She has also been to Rome, where the major pilgrim attractions were St. Peter's (a visit there procuring many years of pardon), and St. Paul's Cathedral, where the stone on which St. Paul was beheaded was said to cure the sick and maimed who touched it.

One of the two female storytellers (the other is the Prioress), the Wife has a lot of experience under her belt. She has travelled all over the world on pilgrimages, so Canterbury is a jaunt compared to other perilous journeys she has endured. Not only has she seen many lands, she has lived with five husbands. The Wife of Bath says that her first three husbands were "good" because they were rich and old. She could order them around, use sex to get what she wanted, and trick them into believing lies. The Wife of Bath says comparatively little about her fourth husband. She loved him, but he was a reveler who had a mistress. She had fun singing and dancing with him, but tried her best to make him jealous. She fell in love with her fifth husband, Jankyn, while she was still married to her fourth. The Wife of Bath's fifth husband, Jankyn, was a twenty-year-old former student, with whom the Wife was madly in love. His stories of wicked wives frustrated her so much that one night she ripped a page out of his book, only to receive a deafening smack on her ear in return.

She is worldly in both sense of the word she has seen the world and has experience in the ways of the world, that is, in love and sex. Rich and tasteful, the Wife's clothes veer a bit toward extravagance: her face is wreathed in heavy cloth, her stockings are a fine scarlet colour, and the leather on her shoes is soft, fresh, and brand new - all of which demonstrate how wealthy she has become. Scarlet was a particularly costly dye, since it was made from individual red beetles found only in some parts of the world. The fact that she hails from Bath, a major English cloth-making town in the



Middle Ages, is reflected both in her talent as a seamstress and her stylish garments. Bath at this time was fighting for a place among the great European exporters of cloth, which were mostly in the Netherlands and Belgium. So the fact that the Wife's sewing surpasses that of the cloth makers of "Ypres and of Gaunt" (Ypres and Ghent) speaks well of Bath's (and England's) attempt to outdo its overseas competitors.

Although she is argumentative and enjoys talking, the Wife is intelligent in a common sense, rather than intellectual, way. Though her experiences with her husbands, she has learned how to provide herself in a world where women had little independence or power. The chief manner in which she has gained control over her husbands has been in her control over their use of her body. The Wife uses her body as a bargaining tool, withholding sexual pleasure until her husbands give her what she demands.

#### **9.4 CHARACTER SKETCH OF THE MONK**

In Chaucer's representation of the Monk there is an element of irony and satire. The Monk is satirically portrayed. He contemptuously ignores the vows he has taken to uphold the monastic discipline laid down by St. Maur and St. Benedict. His greatest pleasure is in hunting the hare, which was thought to be wicked, especially for the clergyman. He neither labours with his hands nor pores over a book in the cloister. The Monk does not fast or deny himself costly garments. Instead he loves a fat swan the best of any roast. Thus, Chaucer's Monk is a lively representative of his class. Moreover, Chaucer gives the portrait of Monk individuality. The Monk has large, prominent eyes and a glistening ruddy face; he is bald and stout. He is pompous and his actions display resentment against the world.

Chaucer's Monk was an outrider who loved hunting. Hunting was, indeed, this monk's favourite pastime, and he did not hide his irritation with those who objected to it. Thus, after outlining in detail the Monk's extremely irreligious activities, Chaucer tells us that "Now certainly he was a fair prelate." Two fundamental rules for the conduct of the monks in the Middle Ages were the obligation to work and to remain within their cloister. St. Benedict's Rule (mentioned as applying to the Monk's order at 173) is clear about this: "Idleness is an enemy of the soul. Because of this brethren ought to be occupied in manual labour... The monastery ought to be so constructed as to contain within it all necessities... so that there be no occasion for monks to wander abroad since this is no wise expedient for their souls".

Chaucer's readers would of course know of this rule, and they would probably also be familiar with St. Augustine's insistence on physical labour: "the blessed Apostle Paul willed the servants of the God to work corporal works which should have as their end a great spiritual reward, for this purpose that they should need food and clothing of no man, but with their own hands procure these for themselves..." Chaucer notes the special exasperation that the Monk reserves for Augustine's admonition to labour. Why should we "swynken with his hands and labour / As Austen bit?... Lat Austen have his swynk to him reserved."

The worldliness and fine living of the Monk are greatly emphasised. His face shone as if he had been anointed. He was fat and in very good shape, like his horse. Thus, Chaucer goes on to indicate the lavish nature of the rest of the Monk's costume. His sleeves were lined with gray fur of the finest quality. He wore supple boots. In order to fasten his hood under his chin, he had an intricate pin of wrought gold. In Chaucer's words "the pin of gold yroght" which fastened his hood, the soft unwrinkled ("couple") boots, and the well-cared-for horse ("in great estate"). He had a large number of valuable horses in his stable. When he rode, the jingling of the bridle of his horse could be heard at a distance. The passage concludes with one of the chief, and most expensive delicacies of the days: roast swan.

## 9.5 LET US SUM UP

This lesson dealt with the characters of the Wife of Bath and the Monk. Chaucer has done a very realistic portrayal of these characters.

## 9.6 GLOSSARY

Difficult words from General prologue

Shoures - showers

Soot - sweet

Droghte - drought

Swich - such

Licour - liquor

Faour - flower

Holt- grove  
Eeke -too  
Sonne - sun  
Ronne - run  
Corages-hearts  
Thane - than  
Strondes-strands,shores  
Ferne - distant  
Halwes-shrines  
Kowhe - known  
Sondry-various  
Londes - lands  
Seke - seek  
Seeke - sick  
Bifil - it so happened  
Hostelry - an inn  
Compaignye-company  
Aventure - chance  
Fustian - course cloth  
Weret - wore  
Gypon - doublet  
Habergon-coatofmale  
Viage - voyage  
Lovyera -lover

Bachelor-aspirant forknighthood

Lokkes - locks

Cruller - curly

Evene - average

Delyvere - agile

Chyvachie-chavalry

Meede - meadow

Floytynge - fluting

Reede - red

Koude - could

Endite-compose

Servysable-serviceable

Biforn - before

Namo-nooter

Liste-preferred

Bar - bore

Arwes - arrows

Drouped-drooped

Bracer - guard

Bokeler - bockler

Sheene - shone

Seint - saint

Cleped - named

Fetisly-gracefully

Scole - school  
Mete - meat  
Muchel - much  
Lest - pleasure  
Ferthyng - trace  
Raughte-reached  
Peyned-shetookpains  
Estatlich - stately  
Digne-worthy  
Wastel-madeoffineflour  
Yerde - stick  
Tretys - well-shaped  
Undergrowe- under-sized  
Fetys -neat  
Amor - love  
Vincit - conquers  
Omnia - all  
Deyntee-valuable  
Rood -rode  
Eek -also  
Streit-strict  
Ilke - same  
Heeld-followed

Space -meanwhile  
Thilke - that same  
Prikasour -hunter  
Purfiled - trimmed  
Poynt - condition  
Forpyned-tormented  
Solempne-stately;important  
Daliaunce - conversation  
frankeleyns- rich farmers  
yeve- give  
wiste- knew  
pituance-payment  
yaf- gave  
avaunt-assert  
smerte-suffer  
moote-must  
yeddengyes-songs  
flour-de-lys- lily  
honeste- worthy  
avance- profit  
poraille- poor folk  
vataille-food  
wydwe- widow

ferthyng- farthing  
whelpy- puppy  
semycope- half-cape  
wantownesse-affectation  
motteleye-multi-colouredgarments;motel  
Flaundryssh-Flemish  
wight- person  
chevyssaunce-usury  
sothe- truly  
with-alle-moreover  
courtepy- cloak  
benefice-paidjobinachurch  
levere- rather  
fithele- fiddle  
sautrie- harp  
scoleye-study  
war- careful  
assise- country court  
patente-letterofauthority  
pleyn- fully  
caas-cases  
doomes- judgements  
falle-hadtakenplace

pleyn-fully  
rote-memory  
hoomly-homely  
medlee- motely  
ceinte-girdle  
barres- stripes  
sommel-somewhat  
scathe-unfortunate  
haunt- practice  
weyeden- wade  
moyste- soft  
hewe-hue;colour  
strem- stream  
muchel- much  
gatetothed-gap-toothed  
amblere- ambling horse  
targe- shield  
carpe- chatter  
pacient- patient  
cursen- curse  
suffisaunce-sufficient  
reyn- rain  
meschief-difficulty



ensample-example

shiten- befouled

discreet- wise

spiced- nice

## **9.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

### **9.7.1 SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS**

Q1. What is the Wife of Bath's greatest talent?

Answer: The Wife's greatest talent is for cloth-making, and we get Chaucer's tongue-in-cheek touch again when he asserts her superiority over the cloth-makers "of Ypres and of Gaunt," an opinion that we suspect came straight from the Wife herself. There follows an illuminating little touch concerning her character. No woman in the parish, Chaucer says, ought to precede the Wife to the "offrynge" in church. And if any did "certeyn sowrooth was she/That she was out allecharitee." We can well imagine it, and so the tone is set for the development of this boisterous, egotistical, but fundamentally very likeable character later in the Tales. Two points are made about the Wife: her amorous nature and her habit of going on pilgrimages. But the striking thing about the line is the number of mates the Wife has had. In part the reason is economic—the Wife is a woman of property and the possessor of a commercially valuable skill.

Q2. What is the favourite past-time of the Monk?

Answer: In Chaucer's representation of the Monk there is an element of irony and satire. The Monk is satirically portrayed. He contemptuously ignores the vows he has taken to uphold the monastic discipline laid down by St. Maurus and St. Benedict. His greatest pleasure is in hunting the hare, which was thought to be wicked, especially for the clergyman. He neither labours with his hands nor pores over a book in the cloister. The monk does not fast or deny himself costly garments. Instead he loves a fat swan the best of any roast. Thus, Chaucer's Monk is a lively representative of his class. Moreover, Chaucer gives the portrait of Monk individuality. The Monk has large, prominent eyes and a glistening ruddy face; he is bald and stout. He is pompous and his actions display resentment against the world. Chaucer's Monk was an outrider who

loved hunting. Hunting was, indeed, this monk's favourite pastime, and he did not hide his irritation with those who objected to it.

Q3. Write a character sketch of the Wife of Bath.

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Q4. What were the fundamental rules regarding the conduct of the monks?

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### 9.7.2 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

1. How many husbands does the Wife of Bath have? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) seven
  - b) five
  - c) three
  - d) none
2. Which character in Prologue takes excessive pride in hunting and eating? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) The monk
  - b) Friar
  - c) The Manciple
  - d) the squire
3. The Wife of Bath by occupation is a \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) Weaver
  - b) Traveller
  - c) Seamstress
  - d) Preacher
4. The Wife of Bath has also been to which place? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) Italy
  - b) Switzerland
  - c) Norway
  - d) Scotland

5. Apart from the Wife of Bath, who is the second storyteller? \_\_\_\_\_

- |             |                 |
|-------------|-----------------|
| a) Squire   | b) Prioress     |
| b) the Cook | c) The Narrator |

#### **9.8 ANSWER KEY (MCQs)**

- 1) b
- 2) a
- 3) c
- 4) a
- 5) b

#### **9.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

Q) Discuss in detail the character of the Wife of Bath?

Q) Discuss in detail the character of the Monk?

#### **9.10 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Chaucer and His World—F.E. Halliday
2. The Canterbury Tales: A Selection of Critical Essays— Edited by J.J. Anderson
3. A Critical History of English Poetry—Greerson and Smith

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**PROLOGUE TO THE CANTERBURY TALES**


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**STRUCTURE**

- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Objectives & Outcome
- 10.3 Examination Oriented Questions
- 10.4 Check Your Progress
- 10.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.6 Suggested Reading

**10.1 INTRODUCTION**

Dear learner, as you know questions are crucial for learning, critical thinking and deeper comprehension of a text in this lesson we give you a set of questions to enhance your appreciation of the Prologue learner. And the questions will further engage you with a deeper study of Chaucer.

**10.2 OBJECTIVES & OUTCOME**

The objective of this lesson is to make the learner familiar with Examination Oriented questions.

**10.3 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

Q1. Discuss in detail Chaucer's Art or Technique of Characterization.

Ans. Chaucer outlines his thirty pilgrims in "The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales". He is the first great painter of characters in English Literature. He has painted the whole of English nation during the fourteenth century, ranging from knightly class to the order of Clergymen. The Character sketches are brief, yet lucid and comprehensive. Both the in and out of the characters are depicted in such a superb way that the entire personality seems moving before the reader's eyes. It is in fact Chaucer's unique rich and original art of characterization that has enabled him to delineate memorable portraits. For the purpose he employs several techniques of characterization, some of whom were popular

among the contemporaries, while the others are purely his own.

Similarly, the medieval poets usually described their character through their physiognomy, to expose their inner spiritual health. Chaucer has successfully employed this technique in the case of the Summoner. His "Fire-red cherubim face", "Pimples", "Narrow eyes" and "scabby black brows" reflect his inner spiritual corruption. Description through physical features is also employed in the case of The Wife of the Bath and The Prioress. Closely connected with this is Chaucer's technique of character portrait through dress. It also helps the audience in understanding, recognizing and differentiating the pilgrims. The Prioress and the Wife of Bath's fashionable dresses reveal their materialism and amorous nature. Admittedly, Chaucer varies his presentation from the full-length portraits to the thumb-nail sketch.

Chaucer's most superb technique is his presentation of Characters as individuals and types. The Characters are not only representatives of their respective classes and professions but also at the same time they possess individual traits. For example, the Friar is a typical representative of his class in the 14th century; he is corrupt, hypocritical, greedy and callous. But his good voice, his twinkling eyes, his white neck and above all his name "Brother Hubert" all have individualistic touches. The Old Knight, stands for heroism and manliness that good knight would always show on the battlefield. But he has been individualized by his prudence and his weakness of behavior. The Prioress is the type of a woman who is an epicure but she is portrayed as an individual, with her meticulous care in eating and her courtly manners as well as care in eating and her courtly manners as well as her tenderness of heart. The Monk is the type of Monks of those times interested not in religion and the study of holy books, but in hunting. But Chaucer's Monk is an individual with bald head and rolling eyes, glowing like the fire under a cauldron. The Oxford Clerk is the type of good scholars, not interested in worldly glory, but in the advancement of knowledge and learning. But Chaucer's Oxford Clerk comes as a figure of individual, by his learning, his hollow cheeks, grave look and his threadbare cloak. In short Chaucer's characters are types as well as individuals.

Chaucer's characters are real and universal because no one is like them, and they are real and universal because they are so like us. His people are always on move. Never do they become shadowy or lifeless. They shout and swear, laugh and weep, interrupt the storyteller, pass compliments and in general behave themselves, as we might expect them to be.

Another portrait delineation technique which Chaucer uses is to define the characters to a greater or lesser extent by the job or profession, they do. The deferent pilgrims represent different professions. The War-like Elements is represented by the Knight, The Square, and Yeoman. The Ploughman, The Miller, the Reeve, and The Franklin typify agriculture. The Sargeant of Law, the Doctor, The Oxford Clerk represent liberal professions. The Wife of Bath, The weaver, The Dyer and The Tapicer, embody industry and trade, the Merchant and the Shipman personate commerce. The poor Village person and the Summoner represent the secular clergy, while the monastic order are represented by the Monk, The Prioress and the Pardoner.

Chaucer also presents a vivid picture of his characters by their vices and presents the fourteenth century in "The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales". Firstly, the prevalent corruption of the Church is mirrored in most of his ecclesiastical figures, like The Friar, The Monk, The Pardoner. Secondly, the greed of doctors is typified in his Doctor of Physic, who loves gold. Thirdly his Sargeant of Law is as shrewd hard-boiled as other members of his profession. Fourthly, the dishonesty of the Reeve and the Miller is also typical. Finally, their traditional enmity is reflected between the Reeve and the Miller. This technique enriches his art of characterization.

Irony and Satire are undoubtedly Chaucer's most prominent techniques of characterization. Chaucer treats noble fellows with sympathy and love but his treatment of knaves, rogues and rascals is either humorous or ironical or satirical. For example, Chaucer calls the Wife of Bath "worthy woman" and then in the very next line ironically qualifies the word "worthy" by commenting

"She was worthy woman all her lyve  
Husbands at church door she had five"

But it remains to be noted that though he depicts most of his characters ironically and humorously yet tolerance and sympathy never lose Chaucer's attention. The characters whom he detests and censures are the two corrupt church offices, the Summoner and The Pardoner. It is in case of these two characters that Chaucer employs satire as a technique of characterization. The goodness of the "Gentle rascal" becomes clear when Chaucer comments that just for a quart of wine he would allow a sinner to keep on committing sins.

Chaucer utilizes the technique of contrast in drawing the portraits of the pilgrims.

The good and the bad rub shoulder together. We have a paragon of virtue in the characters of the Parson and the Ploughman, we have monsters of vice in the characters of the Reeve, the Miller and the Summoner. The knight, is foil to his son, the lusty Squire; the Oxford Clerk, is the very opposite of the merry-making Monk. In this way Chaucer distinguishes the characters through the exhibition of dissimilar qualities.

Chaucer's art of characterization is free from personal bias. He portrays his characters, objectively, impartially and disinterestedly. He depicts what he sees personally. He has the seeing eye, the memory, the judgment to select and the capacity to expound. Lastly, two conclusions may be drawn from the above discussion of Chaucer's art of Characterization. His world of man is varied and wide. In the words of Dryden, "There is God's plenty" and secondly, it is through the depiction of his characters, Chaucer has managed to give an expression to his vision of life which is both joyous and realistic.

Q2. Write a detailed note on Chaucer's humour.

Ans. Humour means that quality of action, speech, and writing which creates amusement. The true form of humour is that which makes one laugh only for the sake of pleasure and enjoyment. It does not hurt one's feelings nor it pinches or agonizes. Chaucer is a great humorist because he loves mankind in spite of its follies and weaknesses. Even while he gently unmask the roguery of the knaves, he feels grateful to them as they give him pleasure. There is no malice, spite or animosity in his attitude. His attitude is that of benevolence and tolerance. Even his satire is in the form of tender shafts of irony, which neither hurt nor destroys.

Chaucer may be regarded as the first great English humorist because no English literary work before his, reveals humour in the modern sense. His humour does not simply raise a smile but also relieve us from seriousness and gloom. He is a great master of humour and all his writing abounds with its rich variety. Masfield calls him "a great Renaissance gentleman mocking the Middle Ages"

Chaucer possesses all the characteristics of a great humorist. Firstly, he has catholicity and tolerance of spirit which save it from slipping into satire. Secondly, Chaucer has the faculty of humour which is fed by keen and penetrating observation. Finally, Chaucer has a healthy interest in this world and in life.

Chaucer's is an essentially English humour, as we see in the qualities in the works

of great English humorists like Shakespeare and Fielding. It is not the “wit” of the Frenchman. His humour is chiefly concerned with the people and happenings of everyday life as we see in “The Canterbury Tales”. Some of the facts are quite trivial in themselves but become amusing because of the way in which they are told.

Chaucer’s humour is without any sting, he is always sympathetic, except in his handling of the Monk and the Friar. He makes us appreciate each character even when laughing at it. His humour is not of a satirical kind. As compared to the Langland, who attacks the Church with keen and telling thrust, Chaucer exposes the corruption of the Church with good humoured laugh. Moreover, Chaucer makes more fun of the individual than of the institution. The genial sympathy saves the Chaucer not only from bitterness, but also from bias. Satire is born of indignation. Therefore, he is an objective humourist, a better realist than an angry satirist.

Chaucer is essentially the poet of man and is intensely interested in his affairs. Chaucer’s humour leads him to be the poet of man and humanity. He has large humanity and good-humoured tolerance for man. He has no disdain for fools and no disgust for rascals. While gently unmasking the roguery of rogues, he is grateful to them for the pleasure they give. He loves to dwell on their funny traits, looks at their pranks and tricks with amused delight – all these make him a great humourist.

Chaucer’s humour is many-sided. Humour can be used in a broad as well as a limited sense. In the narrow sense, it means a gentle mirth. In the broader sense, it stands for boisterous humour, intellectual humour (wit) and bitter humour (satire). Chaucer’s works reflect all these different types of humour. E. Alber has beautifully expressed the many-sided humour of Chaucer: “In the literature of his time, when so few poets seem to have any perception of the fun in life, the humour of Chaucer is invigorating and delightful”. For example, his humour is kind as in the case of the Clerk of Oxford, broad and semi-farcical as in the Wife of Bath, pointedly satirical as in the Pardoner and the Summoner.

Chaucer’s humour is natural and spontaneous. It is because of his peculiar way of looking at things, as the bent of his mind is essentially humorous. His humour is not the result of deliberate, calculated effort, but it is a spontaneous expression of his inner self. Therefore, it has unmistakable marks of ease, spontaneity, naturalness and



effortlessness. In the words of Walter Raleigh "his joy is chronic and irrepressible". The Canterbury Tales radiates with the natural joy that Chaucer felt in writing it.

In the whole company of the prologue to the Canterbury Tales there are those that are good and those others that are bad, the latter more in number than the former. But Chaucer's attitude to them is neither that of unruffled and quiet objectivity nor of partnership. Guided by his sense of humour, Chaucer observes everything and records each detail with smiling eyes, slightly emphasizing one aspect here or another there, in order to evoke in the reader that psychological state which makes him laugh without any malice. To quote Legouis: "He is entirely patient with, nay he accepts with a smile the imperfection of humanity".

Tolerance, indulgence and capacity for enjoying life are the mainsprings of Chaucer's humour. The result is that the portraits he draws become true to life, interesting and enjoyable as life always is, to those whose hearts have not been dried up by the apparently dull and boring routine of life. Humour for the sake of humour; humour is the medium of Chaucer's artistic expressions. Chaucer is never a serious satirist. His aim is primarily to entertain his readers. His aim is never to be a moralist or a preacher. He observes his ages sympathetically and humorously. Chaucer does not specifically and directly criticize any institution of his age. He is a poet who explores the theme of the individual's relation to society.

Chaucer's humour is the outcome of a generous sympathy and broad-mindedness. These excellences are imitated by the greatest English humorist like Shakespeare and Fielding. Critics may be divided in opinion as to Chaucer's right to be called the father of English poetry, but there can be no question that he is the first great English humorist.

Q3. Show how Chaucer's pilgrims are portrayed in the Prologue at once as types and as individuals.

Ans. Chaucer's most superb technique is his presentation of characters as individuals and types. The characters are not only representatives of their respective classes and professions but also at the same time they possess individual traits. For example, the Friar is a typical representative of his class in the 14th century; he is corrupt, hypocritical, greedy and callous. But his good voice, his twinkling eyes, his white neck and above all his name "Brother Hubert" all have individualistic touches. The Old Knight, stands

for heroism and manliness that a good knight would always show on the battlefield. But he has been individualized by his prudence and his weakness of behavior. The Prioress is the type of a woman who is an epicure but she is portrayed as an individual, with her meticulous care in eating and her courtly manners as well as her care in eating and her courtly manners as well as her tenderness of heart.

The Monk is the type of Monks of those times interested not in religion and the study of holy books, but in hunting. But Chaucer's Monk is an individual with bald head and rolling eyes, glowing like the fire under a cauldron. The Oxford Clerk is the type of good scholars, not interested in worldly glory, but in the advancement of knowledge and learning. But Chaucer's Oxford Clerk comes as a figure of individual, by his learning, his hollow cheeks, grave look and his threadbare cloak. In short Chaucer's characters are types as well as individuals. In Chaucer's representation of the Monk there is an element of irony and satire. The Monk is satirically portrayed. He contemptuously ignores the vows he has taken to uphold the monastic discipline laid down by St. Maur and St. Benedict. His greatest pleasure is in hunting the hare, which was thought to be wicked, especially for the clergyman. He neither labours with his hands nor pores over a book in the cloister. The monk does not fast or deny himself costly garments. Instead he loves a fat swan the best of any roast. Thus, Chaucer's Monk is a lively representative of his class. Moreover, Chaucer gives the portrait of Monk individuality. The Monk has large, prominent eyes and a listening ruddy face; he is bald and stout. He is pompous and his actions display resentment against the world.

Thus, the characters in Chaucer's Prologue are both types and individuals, and there lies Chaucer's greatness as a creator of characters. Chaucer's characters are both types and characters.

Q4. Discuss in detail the significance of pilgrimage in Chaucer's Prologue to the Canterbury Tales.

Ans. The narrator opens the General Prologue with a description of the return of spring. He describes the April rains, the burgeoning flowers and leaves, and the chirping birds. Around this time of year, the narrator says, people begin to feel the desire to go on a pilgrimage. Many devout English pilgrims set off to visit shrines in distant holy

lands, but even more choosetotravelto Canterbury to visit the relicsof Saint Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral, where they thank the martyr for having helped them when they were in need. The narrator tells us that he prepared to go on such a pilgrimage, staying at a tavern in Southward called the Tabard Inn, a great company of twenty-nine travellers entered. The travellers were a diverse group who, like the narrator, were on their way to Canterbury. They happily agreed to let him join them. Before continuing the tale, the narrator declares his intent to list and describe each of the members of the group.

A pilgrimage is a religious journey undertaken for penance and grace. As pilgrimages went, Canterbury was not a very difficult destination for an English person to reach. It was, therefore, very popular in the fourteenth-century England, as the narrator mentions. Pilgrims travelled to visit the remains of Saint Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, who was murdered in 1170 by knights of King Henry II. Soon after his death, he became the most popular saint in England. The pilgrimage in The Canterbury Tales should not be thought of as an entirely solemn occasion, because it also offered the pilgrims an opportunity to abandon work and take a vacation.

Q5. "Chaucer gives us a microcosm of English Society in the prologue itself." Elucidate this statement.

Ans. The pilgrims in the Prologue throw a lot of light on the social structure of England in the fourteenth century. Until Chaucer's day popular literature had been busy chiefly with the gods and heroes of a golden age; it had been essentially romantic, and so had never attempted to study men and women as they are, or to describe them so that the reader recognizes them, not as ideal heroes, but as his own neighbours. Chaucer not only attempted this new realistic task, but accomplished it so well that his characters were instantly recognized as true to life, and they have since become the permanent possession of our literature. Chaucer is the first English writer to bring the atmosphere of romantic interest about men and women and the daily work of one's own world, which is the aim of nearly all modern literature.

He spends considerable time characterizing the group members according to their social positions. The pilgrims represent a diverse cross section of fourteenth-century English society. Medieval social theory divided society into three broad classes,

called "estates": the military, the clergy, and the laity. (The nobility, not represented in the General Prologue, traditionally derives its title and privileges from military duties and service, so it is considered part of the military estate). In the portraits that we will see in the rest of the General Prologue, the Knight and the Squire represent the military estate. The clergy is represented by the Prioress (and her nun and three priests), the Monk, the Friar, and the Parson. The other characters, from the wealthy Franklin to the poor Plowman, are the members of the laity. These lay characters can be further subdivided into landowners (the Franklin), professionals (the Clerk, the Man of Law, the Guildsmen, the Physician, and the Shipman), labourers (the Cook and the Plowman), stewards (the Millers, the Manciple, and the Reeve), and church officers (the Summoner and the Pardoner). As we will see, Chaucer's descriptions of the various characters and their social roles reveal the influence of the medieval genre of the estates satire. Chaucer is a model for all those who would put out human life into writing.

Q6. Delineate the character-sketch of the Wife of Bath.

Ans. The Wife of Bath is one of Chaucer's most famous characters. He makes her a vivid presence here in the Prologue, and enlarges the portrait later in The Canterbury Tales in her own prologue to her wintertale. Bath is an English town on the Avon River, not the name of this woman's husband. Though she is a seamstress by occupation, she seems to be a professional wife. She has been married five times and had many other affairs in her youth, making her well practiced in the art of love. She presents herself as one who loves marriage and sex, but, from what we see of her, she also takes pleasure in rich attire, talking, and arguing. She is deaf in one ear and has a gap between her front teeth, which was considered attractive in Chaucer's time. She has travelled on pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times and elsewhere in Europe as well.

The Wife's great talent is for cloth-making, and we get Chaucer's tongue-in-cheek touch again when he asserts her superiority over the cloth-makers "of Ypres and of Gaunt," an opinion that we suspect came straight from the Wife herself. There follows an illuminating little touch concerning her character. Now a woman in the parish, Chaucer says, ought to precede the Wife to the "offryng" in church. And if any did "certeyn sowrooth was she/That she was out allecharitee." We can well imagine it, and so the tone is set for the development of this boisterous, egotistical, but fundamentally very

likeable character later in the Tales.

One of the two female storytellers (the other is the Prioress), the Wife has a lot of experience under her belt. She has travelled all over the world on pilgrimages, so Canterbury is a jaunt compared to other perilous journeys she has endured. Not only has she seen many lands, she has lived with five husbands. The Wife of Bath says that her first three husbands were "good" because they were rich and old. She could order them around, use sex to get what she wanted, and trick them into believing lies. The Wife of Bath says comparatively little about her fourth husband. She loved him, but he was a reveler who had a mistress. She had fun singing and dancing with him, but tried her best to make him jealous. She fell in love with her fifth husband, Jankyn, while she was still married to her fourth. The Wife of Bath's fifth husband, Jankyn, was a twenty-year-old former student, with whom the Wife was madly in love. His stories of wicked wives frustrated her so much that one night she ripped a page out of his book, only to receive a deafening smack on her ear in return.

She is worldly in both sense of the word she has seen the world and has experience in the ways of the world, that is, in love and sex. Rich and tasteful, the Wife's clothes veer a bit toward extravagance: her face is wreathed in heavy cloth, her stockings are a fine scarlet colour, and the leather on her shoes is soft, fresh, and brand new - all of which demonstrate how wealthy she has become. Scarlet was a particularly costly dye, since it was made from individual red beetles found only in some parts of the world. The fact that she hails from Bath, a major English cloth-making town in the Middle Ages, is reflected both in her talent as a seamstress and her stylish garments.

Although she is argumentative and enjoys talking, the Wife is intelligent in a commonsense, rather than intellectual, way. Though her experiences with her husbands, she has learned how to provide herself in a world where women had little independence or power. The chief manner in which she has gained control over her husbands has been in her control over their use of her body. The Wife uses her body as a bargaining tool, withholding sexual pleasure until her husbands give her what she demands.

Q7. Critically analyse the character of the Monk in Chaucer's Prologue.

Ans. In Chaucer's representation of the Monk there is an element of irony and satire. The Monk is satirically portrayed. He contemptuously ignores the vows he has taken

to uphold the monastic discipline laid down by St. Maurus and St. Benedict. His greatest pleasure is in hunting the hare, which was thought to be wicked, especially for the clergyman. Hunting was, indeed, this monk's favourite pastime, and he did not hide his irritation with those who objected to it. He neither labours with his hands nor pores over a book in the cloister. The monk does not fast or deny himself costly garments. Instead he loves a fat swan the best of any roast. Thus, Chaucer's Monk is a lively representative of his class. Moreover, Chaucer gives the portrait of Monk individuality. The Monk has large, prominent eyes and a glistening ruddy face; he is bald and stout. He is pompous and his actions display resentment against the world.

His face shone as if he had been anointed. He was fat and in very good shape, like his horse. Thus, Chaucer goes on to indicate the lavish nature of the rest of the Monk's costume. His sleeves were lined with gray fur of the finest quality. He wore supple boots. In order to fasten his hood under his chin, he had an intricate pin of wrought gold. He had a large number of valuable horses in his stable. When he rode, the jingling of the bridle of his horse could be heard at a distance. Hence, the worldliness and fine living of the Monk are greatly emphasised.

#### **10.4 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Answer the following questions:

1. What are the salient features of Chaucer's art of characterisation in the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales?
2. "Chaucer's group of pilgrims constitute a picture of the society of his times." Discuss.
3. Bring out the humorous elements in the Prologue.
4. Discuss in detail the character of Chaucer's Wife of Bath.

#### **10.5 LET US SUM UP**

In this lesson, we have given you a few examination oriented questions with answers so that you are acquainted with the style of answering a question focusing on the main context of the question & writing your answer in consonance with the main issue or argument raised in the question.

## **10.6 SUGGESTED READING**

1. The Canterbury Tales: A Selection of Critical Essays— Edited by J.J. Anderson

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SONNET

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**STRUCTURE**

- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Objectives & Outcome
- 11.3 Definition of Sonnet
- 11.4 Historical details of sonnet
- 11.5 Types of sonnet
- 11.6 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 11.7 Glossary
- 11.8 Examination Oriented Questions
- 11.9 Answer Key
- 11.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.11 Suggested Reading

**11.1 INTRODUCTION**

Sonnet is a fourteen-line poem written in iambic pentameter, employing one of several rhyme schemes, and adhering to a tightly structured thematic pattern. Sonnet comes from the Italian *sonnetto*, which means “a little sound or song.” The sonnet usually offers contemplation upon a theme such as beauty, love, or grief, and ends with a revelation, or a change of thought on the part of the poet.

**11.2 OBJECTIVES & OUTCOME**

In this lesson, Dear learner, we shall explain the definition of a sonnet. After reading this lesson you will be able to

- a) define a sonnet
- b) explain the origin of sonnet



- c) discuss the types of sonnet

### **11.3 DEFINITION OF SONNET**

The term sonnet is derived from the Italian word sonetto (from Old Provençal sonet a little poem, from son song, from Latin sonus a sound). By the thirteenth century it signified a poem of fourteen lines that follows a strict rhymescheme and specific structure. Conventions associated with the sonnet have evolved over its history. Writers of sonnets are sometimes called “sonneteers”. A sonnet is fundamentally a dialectical construct which allows the poet to examine the nature and ramifications of two usually contrastive ideas, emotions, states of mind, beliefs, actions, events, images, etc., by juxtaposing the two against each other, and possibly resolving or just revealing the tensions created and operative between the two.

### **11.4 HISTORICAL DETAILS OF SONNET**

The sonnet was created by Giacomo da Lentini, head of the Sicilian School (Italy) under Emperor Frederick II. Guittone d'Arezzo rediscovered it and brought it to Tuscany where he adapted it to his language when he founded the Neo-Sicilian School (1235–1294). He wrote almost 250 sonnets. Other Italian poets of the time, including Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) and Guido Cavalcanti (c. 1250–1300), wrote sonnets, but the most famous early sonneteer was Petrarca (known in English as Petrarch). Other fine examples were written by Michelangelo.

### **11.5 TYPES OF SONNET**

There are two basic types of Sonnet depending on their rhyming scheme. These are Italian sonnet and English sonnet.

1) The Italian sonnet: The Italian Sonnet is also called a Petrarchan sonnet. It is named after the famous Italian Sonneteer Petrarch. The Italian sonnet is divided into two sections by two different groups of rhyming sounds. The first 8 lines are called the octave and rhymes: abbaabba

The remaining 6 lines are called the sestet and can have either two or three rhyming sounds, arranged in a variety of ways:

cdcdcd, cddcdc, cdecde, cdecde, cdcdcd

The exact pattern of sestet Rhymes (unlike the octave pattern) is flexible. In strict

practice, the one thing that is to be avoided in the sestet is ending with a couplet (dd ore), as this was never permitted in Italy, and Petrarch himself (supposedly) never used a couplet ending; in actual practice, sestets are sometimes ended with couplets.

The structure of a typical Italian sonnet of the time included two parts that together formed a compact form of “argument”. First, the octave (two quatrains), forms the “proposition”, which describes a “problem”, or “question”, followed by a sestet (two tercets), which proposes a “resolution”. Typically, the ninth line initiates what is called the “turn”, or “volta”, which signals the move from proposition to resolution. Even in sonnets that don’t strictly follow the problem/resolution structure, the ninth line still often marks a “turn” by signaling a change in the tone, mood, or stance of the poem.

In English, both English type (Shakespearean) sonnets and Italian type (Petrarchan) sonnets are traditionally written in iambic pentameter lines.

The first known sonnets in English, written by Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, used this Italian scheme, as did sonnets by later English poets including John Milton, Thomas Gray, William Wordsworth and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Early twentieth-century American poet Edna St. Vincent Millay also wrote most of her sonnets using the Italian form.

The example of Milton’s *On His Blindness* gives a sense of the Italian rhyming scheme:

When I consider how my light is spent (a)  
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide, (b) And  
that one talent which is death to hide, (b)  
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent (a) To  
serve therewith my Maker, and present (a)  
My true account, lest he returning chide; (b)  
”Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?” (b) I  
fondly ask; but Patience to prevent (a)  
That murmur, soon replies, “God doth not need (c)

Either man's work or his own gifts; who best (d)

Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state (e) Is

Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed (c)

And post to 'er land and ocean without rest; (d)

They also serve who only stand and wait." (e)

2) The English sonnet : The English sonnet is also known as Shakespearean sonnet after its foremost practitioner comprises three quatrains and a final couplet, rhyming ababcdcd efefgg. When English sonnets were introduced by Thomas Wyatt in the early 16th century, his sonnets and those of his contemporary the Earl of Surrey were chiefly translations from the Italian of Petrarch and the French of Ronsard and others. While Wyatt introduced the sonnet into English, it was Surrey who gave it a rhyming meter, and a structural division into quatrains of a kind that now characterizes the typical English sonnet. Having previously circulated in manuscript only, both poets' sonnets were first published in Richard Tottel's *Songes and Sonnetts*, better known as Tottel's *Miscellany* (1557).

It was, however, Sir Philip Sidney's sequence *Astrophel and Stella* (1591) that started the English vogue for sonnet sequences. The next two decades saw sonnet sequences by William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, Michael Drayton, Samuel Daniel, Fulke Greville, William Drummond of Hawthornden, and many others. This literature is often attributed to the Elizabethan Age and known as Elizabethan sonnets. These sonnets were all essentially inspired by the Petrarchan tradition, and generally treat of the poet's love for some woman, with the exception of Shakespeare's sequence of 154 sonnets.

There are two variants of English Sonnets. These are:

a) Spenserian sonnet : The Spenserian sonnet, invented by Edmund Spenser as an outgrowth of the stanza pattern he used in *The Faerie Queene* (a b a b b c b c), has the pattern:

ababbcbccdcdee

Here, the "abab" pattern sets up distinct four-line groups, each of which develops a specific idea; however, the overlapping a, b, c, and d rhymes form the first 12 lines into

asingleunitwithaseparatedfinalcouplet.Thethreequatrainsthendevolpthreedistinct but closely related ideas, with a different idea (or commentary) in the couplet. Interestingly,SpenseroftenbeginsL9ofhissonnetswith“*But*”or“*Yet*,”indicatingavolta exactlywhereitwouldoccurintheItaliansonnet;however,ifonelooksclosely,one oftenfindsthatthe“turn”herereallyisn’toneatall,thattheactualturnoccurswhere therhymepatternchanges,withthecouplet,thusgivinga12and2linepatternvery different fromtheItalian8 and6 linepattern(actualvoltamarked byitalicsand isbold):

“SonnetLIV”

OfthisWorld’s theatreinwhichwestay,(a)  
 My love like the Spectator idly sits,(b)  
 Beholdingme,thatallthepageantsplay,(a)  
 Disguisingdiverselymytroubledwits.(b)  
 SometimesIjoywhengladoccasionfits,(b)  
 And mask in mirth like to a Comedy;(c)  
 Soon after when my joyto sorrow flits,(b)  
 I wail and make my woes a Tragedy.(c)  
 Yet she, beholding mewith constanteye,(c)  
 Delights not in my mirth nor rues my smart;(d)  
 ButwhenIlaugh,shemocks:andwhenIcry(c) She  
 laughs and hardens evermore her heart.(d)  
 What thencanmove her?Ifnormirthnormoan,(e) She  
 is no woman, but a senseless stone.(e)

b) Shakespearean sonnet : The English sonnet has the simplest and most flexible patternofallsonnets, consisting of3 quatrains ofalternating rhyme and a couplet:

Ababdcdefefgg

As in the Spenserian, each quatrain develops a specific idea, but one closely related to the ideas in the other quatrains.

Not only is the English sonnet the easiest in terms of its rhyme scheme, calling for only pairs of rhyming words rather than groups of 4, but it is the most flexible in terms of the placement of the volta. Shakespeare often places the “turn”, as in the Italian, at L9:

“Sonnet XXIX”

When in disgrace with Fortune and men’s eyes, (a) I

all alone beweep my outcast state, (b)

And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries, (a)

And look upon myself and curse my fate, (b)

Wishing me like to one more rich in hope, (c)

Featured like him, like him with friends possessed, (d)

Desiring this man’s art and that man’s scope, (c)

With what I most enjoy contented least, (d)

Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising, (e)

Haply I think on thee, and then my state, (f)

(Like to the lark at break of day arising (e)

From sullen earth) sings hymns at

heaven’s gate, (f) For thy sweet

lover remembered such wealth brings, (g) That then I

scorn to change my state with kings. (g)

Equally, Shakespeare can delay the volta to the final couplet, as in this sonnet where each quatrain develops a metaphor describing the aging of the speaker, while the couplet then states the consequence—“You better love me now because soon I won’t be here”:

“SonnetLXXIII”

That time of year thou mayst in me behold,  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet bird sang. In  
me thou seest the twilight of such day,  
As after sunset fadeth in the west,  
Which by and by black night doth take away,  
Death's second self that seals up all in rest. In  
me thou seest the glowing of such fire, That  
on the ashes of his youth doth lie,  
As the deathbed, whereon it must expire,  
Consumed by that which it was nourished by.  
This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more strong,  
To love that well, which thou must leave ere long.

There are, of course, some sonnets that don't fit any clear recognizable pattern but still certainly function as sonnets. We keep those type of sonnets in the category of Indefinables. Shelley's "Ozymandias" belongs to this category. It's rhyming pattern of ababacdcdefef is unique; clearly, however, there is a volta in L9 exactly as in an Italian sonnet:

“Ozymandias”

I met a traveller from an antique land (a)  
Whose said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone (b)  
Stand in the desert ... Near them, on the sand, (a)  
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown, (b)  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command (a)

Tell that its sculptor well those passions read (c)  
 Which yet survive, (stamped on these lifeless things,) (d) The  
 hand that mocked them and the heart that fed: (c) And on  
 the pedestal these words appear: (e)  
 "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: (d)  
 Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!" (e)  
 Nothing beside remains. Round the decay (f)  
 Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare (e) The  
 lone and level sands stretch far away. (f)

### 11.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

- 1) A Couplet \_\_\_\_\_  
 a) Always using alliteration      b) Always consisting of two lines  
 c) Always uses a hyperbole      d) Always consists of three lines
- 2) Shakespearean rhyming scheme is \_\_\_\_\_  
 a) Abab cd cde ffgg      b) Ababbcbccdcdee  
 c) Abbccddeeffghh      d) Abbacddceffegg
- 3) Spenserian rhyming scheme is \_\_\_\_\_  
 a) Abab cd cde ffgg      b) Ababbcbccdcdee  
 c) Abbccddeeffghh      d) Abbacddceffegg
- 4) Who introduced sonnet to England \_\_\_\_\_  
 a) William Shakespeare      b) Edmund Spenser  
 c) Wyatt and Surrey      d) Sir Philip Sidney
- 5) The sonnets were imported from \_\_\_\_\_ to England.  
 a) Greece      b) Italy  
 c) France      d) India

## 11.7 GLOSSARY

Thou—you

Tuscany – A region in

Italy. Volta—A turning point

in a poem

Dialectical – logically reasoned through the exchange of opposite ideas.

Juxtapose—The close placement of two ideas to imply a link that may not exist. Pageant –

A spectacular ceremony

Wit—The ability to think quickly especially under short-term constraints

## 11.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- 1) Discuss the concept of Sonnet with example.
- 2) Write down the origin and development of the sonnet form.
- 3) Write down the difference between the Italian form of sonnet and the English form of sonnet.
- 4) Write down the difference between the Shakespearean and Spenserian form of sonnets.
- 5) Wyatt and Surrey imported the sonnet form to England. Did they imitate the same form of sonnet or amend it with their own English style? Discuss.
- 6) Define Sonnet.

Answer: A sonnet is a poetic form that has fourteen lines. It originated in Italy in the thirteenth century, and though it has generally kept some of the original rules, such as the number of lines and having a specific rhyme scheme and meter, the conventions of sonnets have changed over the centuries to some degree. There are two primary branches of the sonnet form—the Italian or Petrarchan sonnet and the English or Shakespearean sonnet.



7) Define Spenserian sonnet.

Answer : The English poet Edmund Spenser, who lived and wrote during the Elizabethan age, used a slightly different rhyme scheme in his sonnets: ABABBCBCCDCDEE. This provides a tighter connection between the different stanzas and is called Spenserian sonnet.

### 11.9 ANSWER KEY (MCQs)

1. b
2. a
3. b
4. c
5. b

### 11.10 LET US SUM UP

Dear learner after reading this lesson you can explain the origin and the different types of sonnet along with the examples from Shakespearean sonnets highlighting the pattern and rhyme scheme. You will also appreciate the sonnet as a form of expressing one's desires, emotions, situations, thoughts, etc., in brevity.

### 11.11 SUGGESTED READING

- 1) The Art of Sonnet by Stephen Burt David Mikics. Harvard University Press. 2010
- 2) The Penguin Book of the Sonnet: 500 years of the Classical Tradition in English by Philip Levin. Penguin Books. 2001.
- 3) The Cambridge Companion to the Sonnet Edited by A.D. Cousins and Peter Howarth. Cambridge University Press. 2011.
- 4) Daily Sonnets by Laynie Brownie. Counterpath Press. 2007.
- 5) The sonnet; its Origin, structure and place in poetry with original translations from the sonnet of Dante, Petrarch, etc. by Charles Tomlinson. University of California London, 1874.

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SONNET

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**STRUCTURE**

- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Objectives & Outcome
- 12.3 Historical Background
- 12.4 About the poet
- 12.5 Wyatt's poetry and influence
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- 12.7 Introduction to the sonnet
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- 12.10 Style
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**12.1 INTRODUCTION**

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503 – 11 October 1542) was a 16th-century English politician, ambassador. He wrote the first English sonnets and true satires, projecting through them the most important political issues of the period: the Protestant Reformation and the centralization of state power under the reigns of the Tudors. For this combination of

formalistic innovation and historical reflection, Sir Thomas Wyatt today considered the most important poet of the first half of the sixteenth century.

## **12.2 OBJECTIVES & OUTCOME**

In this lesson we shall discuss the sonnet “Whoso List to Hunt” written by Sir Thomas Wyatt. After reading this unit you will be able

- a) appreciate the poet
- b) get familiar with the historical background
- c) to interpret the sonnet

## **12.3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Sir Thomas Wyatt lived in the age when spirit of renaissance was dawning in England. The movement renaissance was not merely literary. It signified an overall change in culture and civilization marking an end to the civilization and culture of the Middle Ages. The dawn of new ideas in science and education, politics and religion, philosophy and literature, marked the arrival of renaissance. Although, the renaissance movement began in Europe around the middle of the fourteenth century, in England it got foothold only in the early sixteenth century and flowered during the middle and later quarters of the century giving rise to unparalleled production of lasting drama and poetry, prose and fiction. The intense conflict between the medieval witchcraft and the new experimental science, between the medieval orthodox Catholicism and the rise of puritan reformism, between the medieval blind faith and ancient skeptical rationalism, between the medieval feudalism and the rising capitalism, between the medieval theocratism and the renaissance monarchism, between the medieval romance tradition and the revival of classical humanism, led to the tremendous rise of all-round creativity during the renaissance. The very term renaissance signifies upsurge, revival or rebirth and it was the revival of classical learning, arts and literature which marked the beginning of this movement.

The renaissance in Europe also saw the development of a parallel movement in religion called reformation, which, too, made its impact on the literature of the period. It is important to consider reformation as a part of the renaissance movement because the renaissance was not pagan or irreligious; rather it was a combination of humanism and Christianity. Calvin and Luther may have steered the ship of Protestantism against

the Roman Catholicism on the continent, in the England of Queen Elizabeth, that is, during the period of the peak English renaissance, the battle of reformation was fought between William Tyndale, the protestant and Sir Thomas Moore, the catholic.

## 12.4 ABOUT THE POET

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) was a 16<sup>th</sup> century English sonneteer. He and his friend Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey are credited with introducing of sonnet form of poetry to English literature. He was born at Allington Castle, near Maidstone in Kent, though his family was originally from Yorkshire. His mother was Anne Skinner and his father, Henry Wyatt, had been one of Henry VII's Privy Councillors, and remained a trusted adviser when Henry VIII came to the throne in 1509. In his turn, Thomas Wyatt followed his father to court after his education at St John's College, Cambridge. He was an English ambassador under Henry VIII's reign. He also travelled to Spain, France and Italy for the diplomatic missions. From Italy he imported the sonnet form of poetry. Wyatt was over six feet tall, reportedly both handsome and physically strong. In 1520, Wyatt married Elizabeth Brooke, (1503–1550), the daughter of Thomas Brooke. A year later, the couple had a son. In 1535 Wyatt was knighted and appointed High Sheriff of Kent for 1536. In May 1536 Wyatt was imprisoned in the Tower of London for allegedly committing adultery with Anne Boleyn (Wife of Henry VIII). He was released from the Tower later that year, thanks to his friendship or his father's friendship with Thomas Cromwell, and he returned to his duties. On 11 December 1542 at the age of 39 he died, the reason being serious illness.

## 12.5 WYATT'S POETRY AND INFLUENCE

Wyatt's professed object was to experiment with the English tongue, to civilise it, to raise its power to those of its neighbours. A significant amount of his literary output consists of translations and imitations of sonnets by the Italian poet Petrarch; he also wrote sonnets of his own. He took subject matter from Petrarch's sonnets, but his rhyme schemes make a significant departure. Petrarch's sonnets consist of an "octave", rhyming abbaabba, followed, after a turn (volta) in the sense, by a "sestet" with various rhyme schemes. Wyatt employs the Petrarchan octave, but his most common sestet scheme is cddcee. This marks the beginnings of an exclusively "English" contribution to sonnet structure that is three quatrains and a closing couplet. Although Wyatt's poems circulated among many of the members of Henry's court, they did not appear in print until

his death. In 1557, ninety-six of his songs appeared in *Songs and Sonnets* (Tottel's Miscellany). The remainder of Wyatt's poems, satires, and lyrics would remain in manuscript and slowly come into print during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His lovely lyrics, many based loosely on the Petrarchan sonnet, deal with courtly love and ill treatment at the hands of his lovers. Among his most famous poems are "Whoso List to Hunt," "They Flee From Me," "What No, Perdie," "Lux, My Fair Falcon," and "Blame Not My Lute." Wyatt also wrote three satires, which adopted the Italian *terzarima* into English, and a number of penitential psalms.

## 12.6 CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE POET

Critical opinion of his work has varied widely. Thomas Warton, the 18th-century critic, considered Wyatt "confessedly an inferior" to his contemporary Henry Howard, and that Wyatt's "genius was of the moral and didactic species and be deemed the first polished English satirist". The 20th century saw an awakening in his popularity and a surge in critical attention. C.S. Lewis called him "the father of the Drab Age" (i.e. the unornate), from what Lewis calls the "golden" age of the 16th century, while others see his love poetry, with its complex use of literary conceits, as anticipating that of the metaphysical poets in the next century. More recently, the critic Patricia Thomson describes Wyatt as "the Father of English Poetry"

## 12.7 INTRODUCTION TO THE SONNET "WHOSO LIST TO HUNT"

"Whoso List to Hunt" is one of the earliest sonnets in all of English literature and one of thirty sonnets written by Sir Thomas Wyatt. Wyatt (1503-1542) probably wrote "Whoso List to Hunt" sometime during the 1530s, and the poem was published in the 1550s after his death. "Whoso List to Hunt" is held to be Wyatt's imitation of "Rime 190," written by Petrarch, a fourteenth-century Italian poet and scholar. Wyatt introduced the sonnet, a fourteen-line poem with a fixed format and rhyme scheme, to England. The Petrarchan sonnet is a fourteen-line poem in which the first eight lines, the octave, present a problem, which is resolved by the final six lines, the sestet. Wyatt altered the Petrarchan formula, ending the sestet with two lines, a couplet, that rhyme. As such, he set a precedent for later poets, many of whom further altered the sonnet formula. Also, in focusing on a hunting allegory in "Whoso List to Hunt," Wyatt demonstrated that sonnets could explore more than unrequited love, on which Petrarch had focused. Wyatt's poem is frequently found in literature anthologies, as well as in several editions

of his own poetry, including Sir Thomas Wyatt: Collected Poems (1975), edited by Joost Daalder.

This sonnet is also about hunting a doe upon which the hunter spies around her neck a diamond encrusted collar pertaining to Caesar's ownership. At the time of writing (approx 1525 when Wyatt separated from his wife), King Henry VIII was married to his first wife Catherine of Aragon, but after meeting Anne Boleyn at a masquerade ball in March 1522, Henry like Wyatt became enamoured with her. Henry later married Boleyn after declaring his union with Catherine invalid. Consequently, Wyatt, who was in an unhappy marriage, had to give up any thoughts of winning Boleyn for himself. His sonnet is believed to be an expression of his frustration at this turn of events. The poem tells of a deer hunt in which several riders are chasing a hind (female deer). The deer hunt and the hind are both metaphors, the hunt representing young men pursuing an alluring woman at the king's court and the hind representing the woman herself, presumably Boleyn.

## 12.8 ANALYSIS OF THE SONNET "WHOSO LIST TO HUNT"

Wyatt uses the sonnet form, which he introduced to England from the work of Petrarch. The Petrarchan sonnet typically has 14 lines. The first 8 lines, or octet, introduces a problem or issue for contemplation and the remaining six lines, or sestet, offers a resolution or an opinion. Wyatt uses iambic pentameter. This means that there are five pairs of syllables, each with the stress on the second syllable. It is the most common rhythm used in traditional poetry and was used by Shakespeare in his sonnets, poems and plays. Iambic pentameter, though a regular rhythm, was thought to be closest to ordinary speech patterns, so it is an attempt to imitate but also to elevate the sounds of everyday conversation.

By opening the poem with a question, the narrator challenges the reader. There is an invitation in his words, and the use of an exclamation mark at the end of the first line implies excitement at the idea. A hunting was a popular pastime in the court of Henry VIII, this suggests a poem along the lines of Henry VIII's own most famous lyric, 'Pastime With Good Company'. However, problem with the octet is revealed in line 2 as the poet tells us that he is no longer part of the hunt. An exclamation mark is used in line 2, again to emphasize emotion, but this time frustration and regret. This is a passionate yet contradictory introduction.

Line 3 makes use of assonance to reveal the poet's earlier hunting efforts as 'vain travail' which has tired him out to the point of physical pain. We can see that the poem is an extended metaphor for the end of a relationship. Wyatt makes use of enjambment (breaking a phrase over more than one line of verse) and caesura (concluding a phrase within the first half of a line of verse) across lines six and seven to highlight the discord represented by the end of the relationship as he subverts and challenges his own chosen structure.

In line 8, the poet uses the concluding line of the octet to stress the futility of his former quest. He uses the metaphor of catching the wind in a net to emphasize the pointlessness of his chase.

The final sestet begins with line 9 reiterating the appeal to those who wish to join the hunt, but he continues into line 10 to explain that the pursuit will be in vain for them too. Again there is an exclamation mark to indicate an intensity of feeling.

Line 11 continues the extended metaphor as an explanation of why his hunt of this 'hind', and that of others who pursue her, is so pointless. She has a bejeweled collar, indicating she already has an owner. Her collar is adorned with the Latin phrase 'Noli Metangere' meaning 'touch me not'. This expression refers to a phrase spoken by Jesus to Mary Magdalene in the Bible. The design also includes the name of her owner—'for Caesar's I am.' If we identify the poem as referring to Anne Boleyn, then her new owner would be King Henry VIII; the pair was married around the time when this poem was composed and Wyatt could no longer compete for her affections. By describing Henry using the allusion of Caesar, Wyatt bestows on his monarch the qualities of a reputation of greatness and incisive rule.

Caesar was, like Henry, a leader early in late teens, a handsome and strong young man and was significant in the political and aesthetic changes and developments of his realm. Both were literate, charismatic and influential. However, other less favourable parallels can be drawn. Both Caesar and Henry VIII incurred huge debt during their respective offices. There were many subjects who were held captive, sometimes executed, on charges of treason. Caesar faced questions regarding his sexuality and his unsuitable choices of women. Wyatt may also be alluding to these less appealing aspects of Caesar in his comparison if we see the passion in the poem to be borne of frustration and danger.

### ACTIVITY

1. Sir Thomas Wyatt was born in the year\_\_\_\_\_.
2. Sir Thomas Wyatt was a \_\_\_\_\_ Century English Sonneteer.
3. When did Sir Thomas Wyatt die?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. “Whoso List to Hunt” is an imitation of “Rime 190,” written by\_\_\_\_\_..
5. \_\_\_\_\_ called Sir Thomas Wyatt “the father of Drab Age.”
6. The sonnet “Whoso List to Hunt” open with the\_\_\_\_\_.

### 12.9 THEMES

#### Unattainable Love

The poem can stand as a metaphor for the frustration a person experiences after circumstances prevent him or her from achieving a goal. This is a timeless theme that occurs frequently in literature. The speaker chases a woman whom he cannot—and must not—catch, for she is a prize of the ruler of the land. If the speaker continues to pursue her, he will incur the wrath of the ruler and probably lose his head. In real life, King Henry VIII accused Wyatt of committing adultery with his wife, Ann Boleyn (apparently the hind in the poem), and imprisoned him in the Tower of London in 1536. The charges against him were dismissed. Ironically, it was Ann Boleyn who lost her head in the same year as Wyatt’s imprisonment after she fell out of favor with the king.

#### Divine Right of Kings

The doctrine of the “divine right of kings” held that kings were God’s representatives on earth and that all of the king’s subjects were, in fact, his property. The final lines of the sonnet, when it is revealed that the hind’s collar declares her to be the property of Caesar alone, allude to this doctrine. The royal ruler supposedly had the right to possess this female, regardless of her wishes or the desires of any other suitors. While he courted Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII gave her many gifts, which established that he was serious about her. These gifts also served to warn other suitors that the object of the



King's desire was not available to other men. Although Anne Boleyn did not wear a collar inscribed with the King's name, she wore jewels and other gifts that he supplied. Asking, Henry VIII would have believed in his divine right to possess his subjects, and he would not have been shy about seizing whomever he desired. There comes a time when the wisest course in a struggle to achieve a goal is to cease striving. Such is the case with the author of "Whoso List to Hunt," Thomas Wyatt. Wyatt well knows that defying the headstrong Henry can only result in an appointment with an executioner. Consequently, he yields to the king. Wyatt's poem is an allegory that explains the futility of opposing an irresistible force.

### Courtly Love

Traditionally, early English sonnets focused on romantic and idealized love, as did the Petrarchan sonnets that inspired the English to adopt the format. The love sonnet often celebrated the woman's beauty, comparing in great detail the features of her face and body to forms in nature. For example, a poet might compare a woman's cheeks to roses in bloom. In "Whoso List to Hunt," Wyatt deviates from the typical love sonnet and casts the woman as a deer, who is pursued in an evidently ardent fashion. In being not an inanimate object of the suitor's affection but a wild animal in flight, the female has more personality than the typical subject of a courtly love poem. While she does not speak, she holds a sort of dialogue with the narrator through her actions and through the display of her collar. Thus, Wyatt shifts the perspective on courtly love to focus on the ideas of masculine.

### Obsession

In Wyatt's sonnet, the hunter can be said to be obsessed with possessing his prey. He describes himself as "wearied" twice, in lines 3 and 5. In line 7, he refers to himself as "fainting" as he continues to follow the hind, even as she flees him. The pursuit is dangerous, as the deer is labelled as royal property, but the hunter follows anyway. When a desire is so intense that it cannot be ignored, even when danger is present, it might be labelled an obsession; mere reasoning is not enough to rid the obsessed lover of his desire.

### Sexism

The object of the hunt in Wyatt's sonnet is a hind, a female deer, which is held

to represent the person of Anne Boleyn. The deer is hunted as prey and wears a collar that proclaims her ruler's ownership over her. This portrayal of a woman as a forest animal to be hunted and possessed reflects the low esteem with which women were often viewed in Elizabethan society. In this allegory, courtship and wooing have no role in the relationship between hunters and hunted, and the female cannot escape the fact that she is a royal possession.

## 12.10 STYLE

### Allegory

In literature, an allegory is an extended metaphor in which objects and events hold symbolic meanings outside of the literal meanings made explicit in the narrative. In Wyatt's sonnet, the hunter's pursuit of the hind can be held to represent Wyatt's pursuit of Anne Boleyn, and the hind's being the property of Caesar can represent the "ownership" of Anne Boleyn by King Henry VIII. All of the accompanying descriptions of the hunt and the hunter's emotions, then, can be applied to this actual romantic situation.

### Petrarchan sonnet

The Petrarchan sonnet, also known as the Italian sonnet, consists of two separate sections. The first part is the octave, an eight-line stanza, where in a problem or issue is put forth. The second part is the sestet, where in some resolution to the problem is provided. In "Whoso List to Hunt," the octave describes the futile pursuit of the hind, while the sestet explains why the hunter cannot capture his prey: she is the property of her royal master, and to capture her would endanger both the hind and the hunter. More specifically, Wyatt's sestet consists of a quatrain (four lines) and a couplet (two lines), as can be seen in examining the rhyme scheme. Petrarch divided his sonnets into octaves of *abbaabba* and sestets of various rhyme schemes, usually *cdecde* or *cdcdcd*. Wyatt's rhyme scheme is slightly different: *abbaabba, cddc, ee*. Within such structures, certain rhymes may be somewhat irregular, particularly in that certain words may have been pronounced differently in Elizabethan times. In Wyatt's sonnet, *wind*, as in "breeze," with a short *i* sound, is held to rhyme with the long *i* of *hind*, *behind*, and *mind*. Similarly, in the last couplet, the long *a* of *fame* is held to rhyme with the short *a* of *fam*. In reading that couplet aloud, one might distort the sounds of either or both of those words in order to approximate a rhyme. In ending with a couplet, Wyatt put emphasis on both of the last two lines; in contrast, the Petrarchan form places more emphasis on the last line of

the octave and the last line of the sestet.

### Meter

The most common meter of the Elizabethan period was pentameter, where in a line of verse contains five measures, or feet. If each foot contains two syllables—such as with an iamb, where the second syllable is stressed—each line will contain a total of ten syllables. The resulting rhythm can heighten the reader's aesthetic appreciation of and emotional response to the poem. Wyatt's use of iambic pentameter was irregular; in fact, when some of his poems were included in Tottel's Miscellany, the printer revised and smoothed out the meter. In "Whoso List to Hunt," lines 1, 4, 6, and 8 contain eleven syllables, and line 14 contains only nine syllables; the remaining lines all contain the expected ten syllables. Lines 2 and 3 reveal the predominant iambic-pentameter pattern :

....1.....2.....3.....4.....5

But AS..|..for ME,..|..hé LAS,..|..I may..|..no more.

....1.....2.....3.....4.....5

The VAIN..|..tra VAIL..|..hath WEAR..|..ied ME..|..so SORE

### ACTIVITY

1. Unattainable Love sonnet is a metaphor for a person experiences after circumstances prevent him or her from achieving a \_\_\_\_\_.
2. What does the doctrine of the "Divine Right of Kings" mean?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. In "Whoso List to Hunt" Wyatt deviates from the typical love sonnet and casts the woman as a \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The object of the hunt in Wyatt's sonnet is a hind, a female deer, which is held to represent \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Define Petrarchan sonnet.

## 12.11 SUMMARY OF THE SONNET “WHOSO LIST TO HUNT”

In line 1 of “Whoso List to Hunt,” the narrator states that for those who wish to hunt, he knows the location of a particular hind, a female deer. The narrator himself is trying to abandon the hunt, acknowledging the futility of his labour that this hind is beyond his reach. Indeed, he is “wearied” from the “vain travail,” the useless work of the hunt; he has begun to realize the worthlessness of this pointless task that has irritated him to the point of sickness. He laments in the fourth line that he is the last of the pursuers, the one “that farthest cometh behind.” In the second stanza, the narrator states that he cannot take his “wearied mind ... from the deer.” She keeps fetching her attention and simultaneously slips away from him and desert him in his continuous chase. She continues to flee from him and he follows her fainting. Nevertheless, he is ultimately forced to indeed abandon the chase, as she is too fast and all that he can catch is the wind that rises after she passes. He is in a pensive mood after being spurned by her as the task of engaging her is as inconsequential as trying to hold wind in a net. In sum, the first eight lines, the octave, state the problem of the writer’s wasted hunt. In the closing sestet, the invitation initially offered by the narrator to whoever wishes to hunt this particular hind is partly rescinded. In the following line, the narrator states that he will remove any doubt about the wisdom of doing so. Just as his hunt was in vain, so would be those of other hunters. He warns them that the female deer wears in diamond lettering a collar around her neck that clarifies that she is not to be touched or possessed by any hunter for she belongs to the royal of the land. The concluding couplet notes that the collar reads “Noli me tangere,” or “Touch me not” in Latin. Thus, the first part of the warning is “Touch me not, for Caesar’s I am.” According to legend, long after the ancient Roman emperor Caesar’s death, white stags were found wearing collars on which were inscribed the words “Noli me tangere; Caesaris sum,” or “Touch me not; I am Caesar’s.” The first part of that phrase, “Noli me tangere,” is also a quotation from the Vulgate Bible, from John 20:17, when Christ tells Mary Magdalene, “Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father.” In the final line, the warning on the collar continues; the deer herself declares that while she

appears tame, holding her is dangerous, as she is wild.

Wyatt is not talking about actual hunting. He is talking about the trials and tribulations in the course of love, ardency of love, courtship and the like. Here he realises that he should not touch the dear otherwise he will get killed. This love poem expresses the frustration of a earnest lover, the pang of separation that he puts up with after his beloved has become the royal property and the love affair that has remained unrequited.

## 12.12 GLOSSARY

Examples of figures of speech in the poem are the following:

Line 1: ... Metaphor: comparison of a woman to a hind (female deer)

Line 1: ... Alliteration: Who solist to hunt, I know where is an hind

Line 3: ... Alliteration: so sore

Line 5: ... Alliteration: Yet may I by no means my wearied mind

Line 8: ... Metaphor: comparison of the task of catching and winning the woman to catching wind with a net.

Line 14: ... Paradox: And wild for to hold, though I seem tame.  
Whose – whosoever, whoever

List – desires, wishes

Hunt – chase to catch or capture

An hind – female deer and metaphor for Ann Boleyn  
Helas –  
alas in French

Vain travail – futile labour, useless labour or efforts

Wearied – greatly tired

Sore – painful, aching, causing distress

I am of them – I am at the back of the hunting party

Farthest – at the greatest distance

By no means – certainly

My wearied – dear – He can't draw his thoughts away from this dear lady.

Fleeth – run fast

Afore – before

Leave off – to give up, to abandon

Since – wind – to get a hold of this hind is like trying to hold the wind in a net Graven –  
engraved

In letters plain – in clear words Fair

neck – beautiful neck

No limetangere – Latin, “Do not touch me”

Ceaser – a Roman emperor

Wild for to hold, though... tame – it's a paradox. (though I seem easy to  
control, I am wild for the hunter to control me)

## 12.13 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

- 1) In “Whoso List to Hunt,” the speaker's stated reason for stopping his pursuit is \_\_\_\_\_.
    - a) Disgust
    - b) Jealousy
    - c) Boredom
    - d) Exhaustion
  - 2) The image of futility Wyatt uses in “Whoso List to Hunt” is \_\_\_\_\_.
    - a) Chasing a deer
    - b) Engraving a necklace
    - c) Catching the wind in a net
    - d) Returning to Ceaser what is his
  - 3) “And wild for to hold, though I seem tame.” \_\_\_\_\_.
    - a) Satire
    - b) Antithesis
    - c) Caricature
    - d) Understatement
- In Wyatt's “Whoso List to Hunt” the word “list” means \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a) Hates
  - b) Wants
  - c) Travels
  - d) Pretends

4)

5) In the sestet of "Whoso List to Hunt" the speaker addresses \_\_\_\_\_.

- |             |             |
|-------------|-------------|
| a) Ceaser   | b) The wind |
| c) The deer | d) A Lover  |

### 12.14 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- 1) Discuss the themes of the sonnet "Whoso List to Hunt" by Sir Thomas Wyatt.
- 2) What is an allegory? How can you say that "whoso list to hunt" is an allegory by Sir Thomas Wyatt.
- 3) "Whoso list to hunt" is essentially a love poem. Do you agree?
- 4) Give the short introduction of Thomas Wyatt's "whoso list to hunt".

Answer : Sir Thomas Wyatt's sonnet 'Whoso List to Hunt' is one of the earliest sonnets in all of English literature. What follows is the poem, followed by a brief introduction to, and analysis of, the poem's language and imagery—as well as its surprising connections to King Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. Wyatt (1503-1542) probably wrote 'Whoso List to Hunt' sometime during the 1530s, and the poem was published in the 1550s after his death. This sonnet is a loose translation of a poem by the fourteenth-century Italian poet Petrarch, who had been the first major poet to use the form (though Petrarch did not in fact invent the sonnet; we've discussed the origins of the sonnet [here](#)). Petrarch left such a mark on the sonnet that one of the most famous sonnet forms is still often referred to as the 'Petrarchan sonnet'. Such a poem is fourteen lines long and is divided into two 'chunks' (to use a not very technical term), an eight-line section (called an 'octave') and a six-line section (a 'sestet').

However, Wyatt alters Petrarch's original in a number of key ways, including the rhyme scheme for that sestet (Petrarch's original sonnet did not end with a couplet). The poem might be summarised thus: the speaker addresses the world, claiming that if anyone should choose ('list') to go hunting, the speaker knows of a hind (female deer), but the speaker must count himself out of the chase.

- 5) What is the historical and biographical content in "Whoso List to Hunt" written by Wyatt?

Answer: "Whoso List to Hunt" is held to be Wyatt's imitation of "Rime 190," written by Petrarch, a fourteenth-century Italian poet and scholar. In "Whoso List to Hunt," Wyatt describes a hunt wherein a deer is pursued and ultimately owned by the royal who owns the land. Scholars generally believe that the poem is an allegory referring to Anne Boleyn's courtship by King Henry VIII, such that when Wyatt speaks of the deer as royal property not to be hunted by others, he is acknowledging that Anne has become the property of the King alone. Wyatt was said to have been interested in Anne—and may have been her lover—but would have withdrawn as a suitor after the King made clear his wish to claim her.

### 12.15 ANSWER KEY (MCQs)

1. d
2. a
3. b
4. b
5. a

### 12.16 LET US SUM UP

"Whoso List to Hunt" by Sir Thomas Wyatt explores the themes of unrequited love and the futility of pursuing something unattainable. The speaker compares his love pursuit to a failed hunt, highlighting the swiftness and untamable nature of his desired object often interpreted as his beloved Anne Boleyn.

### 12.17 SUGGESTED READING

- 1) Sonnet Sequences and Social Distinction in Renaissance England by Christopher Warley. Cambridge University Press. 2005



- 2) Sir Thomas Wyatt: Poems. Faber and Faber publications. 2008.
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SONNET

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**STRUCTURE**

- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Objectives & Outcome
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**13.1 INTRODUCTION**

Sir Philip Sidney was an influential English poet, courtier, and diplomat in the late 16th century, known for his contributions to literature and his passionate advocacy for Protestantism.

Sidney penned several major works of the Elizabethan era, including *Astrophel and Stella*, the first Elizabethan sonnet cycle, and *Arcadia*, a heroic prose romance. He was also known for his literary criticism *The Defense of Poesy*. Although he shared his writing with his close friends, he did not allow his work to be published during his lifetime.

## 13.2 OBJECTIVES & OUTCOME

The objective of this lesson is to introduce you to Sir Philip Sidney's life and works in particular his sonnet "O Grammar rules" so that you are able to explain and appreciate the summary, thematic concerns and the poet's style of writing sonnets.

## 13.3 AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Unleashing new ideas and new social, political and economic forces and displacing the spiritual and communal values of the Middle Ages, Renaissance came to England in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. It emerged under the influence of humanism whose pioneers included Sir Thomas More, John Colet, Roger Ascham, and Sir Thomas Elyot. They aimed at struggles over the purposes of education and curriculum reform. But the focus of education shifted from training for the Church to the general acquisition of "literature," in the sense both of literacy and of cultural knowledge. Although, England during sixteenth century had only Catholicism as the religion but the Protestant Reformation, with its emphasis on the authority of scripture and salvation by faith alone, came to England as a result of Henry VIII's insistence on divorcing his wife, Catherine of Aragon, against the wishes of the Pope. Henry declared himself supreme head of the Church of England and those who refused his supreme power, like Thomas More, were held guilty of treason and executed. Henry's son Edward VI was more firmly Protestant, whilst Mary I was a Catholic. Elizabeth I, though a Protestant, was cautiously conservative.

Being a female monarch in a male world, Elizabeth ruled England through the combination of skillful political strategy and authoritative command. Leading artists during her reign included the poet Edmund Spenser, the miniaturist Nicholas Hilliard, the well-known dramatist, William Shakespeare, the university wits and many more when England faced an invasion from Catholic Spain in 1588, Elizabeth appeared in person before her troops wearing a white gown and a silver breastplate; the incident testifies to her self-consciously theatrical command of the grand public occasion as well as her strategic appropriation of masculine qualities. By the 1590s, virtually everyone was aware that Elizabeth's life was nearing an end, and there was great anxiety surrounding the succession to the throne.

Aesthetically, Elizabethan literature encompasses delight in order and pattern conjoined with a profound interest in the mind and heart. In his *Defense of Poesy*, Sir

Philip Sidney argued that poetry's magical power to create perfect worlds was also a moral power, encouraging readers to virtue. The major literary modes of the Elizabethan period included pastoral, as exemplified in Marlowe's *The Passionate Shepherd to his Love*, and heroic/epic, as in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.

A permanent, free standing public theater in England dates only from 1567. There was, however, a rich and vital theatrical tradition, including interludes and mystery and morality plays. Around 1590, an extraordinary change came over English drama, pioneered by Marlowe's mastery of unrhymed iambic pentameter, or blank verse. The theaters had many enemies; moralists warned that they were nests of sedition, and Puritans charged that theatrical transvestism excited illicit sexual desires, both heterosexual and homosexual. Nonetheless, the playing companies had powerful allies, including Queen Elizabeth, and continuing popular support.

### 13.4 ABOUT THE POET

Regarded as the consummate Renaissance man, Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) was a prominent and highly influential literary figure, scholar, sonneteer and courtier of the Elizabethan period. His major works comprise *Astrophel and Stella*, *The Defence of Poesy*, and *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*. His *Astrophel and Stella* is revered as the finest Elizabethan sonnet cycle. His compassion for protestant made him advise Elizabeth I in a private letter (1579) against marrying the Duke of Anjou, Roman Catholic heir to the French throne.

Born in Kent to aristocratic parents—Sir Henry Sidney, the Lord Deputy of Ireland, and Mary Dudley, sister of the Earl of Leicester—Sidney received the financial, social, and educational privileges of the English nobility and was trained as a statesman. His schooling at the Shrewsbury School gifted him a lifelong friend, Fulke Greville, who is a renowned scholar and is known as Sidney's biographer. Due to an outbreak of plague, Sidney left the Christ's Church three years later without taking a degree. Sidney continued his education with a "Grand Tour" of continental Europe, learning about politics, languages, music, astronomy, geography, and the military. During this time he became acquainted with some of the most prominent European statesmen, scholars, and artists; he also became friends with the humanist scholar Hubert Languet, with whom he spent a winter in Germany. Sidney's correspondence with Languet is a valuable source of information about Sidney's life and career. Languet's censure of Catholicism and his espousal of Protestantism, as well as his attempts to encourage Queen Elizabeth

It is further this cause in England, are believed to have strongly influenced Sidney's religious and political convictions. After further travels, including through Hungary, Italy, and Poland, Sidney returned to England in 1575, where he promptly established himself as one of the Queen's courtiers. Although he pursued literary interests, associating with such prominent writers as Greville, Edward Dyer, and Edmund Spenser, Sidney's chief ambition was to embark on a career in public service. Aside from acquiring some minor appointments, he was never given an opportunity to prove himself as a statesman. Critics speculate that his diplomatic career was deliberately discouraged by Elizabeth, whose policy of caution in handling domestic and religious matters conflicted with Sidney's ardent support of Protestantism. In 1578 Sidney wrote and performed in, along with the Queen herself, an "entertainment," or pageant, entitled *The Lady of May*. He also began writing the first version of *Arcadia*. After writing a letter towards the end of 1579 which urged the Queen not to enter into a planned marriage with the Roman Catholic Duke of Anjou, heir to the French throne, Sidney found himself in strained relations with Elizabeth. Denied court duties, Sidney lived at the estate of his sister Mary Sidney Herbert, the Countess of Pembroke, and occupied himself with writing; probably in 1580 he completed the *Old Arcadia*, and began *The Defence of Poesie*; he began *Astrophel and Stella* around 1581. Also in 1581 Sidney took part in a performance for the Queen of the "entertainment" *The Four Foster Children of Desire*, which scholars believe was at least partially written by Sidney. In 1583 Sidney was knighted so that he might complete an assignment for the Queen. Sidney began a major revision of the *Arcadia* in 1584 and in the following year began work on a verse translation of the psalms, which was later finished by his sister. In 1585 he was appointed governor of Flushing, an area comprising present-day Belgium and the Netherlands, where the English were involved in the Dutch revolt against Spain. In 1586 he participated in a raid on a Spanish convoy at Zutphen in the Netherlands. Struck on the leg by a musketball, Sidney developed gangrene and died a few weeks later, just one month short of his thirty-second birthday. His death was marked with a lavish, ceremonial state funeral at St. Paul's cathedral in London.

Almost all his major works were republished posthumously. Although Sidney died before completing the *Arcadia* and requested on his deathbed that his manuscripts be burned, an edition, now referred to as the *New Arcadia*, was published in 1590 containing the revised chapters. Drawing one element of Italian pastoral romance and Greek prose epic, the plot of the *Arcadia* concerns two princes who embark on a quest for love in

the land of Arcadia, fall in love with two daughters of the Arcadian king, and eventually, after a series of mistaken identities and misunderstandings, marry the princesses. Elaborately plotted with a non-chronological structure, interspersed with poetry, and characterized by extensive alliteration, similes, paradoxes, and rhetorical devices, the *Arcadia* is artificial, extravagant, and difficult to read by modern standards. A printing of a composite *Arcadia* was made in 1593, comprising Books I-III of the *New Arcadia* and Books III-V of the *Old Arcadia*.

His love for Penelope, the twelve-year-old daughter of the Earl of Essex, resulted in his compilation of a series of sonnets addressed to the lady "Stella" - Sidney's name for Penelope. Most of "Stella" poems were not published but were, however, circulated in the form of manuscript. In these sonnets dedicated to Penelope, he calls himself "Astrophel". It is a sequence of 108 sonnets celebrating a hopeless love affair and appeared in printed form in the year 1591. It tells the story of Astrophel (also called Astrophil), his passion for Stella, her conditioned acceptance of his advances and, finally, his plea to be released from his obligation to her.

A preface by Thomas Nashe introduced it as 'the tragicomedy of love, performed by starlight, the argument, cruel chastity, the prolonged hope, the epilogue of despair'. The sequence of 108 sonnets and 11 songs has as its heroine Stella (Star). Punning use of the word 'rich' in sonnets 24, 35 and 37 invites the reader to identify her with Penelope Devereux, who became Lady Rich on her marriage in 1581. She is courted by Astrophil (Starlover). He makes a confined list of 16th-century poetic conventions and styles in sonnet no. 6. He debates the claims of wit and will, reason and passion.

An *Apologie for Poetrie* was published by Henry Olney without authorization early in 1595. William Ponsonby, who had registered *The Defence of Poesie* late in 1594, gained all of Olney's copies. *The Defence of Poesie* responds to Stephen Gosson's *School of Abuse* (1579), which charges that modern poetry exerts an immoral influence on society by presenting lies as truths and instilling unnatural desires in its readers. Sidney answered Gosson's invective by asserting that the poet provides a product of his imagination which does not pretend to be a literal fact and therefore cannot present lies. Sidney declares that the purpose of poetry is to instruct and delight.

### **13.5 SIR PHILIP SIDNEY**

Sir Philip Sidney as one of the most important Renaissance poets of England,

Because of his famous essay, "The Defense of Poesy," Sidney is also perhaps one of the ten or so most famous authors in British history. Importantly, Sidney is the one poet we will study who was of nobility. He was a knight in Queen Elizabeth's court. An adventurous and thrill-seeking knight, he became famous for his involvement in battles and espionage. All of his life he sought heroic action, wanting to be in the thick of things, which made Queen Elizabeth cautious about him. So Sidney was a very well-connected courtier, who knew about life of the court and such experiences as courtly love first-hand. Having access to University education, he also was very passionate about literature and learning, and encouraged such famous authors as Spenser.

Although the sonnet as a poetic form evolved in thirteenth and fourteenth century Italy with poets like Petrarch, it became most famous as the dominant poetic tradition in sixteenth century Renaissance England. Poets like Sidney, Spenser and Shakespeare wrote well-crafted sonnets. But their sonnets were not just separate poems written here and there. They wrote their sonnets in cycles, a lifetime of sonnets combining to form along narrative. Sonnet cycles were very long: Sidney's has more than 100 sonnets. Shakespeare's is 147 sonnets long.

The sonnet is a very crafted and difficult structure. Generally, sonnets are all fourteen lines long, each line in iambic pentameter, and each poet using a particular rhyme scheme that remains consistent through the whole sonnet cycle. The ability to write so many excellent sonnets within such a strenuous structure made the sonnet cycle one of the major Renaissance triumphs. They were seen and admired with the same awe and respect as a symphony, or a cathedral. And it was even more admired in England as an example of their greatness, fostering cultural pride that began to grow during this time when England is trying to edge forward as a super-power in the world.

Sidney's sonnet *Astrophil and Stella*, chronicles the poet, a knight named Astrophil, in the middle of an affair of courtly love with a lady already taken, *Stella*. We hear the poet's thoughts and see his experience as he suffers miserably in his futile attempt to win *Stella's* love, a love he desires but a love he also knows he could never realize. So we get all of the mental arguments the Astrophil makes with himself, where he tries to justify his love, or when he tries to bend the love he feels for *Stella* into something virtuous. In the end, we get a portrait of a poet in deep anguish, struggling with unrequited love like someone being slowly roasted over coals. Readers have

debated for centuries as to whether the portrait of Astrophil is meant to be taken seriously, and that we should have pity for him, or if the portrait is ludicrous, and we are supposed to laugh at him and judge his emotions and actions.

### **13.6 INTRODUCTION TO THE SONNET**

The sonnet uses allegorical pseudonyms Astrophel (star-lover) with a pun on his own name Philip and Stella (star) who is meant to be a substitute for a married lady at court, Penelope Rich with whom Sidney was hopelessly in love. Written in Petrarchan rhyme that interlock, creating couplets embedded in quatrains (pattern-ABBA, ABBA), its Volta (a turn in a sonnet) is marked by an impromptu (unplanned) couplet introducing a new rhyme scheme before reverting back to the Petrarchan quatrain i.e. deed.

Here the lover attempts to use grammar rules and wordplay to convince his beloved Stella to accept his proposal. But she continues to reject his wishes. Stella's rejection of Astrophel's amorous advances saddens him. But her negative statement twice allows him to use grammar rules to his advantage. Thus, the lover claims that Stella's negative exclamation is actually an invitation. Astrophel has asked Stella for the thing desired which she ever denies and she answered "No" "No". The lover (Astrophel) pounces upon her negative assertion and asserts that she really has granted his request.

Structurally, this is an Italian sonnet. The octave describes Astrophel's humble petition of his powerful desire and Stella's reaction. The sestet begins with Astrophel invoking his muse to sing praises and appealing to heaven not to envy him in his triumph. Heaven and Grammar both should, he asserts, recognize and confirm with him that, by repeating her "no" Stella has by all rules and "yes" to his desire.

### **13.7 PARAPHRASE OF THE SONNET**

Lines 1-8

The sonnet opens with an address to Grammar. The lover, Astrophel requests Grammar to project his virtues and rules and make his young Dove (Stella) understand the rules of Grammar with the effort of her own practical wisdom. Without looking face to face at her, casting his eyes low with a tinge of humility and seriousness, fortitude and vigor, he desires together love. In spite of his strong desires, she rejects his advances and continues to deny him. Like the skies which get brighter with the light of Venus, he



expresses a flash of joy in his heart by the use of “no” twice by his beloved.

Lines 9-14

Requesting the Muse, Goddess of poetry, the poet invites her to sing the song of praise or triumph. At the same moment, he urges Heaven not to feel envious of his achievement or victory; and uses Grammar for achieving what he desires. According to Latin grammatical rules, a double negative results in the meaning of the sentence as an affirmative. He believes and is sure that Stella's negative exclamation i.e., the use of “no” twice in her statement is actually a provocation, an invitation to him to make love to her. By making the use of Grammar, he wishes to possess his beloved. Employing the tricks and tools of grammatical rules, he cancels the pessimistic approach of a negative asserting that the double negative is basically a positive. The repetition is merely to put an emphasis so that the lover doesn't lose hope and keep trying.

### **13.8 SUMMARY OF THE SONNET**

The sonnet “O Grammar rules, On how your virtue shows” is an Italian sonnet composed of fourteen lines. Here, Astrophel, the lover, urges the Grammar to assist his beloved, Stella, comprehend the grammatical rules with her own endeavor and intellectuality. In other words, he wants Grammar to use his powers and wisdom in helping Astrophel win his beloved, Stella.

Although he has been making attempts to win her but they all go in vain as she continues to reject his advances of romantic love. With all his intense and earnest efforts, he time and again makes requests to his beloved to accept his advances but she resists and reflects her unwillingness for the same. In spite of her unfavorable reaction, he never gives up and continues the hunt. This shows his adamant and stubborn behavior as he still awaits her to surrender and agree to his proposal.

Once she feels so irritated by his lustful behavior that she strongly rejects his amorous advances with “no, no”. The lover, Astrophel, uses grammar to his advantage. According to Latin grammatical rules, a double negative translates into an affirmation. Thus Stella's negative exclamation is taken as an invitation by Astrophel who is using all tricks and tools at his disposal to convince Stella to acquiesce to his desires. He feels happy that his beloved's “no, no” has made an affirmative invitation to him.

### **13.9 GLOSSARY**

Grammarrules-GrammarrulesthepoemsspeakstheLatinrules,thechief causeofchildren's headaches in the Grammar schools.

Virtues-Goodqualities

Awful- Afeelingoffearcombinedwithfearorwonder.

Young Dove- The poet's beloved Stella.

PerceptsWise-PracticalWisdom.

Hergrant tome-tohelpimwinhisbeloved.

Heartmosthigh-risingexcitement,withseriousness,determinationandenergy Eyes  
most low- with all his humility.

Icrav'dthething-Iaskedforsomethingearnestly,expressedastrongdesire for something.

Whichevershedenies- shecontinuestorejecthisadvances.

She lightning love, displaying-theskieswiththe lightofthe Venus(second planetofthesolarsystem)getsbrighter.Inthesameway,thepoetexperiences a flash of joy in his heart bythe use of "no" twice by hisbeloved.

Muse-GoddessofPoetry

Paen-songofpraise ortriumph

Hightriumphing-gloriousvictoryorsuccess

Confirm- establish the truth

Nay- no

Twonegativeaffirm-adoublenegativetranslates intoanaffirmative.

### 13.10 MULTIPLECHOICEQUESTIONS (MCQs)

1. WhichItalianpoetgreatlyinfluencedSidney'ssonnets?\_\_\_\_\_
  - a. GiacomodaLentini
  - b.GiovanniBoccaccio
  - c.FrancescoPetrarch
  - d.Dante
2. 'OGrammarrules,Onowyourvirtueshowsisasonnetfrom\_\_\_\_\_.

- a. Astrophel and Stella                      b. Amorreti
  - c. Tottel's Miscellany                      d. None of the above.
3. The sonnet 'O Grammer rules, Onow your virtues shows' by Sir Philip Sidney explores Astrophel's despair over the unrequited love, his attempts to woo Stella and to rationalize in his mind the virtue of his \_\_\_\_\_ love.
- a. Selfish                                      b. Futile
  - c. Selfless                                      d. Deep and passionate
4. Philip Sidney's Astrophel and Stella is an English sonnet sequence composed in \_\_\_\_\_
- a. 1580                                      b. 1560
  - c. 1570                                      d. 1555
5. Sir Philip Sidney in his sequence Astrophel and Stella talks about his love for Stella and defines her as the \_\_\_\_\_ of his life.
- a. Moon                                      b. Light
  - c. Star                                      d. Guide

### 13.11 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Why does Sidney personify grammar in this poem? How is grammar figured – what kind of 'person' does it seem to be? How does Sidney use grammar in connection with Stella?
2. Give the central idea/theme of the sonnet 'O Grammer rules, Onow your virtues shows'.
3. What do the words *lo* and *paean* mean? Are they one syllable or two-syllable words?
4. Explain: For late with heart most high, with eyes most low;  
I crave that thing which ever she denies.
5. Why does Astrophel attempt to use grammatical rules?

Answer: Astrophel attempts to use grammar rules and wordplay to convince his beloved Stella to acquiesce (to accept reluctantly but without protest) to his desires. He has a violent and passionate love for Stella but

Stella has outrightly rejected his advances. The lover is attempting to justify his lustful behavior. Stella's denial and rejection of his amorous advances would not enable him to gain his desire and it would count as a rape if she does despite her wishes. But the sexual encounter would not bear a rape if Stella gives an affirmative response (even if by misapplied grammatical rules).

6. Explain: Heavens envy not at my high triumphing.

Answer: In this line the lover appeals to heaven not to envy in his triumph or success, he has succeeded in making his beloved Stella agree to love him since her use of "no" twice amounts to an affirmation as per one rule of Latin grammar.

### 13.12 ANSWER KEY (MCQs)

1. c
2. a
3. d
4. a
5. c

### 13.13 LET US SUM UP

Sir Philip Sidney's poem "O Grammar rules" (Sonnet 63 from *Astrophil and Stella*) playfully celebrates how grammar rules can be used to interpret a negative situation as positive. Sonnet 63 explores the speaker's (Astrophil) joy at Stella's eventual acceptance of his love, which initially was met with a negative response. Astrophil, while heartbroken, finds a way to interpret Stella's "No" as a "Yes" by using the grammatical rule that two negatives can affirm a positive. The poem, particularly the lines "For Grammar says (O this dear Stella's 'Nay!') / For Grammar says (to Grammar, who says 'Nay?') / 'That in one speech, two negatives affirm.'" demonstrate how grammar can be used to find a positive meaning in a negative situation, in this case, Stella's initial refusal.

### 13.14 SUGGESTED READING

1. The Broadview Anthology of Sixteenth-Century Poetry and

Prose edited by Marie Loughlin, Sandra Bell, Patricia Brace. Broadview press. 2012.

2. The miscellaneous works of Sir Philip Sidney, knight: with a life of the author and illustrative notes by William Gray. D.A. Talboys. 1829.
3. Sixteenth Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology by Gordon Braden. John Wiley and Sons. 2008,
4. Sir Philip Sidney: Selected Prose and Poetry. University of Wisconsin press. 1983.

*RALPH ROISTER DOISTER: NICHOLAS UDALL*

## **STRUCTURE**

- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Objectives & Outcome
- 14.3 What is Drama?
- 14.4 Overview of Drama
- 14.5 Influence of the Renaissance on The Sixteenth Century Drama
- 14.6 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 14.7 Answer Key
- 14.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.9 Examination Oriented Questions
- 14.10 Suggested Reading

### **14.1 INTRODUCTION**

Drama comes from Greek words meaning “to do” or “to act.” A drama, or play, is basically a story acted out. And every play, whether it is tragedy or comedy, ancient or modern—tells its story through characters in situations that imitate human life. *Ralph Roister Doister*, a farce is the first comedy written entirely in English by Nicholas Udall around 1552.

### **14.2 OBJECTIVES & OUTCOME**

The objective of this lesson is to offer an analytical and historical introduction to the genre of Drama. The objective of this lesson is to provide you an outline of English theatre in the sixteenth century, and an analysis of the influence of Greek and Roman Classics and Humanism on the sixteenth century theatre. So that after reading the lesson you have a clear view of the

history of drama.

### **14.3 WHAT IS DRAMA?**

In literature, the word Drama defines a genre, or style of writing. Drama is a play that can be performed for theatre, radio or even television. These plays are usually written out as a script, or a written version of a play that is read by the actors but not the audience.

This is where theatre comes in. Drama, as in a play, is meant to be performed on a stage in front of an audience at the theatre. So, drama refers to the script, while the word theatre is the performance of the script.

### **14.4 OVERVIEW OF DRAMA**

Actually, drama, as in plays and the theatre, has changed over time. The word itself comes from the Greek word meaning 'action,' and it's with the Greeks and Romans that we start to define classical drama. In fact, classical drama was more than just acting out a story. These plays were highly symbolic and included music, dance, poetry and audience participation.

As Christianity spread, theatre took a religious turn, which opened the door to the morality plays of the Medieval Period. In Europe, during the 15th and 16th centuries, morality plays, which featured a hero who must overcome evil, were allegorical in nature.

An allegory is a literary device where characters or events represent or symbolize other ideas and concepts. In the case of the morality plays, the hero represented mankind. The other characters served as personifications of many things, including the seven deadly sins, death, virtues and even angels and demons - anything that wanted to take over mankind's soul. In fact, this theme has transcended through many dramatic periods. Also, the fact that these plays were performed by professional actors makes them a

transition between the classical drama and the plays we see today.

Of course, today we have drama popping up all over the place. There is drama for what we call the theatre, both the stage and at the movies. Staged theatre is acted out live in front of an audience. The movie theatre is a different story. This is drama that has been acted out to perfection and is presented as a recording to a live audience. The same goes for television, but on a smaller screen.

Radio is a bit different, however. Most of us don't listen to many radio dramas, but if we did, we would know the actors are using their voices and probably some sound effects. Sometimes we see these elements within audio books. In the case of the Harry Potter series, the narrator, Jim Dale, goes to great lengths to create different voices for each of the characters, as if there were many actors playing the different parts. While we might not actually see the actors acting, we do see them in our mind's eye, and we use our imagination to play out the story that we hear.

#### **14.5 INFLUENCE OF THE RENAISSANCE ON THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY DRAMA**

The dawn of Renaissance revived the ancient classical learning and its impact was visible on the English drama in the middle of sixteenth century. Previously it had a pretty strong native tradition of drama rooted in liturgical drama but with the advent of Reformation, the focus from saint's life started shifting towards morality plays and interludes, as both Morality plays and Interludes offered didactic instruction with entertainment unlike Miracle plays that were static in their teachings. Though Morality plays were meant to install goodness in mankind, but their message wasn't fixed to the teachings of the Bible. These included the personal ideas of the author towards political, religious or moral matters that he incorporated into the morality plays. It was a much more flexible form than the earlier Mystery play. The Interludes included dramatic entertainments of diverse of the popular theatres.



Interludes were in great demand and were provided by professional actors. These actors contributed to the Queen's pleasure and had need of practice in order to be worthy to play before her. They first played in London in the courtyards of certain inns and then, some of them built, in 1576, their first theatre, outside the city on wasteland in Shoreditch.

In the meanwhile, London enjoyed more select performances. The Inns of Court were a home for the drama of classical tendencies, and a connecting link between the stage of the universities and that of the popular theatres.

To ensure the supply of worthy actors to perform in front of the Queen, the choristers or children of the Chapel Royal were trained to perform plays, both those specially written for them by the master of the Chapel Royal, and others. These boys, both singers and actors, performed for the public as well as for the court. Their example was followed by other London schools—St. Paul's, Westminster, and Merchant Taylors'—where the most gifted pupils were trained to act and were proud to contribute to the royal diversions.

Humanism renewed the interest in the study of Greek and Roman classics. Drama became a major means for the teaching of Latin in schools in Britain. The comedies of Terence provided the first and probably the most extensive study of drama for the Renaissance schoolboy. Initially the commentators treated the plays as purely academic texts but as the sixteenth century moved on the plays began to be performed in schools and universities. This was assisted by the development of residential colleges in the universities. Frederick S. Boas notes in *University Drama in Tudor Age* that there are recorded productions of Terence in 1510 and 1516 at King's Hall Cambridge and Plautus in 1519. Boas further states that Plautus's *Miles Gloriosus* was produced in Cambridge about 1522. In 1545, St John's and Queen's College Cambridge mandated two plays per year and in 1560 Trinity College ordered the performance of five plays per year. In Christ Church Oxford, it was established that Christmas festivities would include two comedies and two tragedies each year. It is likely that the schools followed

suit, particularly given they were the training ground for privileged young men moving on to University which they did at around the age of fourteen (16-17).

When Nicholas Udall was the canon of St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle, he wrote *Ralph Roister Doister* around 1554, which marked the emergence of English comedy from the medieval morality plays, interludes, and farces. It was intended for public performance by his pupils. It was highly influenced by Terence and Plautus but instead of making the Windsor boys act Plautus and Terence, Udall wrote for them, according to the laws of the classical drama, a comedy in five acts, inspired by Latin comic plays. Udall borrowed some characters from ancients and took others straight from English life making *Ralph Roister Doister*, a part of an elite theatre. This type of theatre was developing particularly in schools and universities where structure and characterization were more influenced by classical models than by the popular theatre. On the other hand this emerging theatre drew from the popular theatre in its use of vernacular and an intention to instruct. The movement towards a youth oriented morality drama, after the Reformation, developed into a distinct dramatic type in which education of the adolescent became the central focus, also influenced *Ralph Roister Doister*. Many of these plays were written in and performed in schools, initially on the continent. They were thought to correct or supplement the perspective of Roman comedy by balancing Terentian techniques with the morality form.

#### 14.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

1. Which of the following best describes "theater"? \_\_\_\_\_

- a) the words spoken by characters
- b) the place where the play is performed
- c) a story that is written to be acted out
- d) objects used in a play to bring it to life

2. Speech between characters in a play \_\_\_\_\_

- |             |               |
|-------------|---------------|
| a) Dialogue | b) Lines      |
| c) Speech   | d) Directions |

3. The person who writes the play is called \_\_\_\_\_

a) Writer

b) Author

c) Playwright

d) Speaker

4. A set is made of \_\_\_\_\_ that are on-stage.

a) Lights

b) Props

c) Costumes

d) Dialogues

5. The \_\_\_\_\_ is the main character in a drama.

a) Protagonist

b) Antagonist

c) Extra

d) Poor Girl or Boy

#### **14.7 ANSWERKEY (MCQs)**

1.c 2.a 3.c 4.b 5.a

#### **14.8 LET US SUM UP**

Drama as a literary genre offers a unique challenge to the reader. Created to be performed, to become a spectacle, drama is based on imitative action and gesture. The written works of the theater present the reader with only one dimension of what, when fully realized, becomes a multi-sensory experience. Western drama, the dramatic literature of the Western World of Europe and North America, has its origins in ancient Greek theater.

Renaissance drama can be divided into two distinct categories: private performances that took place in indoor (often aristocratic) halls and public, open-air performances. Of historical significance, this period saw the rise of the professionalization of theater troupes with the craft of acting and the skill of dramatic production (staging, costuming, etc.) becoming more organized and regulated, including the formation of professional membership groups or guilds. In Italy, drama returned to an appreciation

of classical staging (Neoclassicism ) and the development of Commedia della Arte , a style of drama based on four principal characters, each with a fixed costume and mask. Spanish drama, likewise experienced a golden age and French theater shared in a neo-classical revival. In England, large public theaters became profitable, most notably the Globe in London, and a bounty of playwrights from William Shakespeare to Ben Johnson and Christopher Marlowe, among many others, forged lasting reputations.

#### **14.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Define Drama.
2. Comment on the influence of the renaissance on the sixteenth century drama.

#### **14.10 SUGGESTED READING**

Worthington W.B.; *Drama Between Poetry and Performance*. Delhi: John Wiley & Sons, 2010.

Styan J.L.; *Drama: A Guide to the Study of Plays*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2000.

Nicholas Udall: *Ralph Roister Doister*

## STRUCTURE

- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 Objectives & Outcome
- 15.3 Life and works of Nicholas Udall
- 15.4 *Ralph Roister Doister*
- 15.5 Principal Characters
- 15.6 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 15.7 Answer Key
- 15.8 Glossary
- 15.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 15.10 Examination Oriented Questions
- 15.11 Suggested Reading

### 15.1 INTRODUCTION

Nicholas Udall (or Uvedale[1] Udal, Woodall, or other variations[2]) (1504 – 23 December 1556) was an English playwright, cleric, schoolmaster, the author of *Ralph Roister Doister*, generally regarded as the first comedy written in the English language.[3]

Nicholas Udall, a schoolmaster and playwright, intended the play *Ralph Roister Doister* for performance by his students. It was first published in 1567, eleven years after Udall's death. The work reflects the burgeoning English theatrical tradition of the mid-16th century. Set in London, the play cleverly combines elements of Roman comedy with English social satire to poke fun at social climbers, braggarts, and the emerging social anxieties surrounding wealthy widows.

### 15.2 OBJECTIVES & OUTCOME

The present lesson offers an analytical and historical introduction to the play *Ralph Roister Doister*. *Ralph Roister Doister* was written by the English playwright, Nicholas Udall, probably between 1551 and 1553. This lesson also provides the readers with an introduction to the author and the play.

### 15.3 LIFE AND WORKS OF NICHOLAS UDALL

### 15.3.1 BIOGRAPHY

Nicholas Udall, an English schoolmaster, translator and playwright, was born about Christmas 1504 in Holy Rood parish, Southampton. Nothing is known of his family, although there is almost a certain connection to the prosperous Uvedale family of Hampshire. The name was probably pronounced Oovedale, as it appears as Yevedale, Owdall, Woodall, with other variants. He latinized it as Udallus, and thence anglicized it as Udall. Although his importance as a translator should not be underestimated, Udall's most enduring reputation is as a dramatist. The one extant play that is certainly by him is *Ralph Roister Doister*, universally recognized as a seminal text of early English comedy, fusing elements from Latin comedy together with a native English tradition.

Udall was educated at Winchester College and was admitted to Corpus Christi College, Oxford, at 16 years of age where he became an exponent of Lutheran views. In May 1524 he received his Bachelor of Arts degree, and stayed on as a lecturer of Greek and logic. However, in the years 1527–8 Udall was among those accused of being involved in a ring of distributors of banned Lutheran works to Oxford undergraduates. There is no certain record of punishment for Udall on this occasion, though he left Oxford in 1529 and nothing certain is known of his movements for the next few years.

Udall was certainly in London by 31 May 1533, the date of the pageant celebrating the coronation of Anne Boleyn, since Udall, with his friend John Leland, produced interludes for the coronation that were staged at Cornhill and Leadenhall. In February 1534 Udall published his first important work, *Floures for Latine Spekyng*, a Latin textbook that was reprinted several times over the next fifty years, and was a standard school text over the same period.

In June 1534 he was appointed as headmaster of Eton, where he was known to be a brutal teacher and described as a keen flogger. In 1541, Udall was committed to Marshalsea prison after being questioned in his involvement with a theft at the school. In September 1542 Udall returned to public prominence with the publication of his *Apophthegmes*. The book was a translation of selections from Erasmus's anthology, with Udall's own additions and

comments. In 1543 Udall was appointed to lead a group of scholars, under the patronage of Queen Katherine Parr, in the task of translating The Paraphrase of Erasmus upon the New Testament. Udall's own personal contribution appears to include translating the paraphrase of Luke, and perhaps also of Matthew and Acts.

The accession of Edward VI was good for Udall, who by 1548 had established a reputation as a Protestant propagandist. He is credited with composing a manuscript tract, an Answer to the Articles of the Commoners of Devonshire and Cornwall, when they rose in rebellion in the summer of 1549 against the First Prayer Book of Edward VI. In 1550 Udall was granted special privileges by the Privy Council to print a translation of the tract on the Eucharist by Pietro Martire Vermigli (known as Peter Martyr). This translation, A Discourse or Traicteise of Petur Martyr, appeared in 1550. His activities in 1551 include contributions to books of Latin elegies on Martin Bucer and on Henry and Charles Brandon, two sons of the widowed duchess of Suffolk. He also worked on revisions and expansions for a second edition of The Paraphrase of Erasmus, which was printed the following year. In December he was appointed canon of St George's Chapel at Windsor Castle. Quickly, Udall was once again involved in controversy, since in July 1552 the dean and canons of Windsor were visited by a royal commission investigating allegations of theft of jewels and vessels. Udall himself was exonerated, as he had been away preaching when the sales took place, but several of his colleagues were punished. During this period he prepared for the press *Compendiosa totius anatomiae delineatio* (1552), an English edition of the anatomical textbook of Thomas Gemini. Udall, a Protestant, was able to survive the reign of Queen Mary and finished his career as headmaster of Westminster School, a post which he held until the school's reabsorption under Mary into the refounded monastery of Westminster. Udall died about a month after this event, and the burial of 'Nicholas Yevedale' is recorded in the registers of St Margaret's, Westminster, under the date 23 December 1556. Nicholas Udall's legacy is defined by his work, *Ralph Roister Doister*, and its status as the first English comedy. Udall seamlessly fused together many of the foundations of classic Latin comedy with uniquely English elements, creating a work that will go on to inspire playwrights such as William Shakespeare. Nicholas Udall's role as an educator played a

large part in making *Ralph Roister Doister* possible. In 1534 Udall published *Floures for Latine Spekynges*, a Latin textbook that examined many of the works of Terence. Udall's study of Terence, along with working with Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus*, led to his embodiment of the five-act form of the Roman tradition in his *Ralph Roister Doister*, bringing the classic form of comedy to the English stage. Though he borrows many aspects of his play from Plautus' work, such as the braggart, womanizing character of *Ralph Roister Doister* and a parasitic companion that nudges him into action in Matthew Merigreek, Udall finds a way to add uniquely new and English aspects to the play. One of the most significant characters is the presence of the old nurse, Margery Mumblecrust, who becomes a part of the English dramatic tradition in her ancestors—most notably in the Nurse of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Udall also incorporates a setting unique to England, as well as comedic dialogue that is unique to its people.

Being a teacher, and also a student, of the Latin comedic tradition, Udall recognized the important role of comedy in the public sphere. In his prologue to *Ralph Roister Doister*, Udall states:

The wise poets long time heretofore, Under  
 merry comedies secrets did declare,  
 Wherein was contained very virtuous lore,  
 With mysteries and forewarnings very rare.  
 Such to write neither Plautus nor Terence did spare,  
 Which among the learned at this day bears the bell:  
 These with such other there indeed excel.

Always the teacher, Nicholas Udall shares the didactic nature of comedy at the onset of his play. He recognizes that “very virtuous lore” is spread to the audience under the guise of comedy, and understands the powerful potential of the genre. Comedy has the ability to appeal to people that may not otherwise be exposed to these lessons and finds a way to teach without seeming moralistic. Udall invokes Plautus and Terence, two of his biggest influences, as proof that “the wise poets” that write comedies take much care in providing



not “mysteries” or “forewarnings” in the text, but virtuous knowledge to the audience. While Udall’s play seems very frivolous, it too contains a didactic message for the audience. He portrays Dame Custance as a woman with strong morals and one that stands up for herself in the face of unjust accusations. Udall shows the dangers of following others whole-heartedly and how easily one can be taken advantage of by the guile of a parasite posing as a friend. The author of the comedy even shows how easily the meaning of a message can be misconstrued and the necessity of taking action in one’s own life in his satirizing the love letter present in the play. Nicholas Udall’s *Ralph Roister Doister* is an entertaining entrance into the world of English comedy and anyone who enjoys the comic genre in this language is indebted to his contributions to the English comic tradition.

### **15.3.2 MAJOR WORKS**

#### **TRANSLATIONS**

- *Apophthegme*, 1542
- *Floures of Terence* or *Floures for Latine Spekynges*, 1534
- *Paraphrases of Erasmus upon the New Testament*, 1545 (Udall wrote on Luke)
- *Compendiosa totius anatomiae delineation*, 1552 (Not only a translation, also expanded on the text)
- *A Discourse or Treatise of Petrus Martyr*, 1550 (Named as publisher)
- *Erasmus's Paraphrases of the Gospels*, 1551/2
- *Geminus's Anatomie* or *Compendiosa totius anatomiae delineation*, 1553

#### **PLAYS**

- *Placidus* or *St. Eustace*, 1534
- *Thersytes* or *Thersites*, 1537
- *Tragoedia de Papatu*, 1549 (probably; credited by John Bale)
- *Respublica*, 1553
- *Roister Doister* or *Ralph Roister Doister* or *Rauf Ruyster Duster*, 1554 (The one play that is certainly written by Udall and his most famous work)
- *Ezechias*, 1564 (Lost play performed for Queen Elizabeth on 8 August 1564 at Cambridge)

Misc.

- Interludes produced for the coronation of Anne Boleyn, 1533 (written with John Leland)
- Answer to the Articles of the Commoners of Devonshire and Cornwall, 1549 (credited but uncertain)

### ACTIVITY

1. Nicholas Udall was born in the year \_\_\_\_\_.
2. In June, 1534 Nicholas Udall was appointed as \_\_\_\_\_ of Eton.
3. In the year \_\_\_\_\_ Nicholas Udall was appointed to lead a group of scholars, under the patronage of Queen Katherine Parr.
4. Nicholas Udall's most enduring reputation is as a \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Nicholas Udall's famous play is \_\_\_\_\_.

### 15.4 RALPH ROISTER DOISTER

Udall's best-known work, *Ralph Roister Doister*, is regarded as a significant work in the development of English drama, among the first English plays to utilize a classical five-act structure and the first to apply that structure to a unified action following a classical design. Udall borrowed from classical writings in composing *Ralph Roister Doister*, adapting elements from Terence's *Eunuchus* and Plautus's *Miles Gloriosus*, and blending them with traditional English materials. This mixing of the vernacular with the classical also had a profound influence on later playwrights.

*Ralph Roister Doister* written by Nicholas Udall, was the first English comedy, although not printed until 1556, and probably written about 1541.

Roisterer is an old word for swaggerer or boaster; and the hero of this little five-act comedy is a good-natured fellow, fond of boasting of his achievements, especially what he has accomplished or might accomplish in love. The play concerns itself with his rather impertinent suit to Dame Christian Custance, "a widow with a thousand pound," who is already the betrothed of Gawin Goodluck. But as Gawin, a thrifty merchant, is away at sea, Ralph Roister Doister sees no reason why he should not try his luck. His confidant is Matthew Merrygreek, a needy humorist, who undertakes to be a go-between and gain the widow's good-will for Ralph. He tries to get some influence over the servants of Custance; and there is a witty scene with the three maids,—Madge Mumblecrust, Tibet Talkapace, and Annot Allface. The servants of Ralph

namely Harpax and Dobinet Doughty who have a considerable part in the play, and the latter complains rather bitterly that he has to run about so much in the interests of his master's flirtations.

Dame Custance, though surprised at the presumption of Ralph and his friend, at length consents to read a letter which he has sent her, or rather to have it read to her by Matthew Merrygreek. The latter, by mischievously altering the punctuation, makes the letter seem the reverse of what had been intended. Ralph is ready to kill the scrivener who had indited the letter for him, until the poor man, by reading it aloud himself, proves his integrity. While Dame Custance has no intention of accepting Ralph, his suit makes trouble between her and Gawin Goodluck, whose friend Sym Suresby, reports that the widow is listening to other suitors. There is much amusing repartee, several funny scenes, and in the end all ends well.

The Ralph Roister Doister is a drama consisting of five-act structure that describes the chronology of the story. However, in analyzing the plot, the writer prefers to apply the four-part designation of plays by the terms introduction, rising action, crisis, and conclusion. The designation, in a wider currency, is known as the largely self-explanatory terms of exposition, complication, and resolution. The major consideration of using the designation is because it suggests a broad pattern of action that applies to virtually all plays and does not imply a particular genre. They can be adapted to the five-plays though it is merely a four-part designation (Tennyson, 1967: 22-23). Actually, there is also a five-part designation that is suitable for a five-act drama, but it is only closely related to tragedy and not comedy. Since the Ralph Roister Doister is a comedy, the writer decides to use the four-part designation because according to Tennyson, it is the most flexible plot frame that does not imply a particular genre of drama. Moreover, the complete description of the plot in the Ralph Roister Doister is as follows.

### 15.5 PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

- Ralph Roister Doister, a well-to-do, cowardly braggart
- Matthew Merrygreeke, Roister Doister's hanger-on
- Dame Christian Custance, a well-to-do widow
- Gawin Goodluck, Dame Custance's fiancé
- Sym Suresby, Gawin Goodluck's friend

### 15.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

1. Nicholas Udall belongs to \_\_\_\_\_period
  - a. Middle
  - b. Renaissance
  - c. Jacobean
  - d. Restoration
2. The Frenchword Renaissance means \_\_\_\_\_

- a. Humanism
  - b. Rebirth
  - c. Old
  - d. Light
3. Morality play is a story that can be interpreted in multiple ways, making it a dramatic example of a(n) \_\_\_\_\_
- a. Didactic Poem
  - b. Philosophical Treatise
  - c. Comedy
  - d. Allegory
4. Interludes are considered to be a transition between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
- a. Medieval Morality Plays and Tudor Drama
  - b. Comedy and Tragedy
  - c. Comedy of Humors and Errors
  - d. Comedy of Manners and Errors
5. Ralph Roister Doister is considered to be written in \_\_\_\_\_
- a. 1523
  - b. 1524
  - c. 1533
  - d. 1554

### 15.6 ANSWERKEY (MCQs)

1.(b)2.(b)3.(d)4.(a)5.(d)

### 15.7 GLOSSARY

Speakers of English frequently take recourse to a number of pause-phrases which parenthetically indicate an individual's frame of mind - *I believe, you think, don't you know*: "The governor, I think, is not so tall" (such expressions are part of a larger category of sentence organizers called discourse markers).

Sixteenth century English used some older words in these types of phrases, and these words appear repeatedly in this play:

- 1. trow = to believe; examples: I trow, trow ye.
- 2. ween = to expect, think; example: I ween.
- 3. wot = to know; examples: I wot, I wot not.

Some other unusual words that Udall depends heavily on include the following:

4. warrant = guarantee, assure; used especially in phrases such as I warrant you, ie. “I guarantee it”, or “I assure you”.

5. wist = to know.

6. pastance = pastime, recreation.

7. use = to treat.

8. fet = to fetch.

Finally, we point out that the word and could be used to mean either “and” or “if”.

Udall uses and in both senses regularly.

9. mirth = entertainment which brings pleasure

10. interlude = originally used to describe a brief comic entertainment performed between acts of long mystery plays, but by the early 16th century interlude was employed to mean any stage play, especially one of a brief and light nature.

11. unfold = reveal, disclose.

12. recreation = amusement, pleasure.

13. honest = decent, not deserving of reproach.

14. recreates = refreshes.

13. voideth pensiveness = drives away sadness.

14. not hindering our wealth = not causing harm to our welfare.

15. of more and less = by the high and the low, ie. people of all ranks.

16. comeliness = propriety, decency.

17. good nature = (person of) virtuous character.

18. gainsay the same = deny this.

19. mysteries = truths (especially of a religious nature) or hidden meanings.

20. forewarnings = preventive admonishments.

21. rare = excellent, valuable.

22. Titus Maccius Plautus and Publius Terentius Afer = were Roman playwrights of the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.; their comic plays were models for later European comedy stage-works, and were familiar to all educated Englishmen

23. bears the bell = the lead sheep in the flock wears a bell; hence, “excels” or “leads”.

21: such other = others like them.

22. comedy was used to describe a stage play with a comic style and a happy ending, as contrasted with tragedy.

23. humour = temperament or inclination of character.

24. roisting = describing one who acts in a boisterous or uproarious manner

25. sort = type of person.

27: leave = permission.

28: for a certain space = for a while

29. hungry griping = a painfully clutching or voracious hunger.

30. by Him that bought us = an oath: “by Christ, who redeemed our sins”.

31 maketh us good cheer = to make one good cheer means “to gladly entertain one”.

32. hoddydodie = hoddydoddy, ie. fool or simpleton, or a short dumpy person.

33. hang on (his) sleeve = be dependent on.

34. meat = food.
35. shoot-anchor = ie. sheet-anchor, the largest anchor on a ship, normally used only in an emergency; hence, meaning “last resort”.
36. behoof = benefit, ie. liking.
37. to the hard = common expression meaning “completely up to” or “right up to”.
38. yea and nay = common formula describing alternating positive and negative assertions or vacillation in general.
39. nown = own, a corruption of “mine own”.
40. white = the use of white in phrases such as white son and white boy simply indicated a term of endearment.
41. in by the week = caught, in the snare, ie. in love.
42. sport anon = great entertainment shortly.
43. tarrieth = tarries, ie. waits.
44. lo = a vague interjection, similar to “oh!”
45. breast = breathe.
46. howbeit = however the case may be.
47. Gawin is a Scottish name, meaning “white hawk”.
48. Malkyn = a name for an effeminate or weak man.
49. warrant = assure.
50. rute = a reference to Brute, the legendary descendent of the Trojan hero Aeneas, and the man credited with founding England; brute hence is used to mean “hero” or “person of distinction”.
51. Alie Land = uncertain reference, but “Holy Land” has been suggested, in response to the mention of the Biblical heroes Goliath and Sampson; Farmer, however, tentatively suggests that Alie, or alye, means “kindred” or “neighbouring”, and Hazlitt, similarly, suggests “similar”, so that they propose the intended meaning of the clause to be “a hero from a similar land.”
52. lack = ie. be lacking for money or anything else.
53. a groat = a coin worth four-pence; used here to mean, “even the least amount of money in my possession.”
54. cast = reckoned, estimated.

### **15.8 LET US SUM UP**

Nicholas Udall’s legacy is defined by his work, *Ralph Roister Doister*, and its status as the first English comedy. Udall seamlessly fuses together many of the foundations of classic Latin comedy with uniquely English elements, creating a work that will go on to inspire playwrights such as William Shakespeare. Nicholas Udall’s role as an educator played a large part in making *Ralph Roister Doister* possible. In 1534 Udall published *Floures for Latine Spekyng*, a Latin textbook that examined many of the works of Terence. Udall’s study of Terence, along with working with Plautus’ *Miles Gloriosus*, led to his embodiment of

the five-act form of the Roman tradition in his *Ralph Roister Doister*, bringing the classic form of comedy to the English stage. Though he borrows many aspects of his play from Plautus' work, such as the braggart, womanizing character of *Ralph Roister Doister* and a parasitic companion that nudges him into action in Matthew Merigreek, Udall finds a way to add uniquely new and English aspects to the play. One of the most significant characters is the presence of the old nurse, Margery Mumblecrust, who becomes a part of the English dramatic tradition in her ancestors—most notably in the Nurse of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Udall also incorporates a setting unique to England, as well as comedic dialogue that is unique to its people.

### **15.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Write a brief note on the life and works of Nicholas Udall.
2. Name the works of Nicholas Udall.
3. Is *Ralph Roister Doister* a comedy or farce? Explain.

### **15.10 SUGGESTED READING**

Legouis, Emile, and Cazamian Louis François. *A History of English Literature: The Middle Ages and the Renaissance (650-1660)*. Dent, 2011.

Udall, Nicholas, et al. *Ralph Roister Doister, a Comedy*. Elibron Classics, 2005.

Nicholas Udall: *Ralph Roister Doister*

## STRUCTURE

- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Objectives & Outcome
- 16.3 Outline Summary of Ralph Roister Doister
- 16.4 Characters
- 16.5 Summary
- 16.6 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
- 16.7 Answer Key
- 16.8 Examination Oriented Questions
- 16.9 Glossary
- 16.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.11 Suggested Reading

### 16.1 INTRODUCTION

The play *Ralph Roister Doister* centers on Ralph Roister Doister, a pretentious and cowardly man who foolishly believes he is a romantic hero. The play blends the stock plot-elements and stock characters of the ancient Greek and Roman theatre with those of chivalric literature and the English mediaeval theatre.

### 16.2 OBJECTIVES & OUTCOME

The lesson's objective is to offer you a detailed summary along with characters and you can explain the play and the role of the characters besides answering for appreciate the comedy *Ralph Roister Doister*.

### 16.3 OUTLINE SUMMARY ALPH ROISTER DOISTER

The plot is simple. The artful sycophant and parasite Matthew Merrygreek convinces the foolish and vain Ralph Roister Doister to woo Dame Custance. She is affianced to Gawyn



Goodluck and rejects Ralph's advances. Dame Custance's constancy is questioned as Goodluck misconstrues the situation after hearing about it from his servant. Ralph, spurned by Custance, decides to march upon Custance's house and do battle, whereupon he is beaten by her women. In the end Custance's virtue is proven and there is reconciliation between the parties. The play is written in five acts. Acts 1 and 2 introduce the principal characters, Ralph Roister Doister a foolish braggart, and his "friend" Matthew Merrygreeke and the key narrative, the wooing of Dame Christian Custance, a widow. Act 3 begins with Ralph's suit to Custance and her responses are dramatically portrayed. Acts 3 and 4 depict Custance's fidelity as misperceived and Act 4 ends with Ralph's ludicrous attempt to get revenge because Custance has spurned him. Act 5 is the resolution with Custance's virtue resolved and reconciliation for the opposing parties.

Matthew Merrygreeke, a happy young rascal who likens himself to the grasshopper of the fable, often has fun and money at the expense of Ralph Roister Doister, a well-to-do, doltish young man who brags long and loud of his bravery but fails to act anything but the coward when called to action. In addition, Ralph Roister Doister imagines himself in love with every woman he meets, and he swears each time he falls in love that he cannot live without the woman who most lately catches his eye. One day, meeting Merrygreeke on the street, he asserts that he is now madly in love with Dame Christian Custance, a widow reported to be wealthy. She captivates Roister Doister when he sees her at supper. Merrygreeke, anxious to please the man he constantly gulls, agrees to help Roister Doister pursue his suit. He assures the foolish braggart that the widow is certain to accept him and that Roister Doister ought really to try to marry someone of higher station and greater fortune.

Merrygreeke goes for musicians to serenade Dame Custance, while Roister Doister waits in front of the widow's home. As he waits, three of the widow's servant women come from the house and talk and sing. When they notice Roister Doister, he comes up, talks to them, and tries to kiss them. After talking with them for a time, Roister Doister gives them a love letter to deliver to their mistress. He boasts that he wrote it himself.

Given the letter by her serving-woman, Dame Custance is furious. She reminds her servants

that she is an honorable woman, affianced to Gawin Goodluck, who is for some months on a sea voyage. Dame Custance refuses to break the seal of the letter, much less read it. Meanwhile, to further his suit, Roister Doister sends his servant to the widow's house with some love gifts, a ring and a token in a cloth. The young servant, after some trouble, convinces the widow's serving-women to take the gifts to their mistress, even though she was angry at receiving the letter.

Handed the gifts, the widow becomes even angrier, lectures her servants on their conduct, and finally sends a boy to find the man who delivered the gifts to her house. Merrygreeke, after many a laugh over what happened during Roister Doister's suit, finally goes to Dame Custance and reveals his scheme for gulling Roister Doister. The widow says she would never marry such a doltish man, but she agrees to join in the fun at the braggart's expense. She goes so far as to read the letter he wrote her and says she will make a reply.

Rejoining Roister Doister, Merrygreeke listens to the suitor's woeful tale and then tells him in outrageous terms that the widow refused his suit, calls him vile names, and accuses him of cowardice. Roister Doister immediately vows that he will assault the widow's house with intent to kill her in combat, along with all her servants. Over Merrygreeke's protests, Roister Doister sets out to get his men together. Merrygreeke laughs and waits, knowing that the cowardly braggart will never carry out his vow.

When they arrive at the widow's house, Merrygreeke offers Roister Doister an excuse for

not leading the assault. Instead, the braggart begins once more to woo the widow with music and song. He sends Merrygreeke to call the widow from her house. Dame Custance goes out to Roister Doister and repeats her refusal of his foolish proposal. Then she reads his letter aloud, and by rephrasing and repunctuating it she makes the letter as insulting as Roister Doister meant it to be loving. The result thoroughly confuses the suitor, who vows it is not the letter he sent to her. He goes to find the scribe who wrote the letter. Scriver beats Ralph Roister Doister for questioning him.

Dame Custance's fiancé's man Sym Suresby comes to meet her and questions Custance's fidelity towards her fiancé Gawyn Goodlucke because of Ralph and the talk of ring and marriage. Custance calls Trusty to come to her rescue. Merrygreeke tells Dame Custance about his prank and enrolls her in it. He beats Ralph Roister Doister on the pretence of

beating Dame Custance. The men, defeated, retreat to their place.

Goodlucke and Suresby accost Custance. Custance tells him that it was just the fool Roister Doister who thought he was in love with her. Merrygreeke tells Goodlucke about the prank and Goodlucke finds it to be funny. Merrygreeke brings Doister to the group as Goodlucke bids. He has convinced Doister that they sue for peace for fear that, having won the battle, they will be victims of Doister's vengeance. Doister, of course, believes Merrygreeke's flattery and says he will show them pity. Custance gets in a Parthian shot, saying that Doister was a usurer to her, giving her one blow and requiring fifty in return. Doister and Merrygreeke are invited to the nuptial feast, and all are made friends. They sing and wish health to their Queen.

## **16.4 CHARACTERS**

### **Ralph Roister Doister**

Ralph Roister Doister, a pompous braggart so taken with the idea of his own prowess that he believes no woman can resist him. He is gullible and is easy prey to the flattery and chicanery of Matthew Merrygreeke. His ridiculous effort to bear a romantic figure and his complete rout by the feminine forces in a pitched battle make him a laughable creation. He is a much-purified adaptation of the braggart soldier in Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus*.

### **Matthew Merrygreeke**

Matthew Merrygreeke, a witty parasite. He makes his living by sponging on characters like Ralph, whom he flatters fulsomely for free meals. His flattery, however, usually is mixed with irony. He enjoys stirring up strife. In the pitched battle between Ralph's and the widow's forces, he pretends to help Ralph but always misses the widow and lets his blows fall on Ralph.

### **Dame Christian Custance**

Dame Christian Custance, a virtuous, humorless widow betrothed to Gawin Goodluck, who is away at sea. She is infuriated at Ralph's suit. Her weapons against him do not include the laughter his behavior should arouse, and she is distressed by Gawin Goodluck's questioning

about her conduct. After he has been satisfied that she is blameless, she grudgingly consents to allow Ralph to appear in her presence at the feast of general reconciliation and celebration.

### **Margery “Madge” Mumblecrust**

Margery “Madge” Mumblecrust, Dame Christian’s simpleminded nurse. She welcomes Ralph as a suitor of her mistress and greedily accepts his greeting kisses, first wiping her mouth vigorously. She readily agrees to deliver his love letter to her mistress, who scolds her severely for doing so.

### **Tibet Talkapace and Annot Alyface**

Both are Dame Christian’s maids. Ralph is much taken with them and looks forward to having them around the house after he marries Dame Christian. He is much more eager to exchange greeting kisses with them than with toothless Margery, but they do not cooperate. They help out Dobinet Doughty on his mission to deliver love tokens, but after their scolding by their mistress, they will have no more of the whole business. Armed with spits and other domestic weapons, they aid in the rout of Ralph and his forces.

## **16.5 SUMMARY**

### **The Prologue**

The Prologue, sometimes called a Chorus, is a device used to introduce the play to an audience, and is recited by a single actor. The Prologue of *Ralph Roister Doister* is divided into 7-line stanzas, and employs a rhyme scheme known as rhyme royal, or rhythm royal: *ababbcc*. **Rhyme royal** was first used in English poetry in the 14th century by Geoffrey Chaucer. In the prologue, Udall states his intention to provide “mirth with modesty” and avoid any kind of abuse and scurrility.

Knowing nothing more commendable for a man's recreation Than

Mirth which is used in an honest fashion:

For Mirth prolongeth life, and causeth health.

Mirth recreates our spirits and voideth pensiveness, Mirth  
increases our amities, not hindering our wealth[...]

This is certainly a hymn to mirth, understood as good-natured, convivial merriment expressed by laughter, following the most favorable view of humor from classical times to the Renaissance. Instead of linking humor with scorn, Udall associates it with health and friendship, and presents it as having an important role in human recreation, and as a good remedy against depression. The play is actually full of farcical actions performed by stock characters borrowed from Plautus and Terence, whose plays were well known by any educated person at the time, since they were part of their instruction. Burlesque, misunderstanding, and the clash of opposing parties that finally get reconciled are basic elements of this play that will later be developed by Shakespeare, for instance, in most of his romantic comedies.

#### Act I

Scene setting: The entire play (with the possible exceptions of Act I, Scenes iii and v) takes place on the street, in the front of or within the sight of Christian Custance's house.

In Act I, Scene i, Matthew Merygreeke enters and tells us about his friend Ralph Roister Doister. Doister is a braggart and a Petrarchan lover, always about to die for the love of some woman he has just met. Because of Doister's high self-opinion he is susceptible to flattery. Hence, Merygreeke has a grand time twisting Doister around his finger with flattery. Doister, of course, believes Merygreeke is his very good friend.

In Act I, Scene ii, The Reader finds Doister accosting Merygreeke. Doister has fallen in love with Christian Custance (whose name he cannot initially remember). He wants her for his wife or else he might "runne madde." The problem is that she is already promised to Gawyn Goodlucke, a prosperous merchant who is presently away on business. Merygreeke flatters Doister greatly and swears to help him get Custance. The whole thing, of course, is an amusement for Merygreeke who loves to get Doister into tight places in order to watch him squirm. Merygreeke leaves to fetch minstrels so that Doister might serenade Custance.

In Act I, Scene iii, The Reader finds Doister eavesdropping upon Custance's maids, Mage Mumblecrust, Tibet Talkapace, and Annot Alyface. Each is doing a household chore (spinning on a distaff, sewing, and knitting respectively). The women engage in an indecent talk while Doister, listening, is all the more certain that he wants Custance for wife—a woman who would employ such servants! The women sing and soon discover Doister eavesdropping. Doister kisses old Mumblecrust, and she is his servant. Talkapace refuses to be kissed. Mumblecrust promises to take a message to her mistress for Doister, but Doister refuses to tell her his name. Doister whispers in Mumblecrust's ear what she is to tell Custance.

In Act I, Scene iv, The Reader finds Merygreeke and the minstrels, Doister's servants, entering and seeing Doister whispering to Mumblecrust. Dobinet Doughty thinks Mumblecrust is the beloved of Doister and compliments him on his choice, though she is obviously an old lady. Merygreeke glorifies Doister (some horrible tall tales) for Mumblecrust's edification and beats Doister under the guise of brushing lint from his coat. Doister gives Mumblecrust a letter to deliver to Custance, swearing he wrote it himself. He promises that the worst kitchen wench will be treated like nobility if he should become master of Custance's house. Mumblecrust is all too eager to forward his position with her lady.

In Act I, Scene v, Mumblecrust gives Custance the letter. Mumblecrust angers Custance by not being able to tell who sent her the letter, the gentleman not having left his name. Custance swears she will be true to her promise to Gawyn Goodlucke and tells Mumblecrust, under pain of punishment, "bring mee no mo letters for no man's pleasure, / But you know from whom [it comes]."

## Act II

Act II, Scene i, begins the next morning. Doughty is delivering a present to Custance. He speaks of Doister's typical ardor in such times of passion (he's been through it all before, apparently many times).

Act II, Scene ii, The Reader finds Mumblecrust meeting Doughty. Doughty asks her to deliver the gift from his master to Custance. But Mumblecrust will not do that because she has already been scolded once for such service. Truepenny (another of Custance's servants) enters.

Act II, Scene iii, begins with Truepenny's first lines. Doughty pretends to have lost something or be looking for a house on the street and paying no attention to Truepenny. It is a ruse to lure Truepenny into conversation without her suspecting that Doughty really wants a favor. The plan works. Doughty informs Truepenny that he is the servant of the man Custance is to marry. Truepenny mistakes him, thinking he means Gawyn Goodlucke, and promises to deliver the gift. Talkapace and Alyface enter. Truepenny introduces Doughty to them as the "Servant to hym that must be our mistresse husbnde." They are happy to meet Doughty and sing. Doughty delivers the gift, a ring, and Talkapace takes it for Custance.

Act II, Scene iv, The ring is delivered to Custance. Custance is annoyed at receiving another gift from her secret admirer and she scolds Talkapace for bringing it. She sends Truepenny out to catch Doughty and bring him to her. Custance's maids swear they will be more careful in accepting tokens for Custance in the future. Truepenny returns but has not found Doughty.

### Act III

Act III, Scene i, Merygreeke enjoys making fun of Doister and decides to tell Custance about his prank.

Act III, Scene ii, The Reader finds Merygreeke with Custance and Talkapace. Custance obviously knows Merygreeke and welcomes him as a friend. Custance discovers (upon opening the letters he was sent via Mumblecrust) that it is Doister who is trying to woo her. She considers him a fool and refuses even to consider him for husband. She hurls invective at him. Merygreeke says she will convey her message to Doister. He tells her "we will laugh well, ye shall see."

Act III, Scene iii, Merygreeke greets Doister and gives him Custance's stern rebuff. Doister

determines to go home and die. Merygreeke builds Doister up with flattery again though, and convinces Doister to go and win Custance, "That she may knowe she hath to answereto a man." Doister calls his musicians again and theygo sing in front ofCustance's door.

Act III, Scene iv, Custance comes out to see who is wailing at her door. She again scorns Doister and, for reason, produces the letter he sent her. Merygreeke reads it aloud,changing the punctuation in order to make the letter sound insulting. He reads, "Sweete mistress, whereas I love you nothing at all, / Regarding your substance and riches" insteadof"Sweetemistress,whereasIloveyou—nothingatallregardingyoursubstance and riches" etc. Custance says she would not take such an insult. Doister despairs, but again Merygreeke flatters him and tells him, "If she despise you, e'en dispise ye hiragain!"HetellsDoisterthat,ifhewereawoman, hewould marryDoisterhimself.Doister agrees to avoid Custance in order to make her want him, but in the meantime he goes to find the scribe who wrote his love letter for him.

Act III, Scene v, is the scrivener's scene. The scrivener reads the letter as he punctuated it and thus shows himself guiltless of the misunderstanding between Doister and Custance. The Scrivener beats Doister for questioning his integrity. Doister realizes the fault lies in Merygreeke's reading of the letter. Merygreeke beats Doister for threatening him. Then Merygreeke promises to mend the mess he has made in order to make all well with Custance again.

#### ActIV

Act IV, Scene I, Sym Suresby, Gawyn Goodlucke's man, has come ahead to see whetherhis master's mistress, Custance, is well.

ActIV,Sceneii,SymmeetsCustance.SheiseagerforGoodlucke'sreturn.

Act IV, Scene iii, Doister and Merygreeke accost Custance in Suresby's presence. They speak of the ring and letter, of a marriage between Doister and Custance, etc., and cause Suresby to question Custance's fidelity. Suresby leaves to go on other errands for his master. Custance upbraids Doister and orders him off. Doister promises to be revenged upon her for rejecting him. Custance sends Truepenny for Goodlucke's old friend Tristram



Trusty to come to her aid.

Act IV, Scene iv, finds the women preparing for Doister's threatened attack. They plan to use household implements to drive the attackers away (distaff, broom, skimmer, firefork, spit).

Act IV, Scene v, Truepenny returns with Trusty. Custance tells Trusty what is going on and Trusty says he heard of it from Suresby when Suresby came by. Trusty promises his aid in her struggle with Doister.

Act IV, Scene vi, Merygreeke enters to tell Custance that it is all a prank to make Doister look foolish. Merygreeke sets up a plan with Custance to act like he is going to hit her, but will accidentally strike Doister in the fight.

Act IV, Scene vii, is the arming scene. Merygreeke beats Doister again after a brief misunderstanding. Custance, as previously prepared with Merygreeke, sees Doister and his men and runs off in feigned fear. Doister is given a kitchenpot by Merygreeke to wear as a helmet.

Trusty comes forth and begs that Doister take his grievances to the law instead of fighting over them. Doister is immediately persuaded. Merygreeke has to flatter Doister again to find his purpose to battle. Finally Doister, who is a braggart but a coward as well, decides not to fight, but to take Trusty's advice instead. Merygreeke agrees, but fires his gun supposedly to say that the battle was fought. Actually it is a signal to instigate the battle and the fun Custance and he have prepared.

Act IV, Scene viii, Custance and the women spill out of the house at the sound of the pistol shot and beat the men with kitchen utensils. Talkapace beats Doughty, who had lied to her about his master. Doister falls to Custance, "Out! Alas, I am slain! Help!" Merygreeke runs to his rescue and, in an attempt to beat Custance, constantly beats Doister, as planned. The men, defeated, retreat to their place.

Act V

Act V, Scene i, The Reader finds Suresby telling the newly-arrived Goodlucke about

Custance's doubtful fidelity, the ring and letter, etc. Goodlucke decides to discover the matter.

Act V, Scene ii, Goodlucke and Suresby accost Custance. Custance tells him that it was just the fool Roister Doister who thought he was in love with her, but Goodlucke is not persuaded. She tells Goodlucke and Suresby to go to Trusty and have her story verified by him.

Act V, Scene iii, Custance asks the Lord to smile on her innocence.

Act V, Scene iv, Goodlucke and Suresby return with Trusty to Custance. Trusty has made all clear to them. Suresby is overjoyed that he was wrong about her, and she forgives him.

Act V, Scene v, Merygreeke and Doister accost the group. With Doister out of hearing, Merygreeke tells Goodlucke that everything was done in fun to discomfort Doister. Goodlucke thinks it is all quite funny.

Act V, Scene vi, Merygreeke brings Doister to the group as Goodlucke bid. He has convinced Doister that they sue for peace for fear that, having won the battle, they will be victims of Doister's vengeance. Doister, of course, believes Merygreeke's flattery and says he will show them pity. Custance gets a Parthian shot, saying that Doister was a usurer to her, giving her one blow and requiring fifty in return. Doister and Merygreeke are invited to the nuptial feast, and all are made friends. They sing and wish health to their Queen.

### **16.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)**

1. In which city is *Ralph Roister Doister* set? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. Dublin
  - b. London
  - c. Rome
  - d. Paris
2. Who is Ralph Roister Doister's servant? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. Dobinet Doughtie
  - b. Gawin Goodluck
  - c. Sym Suresby
  - d. Tristram Trusty

3. Who is Ralph Roister Doister infatuated with?\_\_\_\_\_
- a. Gawin Goodluck
  - b. Mumblecrust
  - c. Merrygreeke
  - d. Custance
4. Ralph Roister Doister is a\_\_\_\_\_man.
- a. Intelligent
  - b. Foolish
  - c. Wise
  - d. None of the above
5. Who tries to woo Custance by serenading her with music?\_\_\_\_\_
- a. Dobinet Doughtie
  - b. Gawin Goodluck
  - c. Ralph Roister Doister
  - d. Merrygreeke
6. Who is one of the main characters in *Ralph Roister Doister*?\_\_\_\_\_
- a. Othello
  - b. Macbeth
  - c. Ralph Roister Doister
  - d. Hamlet
7. Who is Ralph Roister Doister's friend in the play?\_\_\_\_\_
- a. Henry Higgins
  - b. Matthew Merrygreeke
  - c. John Falstaff
  - d. Tom Snout
8. In what year was *Ralph Roister Doister* published?\_\_\_\_\_
- a. 1601
  - b. 1578
  - c. 1545
  - d. 1552
9. Who is the author of *Ralph Roister Doister*?\_\_\_\_\_
- a. Nicholas Udall
  - b. Ben Jonson
  - c. William Shakespeare

d. Christopher Marlowe

10. Who is Custance betrothed to? \_\_\_\_\_

- a. Gawin Goodluck
- b. Sym Suresby
- c. Tristram Trusty
- d. Ralph Roister Doister

### 16.7 ANSWER KEY (MCQs)

- 1. b
- 2. a
- 3. c
- 4. b
- 5. b
- 6. b
- 7. c
- 8. b
- 9. d
- 10. b

### 16.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- 1. Analyze the character of Merrygreeke as an artful sycophant and a parasite.
- 2. Analyze Ralph Roister Doister as a comic character.
- 3. Discuss in detail the role of servants in *Ralph Roister Doister*.
- 4. Narrate the humorous incident where Merrygreeke beats Ralph Roister Doister.
- 5. Analyze the difference between the characters of Ralph Roister Doister and Goodluck?
- 6. Examine the kind of friendship between Ralph Roister Doister and Merrygreeke.

### 16.9 GLOSSARY

Speakers of English frequently take recourse to a number of pause-phrases which parenthetically indicate an individual's frame of mind - *I believe, you think, don't you know*: "The governor, I think, is not so tall" (such expressions are part of a larger category of sentence organizers called discourse markers).

Sixteenth century English used some older words in these types of phrases, and these words appear repeatedly in this play:

- 1. trow = to believe; examples: I trow, trow ye.

2. ween = to expect, think; example: I ween.

3. wot = to know; examples: I wot, I wot not.

Some other unusual words that Udall depends heavily on include the following:

4. warrant = guarantee, assure; used especially in phrases such as I warrant you, ie. "I guarantee it", or "I assure you".

5. wist = to know.

6. pastance = pastime, recreation.

7. use = to treat.

8. fet = to fetch.

Finally, we point out that the word and could be used to mean either "and" or "if".

Udall uses and in both senses regularly.

9. mirth = entertainment which brings pleasure

10. interlude = originally used to describe a brief comic entertainment performed between acts of long mystery plays, but by the early 16th century interlude was employed to mean any stage play, especially one of a brief and light nature.

11. unfold = reveal, disclose.

12. recreation = amusement, pleasure.

13. honest = decent, not deserving of reproach.

14. recreates = refreshes.

13. voideth pensiveness = drives away sadness.

14. not hindering our wealth = not causing harm to our welfare.

15. of more and less = by the high and the low, ie. people of all ranks.

16. comeliness = propriety, decency.

17. good nature = (person of) virtuous character.

18. gainsay the same = deny this.

19. mysteries = truths (especially of a religious nature) or hidden meanings.

20. forewarnings = preventive admonishments.

21. rare = excellent, valuable.

22. Titus Maccius Plautus and Publius Terentius Afer = were Roman playwrights of the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.; their comic plays were models for later European comedy stage-works, and were familiar to all educated Englishmen

23. bears the bell = the lead sheep in the flock wears a bell; hence, "excels" or "leads".

21: such other = others like them.

22. comedy was used to describe a stage play with a comic style and a happy ending, as contrasted with tragedy.

23. humour = temperament or inclination of character.

24. roisting = describing one who acts in a boisterous or uproarious manner

25. sort = type of person.

27: leave = permission.

28: for a certain space = for a while

29. hungry griping = a painfully clutching or voracious hunger.

30. by Him that bought us = an oath: "by Christ, who redeemed our sins".

31 maketh us good cheer = to make one good cheer means "to gladly entertain one".

32. hoddydodie = hoddydoddy, ie. fool or simpleton, or a short dumpy person.
33. hang on (his) sleeve = be dependent on.
34. meat = food.
35. shoot-anchor = ie. sheet-anchor, the largest anchor on a ship, normally used only in an emergency; hence, meaning “last resort”.
36. behoof = benefit, ie. liking.
37. to the hard = common expression meaning “completely up to” or “right up to”.
38. yea and nay = common formula describing alternating positive and negative assertions or vacillation in general.
39. nown = own, a corruption of “mine own”.
40. white = the use of white in phrases such as white son and white boy simply indicated a term of endearment.
41. in by the week = caught, in the snare, ie. in love.
42. sport anon = great entertainment shortly.
43. tarrieth = tarries, ie. waits.
44. lo = a vague interjection, similar to “oh!”
45. breast = breathe.
46. howbeit = however the case may be.
47. Gawin is a Scottish name, meaning “white hawk”.
48. Malkyn = a name for an effeminate or weak man.
49. warrant = assure.
50. rute = a reference to Brute, the legendary descendent of the Trojan hero Aeneas, and the man credited with founding England; brute hence is used to mean “hero” or “person of distinction”.
51. Alie Land = uncertain reference, but “Holy Land” has been suggested, in response to the mention of the Biblical heroes Goliath and Sampson; Farmer, however, tentatively suggests that Alie, or alye, means “kindred” or “neighbouring”, and Hazlitt, similarly, suggests “similar”, so that they propose the intended meaning of the clause to be “a hero from a similar land.”
52. lack = ie. be lacking for money or anything else.
53. a groat = a coin worth four-pence; used here to mean, “even the least amount of money in my possession.”
54. cast = reckoned, estimated.

#### **16.10 LET USSUMUP**

The lesson lays bare the plot and the detailed critical summary of the play *Ralph Roister Doister*. Further, the lesson contains glossary in order to get acquainted with the play and also to enhance the vocabulary of the learners. The lesson sums up with multiple choice questions described at the end of the lesson to help the readers check their understanding of the play.

#### **16.11 SUGGESTED READING**

Udall, Nicholas. “Ralph Roister Doister.” [www.enotes.com](http://www.enotes.com)

Udall, Nicholas, et al. *Ralph Roister Doister, a Comedy*. Elibron Classics, 2005.

**STRUCTURE**

17.1 Introduction

17.2 Objectives &amp; Outcome

17.3 Multiple Choice Questions

17.4 Examination Oriented Questions

17.5 Fill in the Blanks

17.6 Let Us Sum Up

17.7 Suggested Reading

**17.1 INTRODUCTION**

Dear Learner, you have read the play *Ralph Roister Doister* written by Nicholas Udall in detail in the previous lessons no. 14-16. In this lesson, you are given Multiple Choice Questions, Examination Oriented Questions and Fill in the blanks in order to explain and the learner get insights into the various aspects of the play *Ralph Roister Doister*.

**17.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME**

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with Examination Oriented Questions so that after an intensive reading of the last three lessons no. 14-16 the learner is able to grasp the nuances of semester end examination and prepare the play *Ralph Roister Doister* from the perspective of the term end examination.

**17.3 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)**

1. What type of comedy tells a story? \_\_\_\_\_

a) Slapstick

b) Parody

c) Anecdote

d) Caricature

2. Comedy was developed from celebrations dedicated to the Greek god of \_\_\_\_\_

a) Knowledge

b) Inspiration

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c) Wine and Revelry

d) Laughter

3. Which of these was among the earliest Greco-Roman comedians? \_\_\_\_\_

a) Plautus

b) Terence

- c) Aristophanes  
d) All of the above
4. How many Dramatic Unities were recommended by the Greeks?\_\_\_\_\_
- a) One Central Unity  
b) Two Central Unities  
c) Three Central Unities  
d) No number fixed
5. Which is supposed to be the first regular comedy in English?\_\_\_\_\_
- a) Jocasta  
b) The English Traveller  
c) Gammer Gurton's Needle  
d) Roister Doister
6. What type of comedy tells a story?\_\_\_\_\_
- a) Slapstick  
b) Parody  
c) Anecdote  
d) Caricature
7. Comedy was developed from celebrations dedicated to the Greek god of\_\_\_\_\_
- a) Knowledge  
b) Inspiration  
c) Wine and Revelry  
d) Laughter
8. Which of these was among the earliest Greco-Roman comedians?\_\_\_\_\_
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b) Two Central Unities  
c) Three Central Unities  
d) No number fixed
10. Which is supposed to be the first regular comedy in English?\_\_\_\_\_



a) Jocasta

b) The English Traveller

c) Gammer Gurton's Needle

d) Roister Doister

#### 17.4 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Ralph Roister Doister as the first Comedy to be written in English language.
2. What are the arguments given by Nicholas Udall in the prologue of the play *Ralph Roister Doister* regarding Comedy being a source of 'prolonge the life and health'?
3. Nicholas Udall developed the play *Ralph Roister Doister* by imitating Roman's playwright, Plautus and Terence. Elucidate

Q.4 Discuss the various trends prevalent in drama during the sixteenth-century.

Ans. It is very easy to see the drama which developed in the age of Elizabeth I as coming out of nowhere and the dramatists who wrote in this period, particularly Shakespeare and Marlowe, as having adapted extraordinarily from the combination of the limited religious drama of the medieval period and a re-awakened humanist interest in the Roman classical drama. But as Norland argues, the development of British drama, which saw its flowering in the age of Elizabeth, had a far longer gestation.

Henry VIII (1509) was also a patron of the Gentleman and Children of the Royal Chapel and all of his wives at some time provided patronage to companies of players. Edward VI and his sister Mary were both royal protectors of theatre as were many other nobles at the time. (Norland 1995, xviii) At the beginning of the Tudor period the only restraints to dramatic activity came from the local authorities, who were concerned about drunkenness and immorality among crowds attending Corpus Christi plays or gatherings for Robin Hood. (Norland, 1995, xix).

The reformation changed the nature of the theatre with saints' plays being less acceptable and an increase in morality plays and interludes. Morality plays were intended to teach. The Morality play was a much more flexible form than the earlier Mystery play. Everyman is the most widely known of the Morality plays. The Interlude and we know that *Ralph Roister Doister* is described as an interlude in the prologue) "includes dramatic entertainments of many diverse forms and could be applied to plays with or without a moral theme" (Richardson and Johnston, 1991, 97. Interludes were invariably played in halls, rather than in the outdoor theatres.

The drama was also considerably influenced by humanism, a movement that brought from the continent a renewed interest in classical languages and learning. Chief among these scholars was Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536) often described as the "father of humanism".

Drama became a major means for the teaching of Latin in schools in Britain. The comedies of Terence provided the first and probably the most extensive study of drama. Terence was to the Tudor age what Shakespeare is today.

Q.5 Portray the comical aspect of the character of Ralph Roister Doister as described in the play *Ralph Roister Doister*.

Ans. He was a rich bachelor who fell in love with Dame Christian Custance. He was a kind of man who was easy to fall in love to every woman, especially the woman who

stared her eye at him. He would do everything to make his love come true, but he was easy to have a broken heart if he failed. It was reflected from Merrygreek's dialogue in Act I scene 1: Merrygreek : ....If any woman smile, or cast on him an eye

Up is he to the hard ears in love by-and-by!  
And in all the hot haste must she be his wife,  
Else farewell his good days and farewell his  
life!.....

..... (Gassner, 1987:268)

Roister Doister was also an overconfident man since he thought that Custance was in love with her, but, in fact, she was not. In Act I scene 2, the dialogue between Merrygreek and Roister Doister describes that he was such an overconfident man in the matter of love. It was seen when he said that he knew if she loved him, but she did not dare to speak (Act I scene 2).

Mostly, the expressions in the comedy reflect that Ralph Roister Doister was a foolish person since he loved Dame Custance, the one who had been engaged to another man, Gawin Goodluck. His ridiculous way in wooing Custance, strengthened the description of his foolishness. Most of the expressions are portrayed in all his doings or actions to get her love, such as when he sent the letter to Custance. He copied it from the Scrivener in the right way, but he made mistake when he let Merrygreek to read the letter so the content of wooing letter changed into a mocking letter. Another description of his foolishness is seen when he threatened Custance's house to be destroyed because she had refused his love. In Act V scene 7 and 8, it is described how Roister Doister together with Merrygreek, Harpax, and Doughty attacked Custance's house to take revenge due to her refusal. This absolutely reflects that Roister Doister was a foolish person seen from his ridiculous way to face a woman.

Furthermore, the character of Roister Doister is also described as a coward man since he was not brave enough to woo Custance himself. He preferred to send deputies, Merrygreek and Doughty, to send the letter and the tokens and the rings. Moreover, when he intended to ask for sorry to Gawyn Goodluck and Dame Cutsance, he still performed himself as a coward person. It describes that he was a figure of a low sense character in comedy. In the last act, Act V Scene 5, he ordered Merrygreek to tell Dame Custance and Gawyn Goodluck that Roister Doister was willing to ask for sorry to them. However, Roister Doister did not have enough courage to ask them by himself so he ordered Merrygreek to tell them.

The dialogue expresses that Roister Doister was so worry that they would not forgive him. It reflects that Roister Doister was afraid of facing the anger of Custance and Goodluck due to his guilty. It, in turn, describes that Roister Doister was a coward man. Thus, the foolishness, cowardice, and overconfidence characters of Roister Doister reflect that this character is the portrait of a lower sense character in comedy. Roister Doister's lower character can be seen more in the description of the plot on the next subchapter in the analysis.

Q.6 What role does Matthew Merrygreek in inciting Ralph Roister Doister.

Ans. Matthew Merrygreek was Ralph Roister Doister's trusty friend. He was always ready to assist him whenever he got trouble. The foolishness, ridiculousness, tricky, and parasite attitude attached on him make Merrygreek as a comic character in the comedy.

One of the descriptions informing the foolishness of Merrygreek is seen when he made mistake in reading the letter of love. It caused the letter sounded naught and changed into a mocking letter. Roister Doister had written the right one, but Merrygreek made mistake in reading it. As the result, the letter changed into a mocking letter. It caused the failure to Roister Doister in wooing Custance. Later, he confessed that he was the one who had read the letter in wrong way after the Scrivener told them that the mistake was not in the writing but it was in the reading. It caused the letter sounded naught and changed into a mocking letter. Because of Merrygreek's mistake, then, Ralph Roister Doister received his first refusal from Custance. It reflects that Merrygreek was a stupid man.

In the first scene of the first act, Merrygreek is said as a “parasite” through the stage direction. “Enter ‘the parasite’ Matthew Merrygreek” (Gassner, 1987: 267). Later, the descriptions of his “parasite” manner are expressed in some dialogues. The dialogue in the second scene of the first act, for example, expresses that Merrygreek is willing to assist Roister Doister since he will get a reward from him. He pretended to be in hurry to handle his business. It was aimed to put Roister Doister in a difficult situation so he could get more reward from him. It was because Roister Doister would be panic if Merrygreek was not able to assist him. As the result, Roister Doister would offer him big reward if he helped him.

Merrygreek : Within a month or two I will be here again.

Negligence in great affairs, ye know, may mar all.

Roister Doister : Attend upon me now, and well reward thee I shall.

Merrygreek : I have take my leave, and the tide is well spent.

Roister Doister : I die except thou help! I pray thee, be content.

Do thy part well, now, and asks what thou wilt;

For without thy aid my matter is all split.

Merrygreek : Then, to serve your turn, I will some pains take,  
And let all mine own affairs alone for your sake. (Gassner, 1987: 270).

The dialogue also tells that Merrygreek is a tricky man. Someone is usually called as a “parasite” if he has a tricky way to get what he wants, especially money. This attitude is similarly attached on Merrygreek since he has a tricky way to dramatize the situation in order to get his desire. “And let all mine own fair alone for your sake” is the expression of how he is so tricky to place himself like a hero for Roister Doister because he acted as if he had been sacrifice his business for him.

Q.7 Justify Dane Christian Custance as a comical character in *Ralph Roister Doister*.

Ans. Dane Christian Custance was a widow to whom Ralph Roister Doister fell in love. In the comedy of Ralph Roister Doister, she was portrayed as a rich and fair widow. She was also a kind of woman who had a great loyalty to the one she loved, Gawin Goodluck. She did not turn her love to other men including Roister Doister. However, she is still performed as a comic character seen from some expressions in the dialogue. Mostly, the expressions of her comic appear when she was in great anger due to her maiden’s and Roister Doister’s attitude. She often mocked them with rough and ridiculous words, which brought her stay in a lower sense character. As in the fourth scene of the second act, it is shown how Custance called Alyface, Truepenny, and Talkapace as “great calf” (Gassner, 1987: 295). In the third act of the second scene, there also lays another description of Custance’s comic character when she told Merrygreek to suggest him to stay at home and to stay away from her. “Dane Custance: Go, say that I bid him keep him warm at home! For, if he come abroad, he shall cough me a mome. My mind was vexed, I shrew his head! Scottish dolt!” (Gassner,1987:300). Moreover, in the third scene of the third act, she also mocked Roister Doister as a foolish man who did not understand how to woo a woman.

In short, Dane Custance is portrayed as a comic character through some expressions that describe her as an easy-temper woman. However, the main point that describes her as a lower sense character is not her easy-temper but it is her way in expressing her anger that makes her such a funny character. In other words, her ridiculousness is the key to put her as the portrait of a lower character in comedy.

Q.8 Comment on the male charater.

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Q.9 Comment on the female character.

Q.10 Discuss Ralph Roister Doister as a comedy.

Q.11 Discuss the plot of the play *Ralph Roister Doister*.

Q.12 Which character you like the most in the play *Ralph Roister Doister* and why?

Q.13 The play *Ralph Roister Doister* reflects the social conditions of its time. Elaborate.

Q.14 Is *Ralph Roister Doister* a comedy or a farce? Explain.

Q.15 Discuss the main themes explored in *Ralph Roister Doister*.

### 17.5 FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. Ralph Roister Doister was born in the year\_\_\_\_\_.
  2. The play Ralph Roister Doister was developed in the form of \_\_\_\_\_.
  3. The play Ralph Roister Doister is the first comedy on \_\_\_\_\_ mode.
  4. The play Ralph Roister Doister is written in the year\_\_\_\_\_.
  5. The play Ralph Roister Doister shows similarities to the comedies of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
  6. The Play Ralph Roister Doister is written by \_\_\_\_\_.
  7. The Play Ralph Roister Doister is written in \_\_\_\_\_ acts.
  8. In Act I, Scene II, Doister has fallen in love with \_\_\_\_\_.
  9. Merygreeke enjoys making fun of \_\_\_\_\_.
  10. Ralph Roister Doister is the first comedy on \_\_\_\_\_ models.
  11. Interludes were in great demand and were provide by \_\_\_\_\_.
  12. Define Drama.
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### 17.6 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson, the learner is acquainted with the various analytical and descriptive questions to comprehend the theme and motive of the play. Also, Examination Oriented Questions and Multiple Choice Questions help the learner to grasp the play better.

### 17.7 SUGGESTED READING

1. Boas, F.S. (ed) (1970) *Five Pre-Shakespearean Classics*, London OUP
2. Farmer, John S. (ed) (1906), *The Dramatic Writings of Nicholas Udall*, London: *Early English Drama Society* Norland, Howard B. (1995) *Drama in Early Tudor Britain 1485-1558*, Lincoln & London, University of Nebraska Press
3. Reed, A.W. (1926) *Early Tudor Drama*, London: Methuen
4. Richardson, C and Johnston, J. (1991) *Medieval Drama*, London: Macmillan