UNIT 4 CHAUCER'S POETRY: A GENERAL SURVEY

Structure

4.0   OBJECTIVES

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

4.1   INTRODUCTION

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

4.2   THE LIFE OF CHAUCER

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

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

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

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

4.3 CHAUCER'S POETRY (1370-80)

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

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

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

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

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

4.4 CHAUCER'S POETRY (1380-86)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.5   CHAUCER'S POETRY (1387-1400)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.6   CHAUCER'S COMIC VISION

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

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

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

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

4.7 CHAUCER LANGUAGE AND VERSIFICATION

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

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

x   /   x   /   x   /   x   /   x   /

A Knyght ther was, and that a worthy man

x   /   x   /   x/   x   /   x   /

A Clerk ther was of Oxenford also

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

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

4.8 LET US SUM UP

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

4.9   EXERCISES

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

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

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

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

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

4.   How does the Troilus story come to Chaucer?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8.   How are the tales linked to each other?

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

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

(Latin, French, English. See 2.7)

4.10   SUGGESTED READING

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