

**: STRUCTURE :****4.0 Objectives****4.1 Introduction****4.2 Major writers of the Age of Chaucer and their literary contribution****4.2.1 William Langland and Sir John Mandeville****4.2.2 John Wyclif and John Gower****4.2.3 John Lydgate, John of Trevisa and Nicholas Love****4.3 Life and Career of Chaucer****4.4 Let Us Sum Up****4.5 Key words****4.6 Books Suggested****Answers**

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**4.0 OBJECTIVES**

- To introduce major writers of the Age of Chaucer and familiarize the students with their life,
- To enable to get detailed information about their literary works,
- To enable the students to critically evaluate the major literary works of the age.

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**4.1 INTRODUCTION**

As noted in the preceding unit the Age of Chaucer was the first significant period in the literary history of English literature. The period marked a new era of new learning. Latin and French were the dominant languages in fourteenth-century England. However, in the later half of the century English came to its own, thanks to the sterling work done by Chaucer and some others like Langland, Gower, and Wyclif who wrote in English and wrote well.

Richard II was a great patron of the arts and a literary culture flourished at his court in the second half of the Fourteenth Century. Chaucer was widely known amongst the literati of the day, and his circle

included influential figures such as Sir Lewis Clifford, Sir Richard Stury and Sir John Montagu.

Often referred to as the 'Father of the English Language' Chaucer's poetry and use of English inspired a whole generation of poets. The dominance of French following the Norman conquest of 1066 had impeded the growth of English as a literary language for hundreds of years, and it was not until the Fourteenth Century that the vernacular came once more to be used as the language of choice in all areas of society, including at court and in business. Nonetheless, most writers – such as Gower – still wrote fluently in French and Latin, as well as in their native tongue. Chaucer proved that English could be written with elegance and power and it is thanks to his works that its prestige grew as a medium for serious literature. His poetry naturally inspired praise and imitation from his contemporaries. Of these admirers, the prolific John Lydgate is probably one of the best known today. A monk at the great Benedictine Abbey of St Edmund at Bury, he emulated Chaucer's style, and in the prologue to his *Siege of Thebes* even portrayed himself as meeting Chaucer's pilgrims at their inn in Canterbury. Although Lydgate's work has suffered from adverse criticism he played a crucial role in ensuring Chaucer's popularity throughout the Fifteenth Century.

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## 4.2 MAJOR WRITERS OF THE AGE OF CHAUCER AND THEIR LITERARY CONTRIBUTION

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### 4.2.1 William Langland and Sir John Mandeville

The English poet William Langland (ca. 1330-ca. 1400) is known as the probable author of "*Piers Plowman*," an allegorical poem which attacks abuses in the government and the Church and deplores the misery of a people without true leadership. One of the greatest examples of Middle English alliterative poetry, this is an allegorical work with a complex variety of religious themes. One of the major achievements of *Piers Plowman* is that it translates the language and conceptions of the cloister into symbols and images that could be understood by the layman. In general, the language of the poem is simple and colloquial, but some of the author's imagery is powerful and direct. Langland voiced the social discontent and preached the equality of men and the dignity of labor.

Almost nothing is known of Langland himself, and if he authored any other works of literature they are no longer known to us. Nonetheless, on the basis of *Piers Plowman* alone, Langland is one of the most important figures in Middle English literature. Langland was writing during a period of significant cultural and linguistic change in England. The English language itself had been rapidly changing as a result of the Norman

Conquest and increased interaction with the European continent; and English culture had entered a period of significant strife. The rampant corruption of medieval Roman Catholicism had incited a great deal of unrest among the English populace, and a number of authors, Langland among them, would directly address their own thoughts on Christianity, the Church, and the state of England as a whole through the medium of poetic allegory. In so doing, *Piers Plowman* became (intentionally or not) a rallying-point for one of the largest revolts in medieval history, and the poem would be appropriated by a number of radicals throughout England.

Sir John Mandeville is the pen name used by the unidentified 14th-century English author of one of the most famous and widely read travel romances of Europe—**The Voyage and Travels of Sir John Mandeville, Knight**.. He probably wrote his travels first in Latin, next in French, and then turned them into English. The tales are selections from the narratives of genuine travelers, embellished with Mandeville's additions and described as his own adventures. The book is a kind of guide-book to the Holy Land; but the writer himself went much farther east, and reached China, in fact. *Mandeville's Travels* was much admired, read, and copied; indeed, hundreds of manuscript copies of his book were made. There are nineteen still in the British Museum.

Originally written in Norman French about 1360 and translated into 10 major European languages, including English and Latin, by the end of the century, the *Travels* enjoyed undiminished popularity for over 400 years. Purporting to be a travel guide emphasizing the exotic wonders of the Near and Far East, it is generally considered one of the finest works of imaginative literature of the medieval period.

#### 4.2.2 John Wyclif and John Gower

Among the great contemporaries of Chaucer, few deserve more attention than John Wyclif (1327-1384), for he was one of the first Englishmen to challenge the authority of the Catholic Church. He was the most influential prose writer of the fourteenth century. His fame rests upon his complete translation of the Bible. This work was finished in 1383, just one year before his death. However, the translation was not done by himself alone, but a number of men worked on it under his supervision. Though often copied in manuscript, it was not printed for several centuries. Wyclif's *New Testament* was printed in 1731, and the Old Testament not until the year 1850. But the words and the style of his translation, which was read and re-read by hundreds of thoughtful men, were of real and permanent service in fixing the form of the English language. Wyclif held that the pretensions had raised a barrier between man and God; and both by pen and

in pulpit he endeavored to break it down. Free access to the Bible was what the spiritual life required.

John Gower ( c. 1330 – 1408) was an English poet, and the Pearl Poet, and a personal friend of Geoffrey Chaucer. He is remembered primarily for three major works, the *Mirour de l'Omme*, *Vox Clamantis*, and *Confessio Amantis*, three long poems written in French, Latin, and English respectively, which are united by common moral and political themes. Gower criticized this vigorous life and plainly afraid of its consequences. John Gower was a person of shrewd business instincts with a large amount of landed property in East Anglia. Some authorities have inclined to prove him as a lawyer, but M.G.C. Macaulay, his biographer, suggests that he made his money as a merchant; judging by the way in which he speaks of "City", and the number of merchants with whom he was in personal communication. However that may be, it is clear that about middle life he is concerned entirely with the management of his estates and the writing of books. His sympathies were aristocratic and conservative, and the Peasants' Revolt horrified him exceedingly, not, merely as an upholder of law and order, but as a landlord with vested interests.

**Gower's** chief works were *Speculum Hominids*, written in French; the *Vex Clamantis*, written in Latin; and *The Confessio Amantis*, written in English. The first is a poem of some 30,000 lines, somewhat in the nature of a Morality. The Vices and Virtues are classified, and a picture of society is drawn. For its improvement, Gower looks to the intervention of the Blessed Virgin. Historically, the work is of small value, but, as in Langland and Chaucer, there are interesting sidelights on city life.

His another work the *Vex Clamantis* written in Latin was occasioned by the Rising of 1381. It consists of seven books; the first book describing the wilderness in which this medieval Baptist cries. In later books, he pictures the common people as having lost their reason and being transformed into wild beasts. Poor Tyler is suggested as an elephantine boar, later on as a jay who has learnt to speak. Throughout the poem, politics and theology are intermingled, the later books dealing with man's responsibility towards man. The author divides people into three classes; clerk, soldier, and ploughman; he criticizes the clergy as freely as Langland does- a significant testimony to the corruption of the Medieval Church. And the satirical touch that wealth and wisdom for them are not synonymous, is worthy of Carlyle. Gower used the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 in this long Latin poem to describe the faults of government and the various classes of society. Caused by a complex interaction of social discontents, the Revolt was a brief but horrific episode of anarchic insurrection. The rebels (not all of them peasants) plundered London, massacred a group of Flemings, and murdered the Archbishop of Canterbury. The earlier portion of the *Vox*

*Clamantis* contains a vivid account of this uprising in the form of an allegory, with a somewhat hysterical portrayal of the rebels as domestic animals reverting to bestiality. Chaucer himself only makes one passing reference to the Revolt in a facetious remark about Jack Straw, one of its main leaders, in the Nun's Priest's Tale. Nonetheless, as a member of the upper class, he probably shared Gower's view of the rebels as being a lawless rabble.

*The Confessio Amantis* is Gower's most acclaimed English work. Completed in its first version in 1390, when Gower was about sixty, it is a lover's account of his confession to Genius, the priest of Venus, under headings supplied by the seven deadly sins. Gower uses a number of stories with the definite intention of telling the people what are the rudiments of good morality. According to the original prologue, Gower wrote the book for Richard II after the king asked him for a poem on the theme of love. Two or three years later, the reference to Richard was cut out, presumably because of his growing unpopularity. Gower then wrote another version of the prologue in which he says that the work was written for 'Engelondes sake'.

It is clear, from the drift of the poem, that the writer is opposed to social reform. In telling the stories he is clear and straightforward. Gower points the moral "to adorn a tale."

#### 4.2.3 John Lydgate, John of Trevisa and Nicholas Love

Lydgate is credited with some 145,000 lines of verse, almost a quarter of which is contained in the *Fall of Princes*, his longest single work. The poem is a greatly amplified version of Laurent de Premierfait's translation of Boccaccio's *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*, with additions from a variety of sources including the Bible, Ovid and other works by Boccaccio. The result is a universal encyclopaedia of history and mythology, somewhat ponderous in tone and exhaustively fleshed out with moral teaching. The work was commissioned from Lydgate in 1431 by Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, younger brother of Henry V and Protector of England during the minority of Henry VI, and it occupied the following eight years of his life.

Lydgate wrote religious poetry throughout his career. The quasi-liturgical *Life of Our Lady* was probably composed for Henry V in about 1415-16. A genuinely devout composition written in the 'high style', the work draws upon the Apocryphal Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, as well as other devotional texts such as the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*. It has been praised for its religious intensity and luminous rhetoric.

John of Trevisa is chronicled in the history of English literature as a translator of an originally Latin work *Ranulf Higden Polychronicon*.

Originally composed in Latin, this universal history is a chronicle of the period from the Creation to 1357. Its author was a Benedictine monk who arranged the work into seven books, in imitation of the seven days of Genesis. This translation was made by John of Trevisa (c.1330-1412) and completed in 1387. There was an increasing interest in history throughout the late medieval period, and Trevisa's version was just one of several standard vernacular histories available. His translation is interesting for the additional comments that he makes to update the original text. Where Higden, for example, discusses the fact that children learn their lessons in French, Trevisa comments that the situation has changed by the time he is writing, and that lessons are now conducted in English. He acknowledges that this has its advantages for speed of learning, but points out rather disapprovingly that now children 'know no more French than their left heel, and that is harmful for them if they should pass the sea and work in strange lands'.

Nicholas Love (d. 1424), a prior of the Carthusian Priory of Mount Grace in Yorkshire, is known for his translation work *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, originally written in Latin as *The Meditationes Vitae Christi*. The holy text describing the devotional life of Christ was extremely popular throughout medieval Europe. *The Mirror* is a free translation of the work. Concentrating on the Passion, the Mirror dispenses meditative and doctrinal comment on the Bible. Its sixty-three chapters are each split into seven sections, every section representing a day of the week.

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### 4.3 GEOFFREY CHAUCER: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

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Above all there was Geoffrey Chaucer, a scholar, traveler, business man, courtier, sharing in all the stirring life of his times, and reflecting it in literature as no other but Shakespeare has ever done. Chaucer was born in London sometime between 1340 and 1344 to John Chaucer and Agnes Copton. John Chaucer was an affluent wine merchant and deputy to the king's butler. Through his father's connections, Geoffrey held several positions early in his life, serving as a noblewoman's page, a courtier, a diplomat, a civil servant, and a collector of scrap metal. His early life and education were not strictly documented although it can be surmised from his works that he could read French, Latin, and Italian.

In 1359, Chaucer joined the English army's invasion of France during the Hundred Years' War and was taken prisoner; King Edward III of England paid his ransom in 1360. In 1366, Chaucer married Philipa de Roet, who was a lady-in-waiting to Edward III's wife. In 1367, Chaucer was given a life pension by the king, and began traveling abroad on diplomatic missions. During trips to Italy in 1372 and 1378, he discovered

the works of Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch—each of which greatly influenced Chaucer's own literary endeavors.

Chaucer was named Controller of Customs on wools, skins, and hides for the port of London in 1374, and continued in this post for twelve years. Around that time, Chaucer's period of Italian influence began, which includes transitional works such as *Anelida and Arcite* (c. 1379), *Parlement of Foules* (c. 1382), and *Troilus and Criseyde* (c. 1385). Chaucer established residence in Kent, where he was elected a justice of the peace and a member of Parliament in 1386. His wife died the following year.

His period of artistic maturity is considered to begin at this time, marked by the writing of the General Prologue of the *Canterbury Tales*, which Chaucer continued to work on for many years—most likely until his death in 1400. Considered a cultural touchstone, if not the very wellspring of literature in the English language, Chaucer's tales gather twenty-nine archetypes of late-medieval English society and present them with insight and humor.

Now considered the "Father of English literature," Chaucer wrote in the English vernacular while court poetry was still being written in Anglo-Norman or Latin. The decasyllabic couplet Chaucer used for most of the *Canterbury Tales* later evolved into the heroic couplet, commonly used for epic and narrative poetry in English. Chaucer is also credited with pioneering the regular use of iambic pentameter.

As the American poet and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in his essay "The Poet" in 1844: "...the rich poets, such as Homer, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Raphael, have obviously no limits to their works, except the limits of their lifetime, and resemble a mirror carried through the street, ready to render an image of every created thing."

Until less than a year before his death, Chaucer remained Clerk of Works of the Palace of Westminster. He leased a tenement in the garden of the Lady Chapel of Westminster Abbey. After his death, he was buried at the entrance to the chapel of St. Benedict, in the South Transept. In 1556, a monument was erected in Chaucer's honor. When the Elizabethan poet Edmund Spenser died in 1599 and was buried nearby, the tradition of the "Poets' Corner" in the Abbey began. Since then, more than thirty poets and writers are buried there—including Browning, Dryden, Hardy, Jonson, and Kipling—and more than fifty others are memorialized.

Chaucer's works are sometimes grouped into first French period, then Italian period and finally an English period, with Chaucer being influenced by those countries' literatures in turn.

### **The French Period**

First is that of French influence, when, though writing in English, he drew inspiration from the rich French poetry of the period, which was produced partly in France, partly in England. Chaucer experimented with the numerous lyric forms which the French poets had brought to perfection; he also translated, in whole or in part, the most important of medieval French narrative poems, the thirteenth century '*Romance of the Rose*' of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung, a very clever satirical allegory, in many thousand lines, of medieval love and medieval religion. This poem, with its Gallic brilliancy and audacity, long exercised over Chaucer's mind the same dominant influence, which it possessed over most secular poets of the age. Another is '*The Book of the Duchess*'. This book was written on the death of the Duchess Blanche of Lancaster, the wife of John of Gaunt. It was an elegy. Chaucer was actually moved as she was his patroness and he wanted to please John of Gaunt. *The Complaint unto Pity*, *The Complaint of Mars*, *Queen Anelida*.

### **The Italian Period**

Chaucer's second period, that of Italian influence, dates from his first visit to Italy in 1372-3, where at Padua he may perhaps have met the fluent Italian poet Petrarch, and where at any rate the revelation of Italian life and literature must have aroused his intense enthusiasm. From this time, and especially after his other visit to Italy, five years later, he made much direct use of the works of Petrarch and Boccaccio and to a less degree of those of their greater predecessor, Dante, whose severe spirit was too unlike Chaucer's for his thorough appreciation. During this period he wrote *Troilus and Criseyde*. It is believed that this is partly based upon and partly a translation of Boccaccio's *Filostrato*. It contained 8200 lines of rime royal. It is the longest poem. It is famous for comical character of Pandarus. Other book of this phase is *The Parliament of Fowls*. This is a mixture of mythology, allegory and sentimentality. It's a 700 lines long poem and was written in honour of Richard II's marriage with Anne of Bohemia. Other work is *The House of Fame*, which shows the clear influence of Dante. Lydgate later called this poem Dante in English. This contains highly autobiographical elements.

### **The English Period**

Chaucer's third period, covering his last fifteen years, is called his English period, because now at last his genius, mature and self-sufficient, worked in essential independence. First in time among his poems of these years stands *The Legend of Good Women*, a series of romantic biographies of famous ladies of classical legend and history, whom it pleases Chaucer

to designate as martyrs of love; but more important than the stories themselves is the Prolog, where he chats with delightful frankness about his own ideas and tastes. The English period displays his originality and genius with full flowering. It has most impressive work of his life which has immortalized him. This work is 'The Canterbury Tales'. In Italy, Chaucer met writer Giovanni Boccaccio, and it is believed Chaucer got his inspiration for the Canterbury Tales from Boccaccio's Decameron. Twenty-nine pilgrims met in an inn called 'The Tabard Inn'. They were bound to visit the shrine of St. Thomas Becket at Canterbury. The group of pilgrims included poet also. All were in jolly mood. They were welcomed by host, Harry Bailly. Chaucer's frame is a religious pilgrimage during which each traveler is to tell story. They would tell two stories when they go and two when they return. Although the work was never completed, The Canterbury Tales is considered one of the greatest works in the English language. He is the photographer who shoots in all directions. He sets some pilgrims from various walks of life together on a pilgrimage in his Canterbury Tales. Instead of creating a make-believe world, he takes real and concrete characters of the world to give a complete picture.

The great work of the period, however, and the crowning achievement of Chaucer's life, is 'The Canterbury Tales.' Every one is familiar with the plan of the story (which may well have had some basis in fact): how Chaucer finds himself one April evening with thirty other men and women, all gathered at the Tabard Inn in Southwark (a suburb of London and just across the Thames from the city proper), ready to start next morning, as thousands of Englishmen did every year, on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas a Becket at Canterbury. The travelers readily accept the proposal of Harry Bailey, their jovial and domineering host, that he go with them as leader and that they enliven the journey with a story-telling contest (two stories from each pilgrim during each half of the journey) for the prize of a dinner at his inn on their return. Next morning, therefore, the Knight begins the series of tales and the others follow in order. This literary form--a collection of disconnected stories bound together in a fictitious framework--goes back almost to the beginning of literature itself; but Chaucer may well have been directly influenced by Boccaccio's famous book of prose tales, 'The Decameron' (Ten Days of Story-Telling). Between the two works, however, there is a striking contrast, which has often been pointed out. While the Italian author represents his gentlemen and ladies as selfishly fleeing from the misery of a frightful plague in Florence to a charming villa and a holiday of unreflecting pleasure, the gaiety of Chaucer's pilgrims rests on a basis of serious purpose, however conventional it may be.

Chaucer's personality stands out in his writings plainly and most delightfully. It must be borne in mind that, like some others of the greatest poets, he was not a poet merely, but also a man of practical affairs, in the eyes of his associates first and mainly a courtier, diplomat, and government official. His wide experience of men and things is manifest in the life-likeness and mature power of his poetry, and it accounts in part for the broad truth of all but his earliest work, which makes it essentially poetry not of an age but for all time. Something of conventional medievalism still clings to Chaucer in externals, as we shall see, but in alertness, independence of thought, and a certain directness of utterance, he speaks for universal humanity. His practical experience helps to explain as well why, unlike most great poets, he does not belong primarily with the idealists. Fine feeling he did not lack; he loved external beauty--some of his most pleasing passages voice his enthusiasm for Nature; and down to the end of his life, he never lost the zest for fanciful romance. His mind and eye were keen, besides, for moral qualities; he penetrated directly through all the pretenses of falsehood and hypocrisy; while how thoroughly he understood and respected honest worth appears in the picture of the Poor Parson in the Prolog to 'The Canterbury Tales.' Himself quiet and self-contained, moreover, Chaucer was genial and sympathetic toward all mankind. But all this does not declare him a positive idealist, and in fact, rather, he was willing to accept the world as he found it--he had no reformer's dream of 'shattering it to bits and remoulding it nearer to the heart's desire.' His moral nature, indeed, was easy-going; he was the appropriate poet of the Court circle, with very much of the better courtier's point of view. At the day's tasks he worked long and faithfully, but he also loved comfort, and he had nothing of the martyr's instinct. To him human life was a vast procession, of boundless interest, to be observed keenly and reproduced for the reader's enjoyment in works of objective literary art. The countless tragedies of life he noted with kindly pity, but he felt no impulse to dash himself against the existing barriers of the world in the effort to assure a better future for the coming generations. In a word, Chaucer is an artist of broad artistic vision to whom art is its own excuse for being. And when everything is said few readers would have it otherwise with him; for in his art he has accomplished what no one else in his place could have done, and he has left besides the picture of himself, very real and human across the gulf of half a thousand years. Religion, we should add, was for him, as for so many men of the world, a somewhat secondary and formal thing. In his early works, there is much conventional piety, no doubt sincere so far as it goes; and he always took a strong intellectual interest in the problems of medieval theology; but he became steadily and quietly independent in his philosophic outlook and indeed rather skeptical of all

definite dogmas. Even in his art, Chaucer's lack of the highest will-power produced one rather conspicuous formal weakness; of his numerous long poems he really finished scarcely one. For this, however, it is perhaps sufficient excuse that he could write only in intervals hardly snatched from business and sleep. In 'The Canterbury Tales' indeed, the plan is almost impossibly ambitious; the more than twenty stories actually finished, with their eighteen thousand lines, are only a fifth part of the intended number.

In nothing are Chaucer's personality and his poetry more pleasing than in the rich humor which pervades them through and through. Sometimes, as in his treatment of the popular medieval beast-epic material in the Nun's Priest's Tale of the Fox and the Cock, the humor takes the form of boisterous farce; but much more often it is of the finer intellectual sort, the sort which a careless reader may not catch, but which touches with perfect sureness and charming lightness on all the incongruities of life, always, too, in kindly spirit. No foible is too trifling for Chaucer's quiet observation; while if he does not choose to denounce the hypocrisy of the Pardoner and the worldliness of the Monk, he has made their weaknesses sources of amusement (and indeed object-lessons as well) for all the coming generations.

Chaucer is one of the greatest of all narrative poets. Chaucer is an exquisite lyric poet, but only a few of his lyrics have come down to us, and his fame must always rest largely on his narratives. Here, first, he possesses unfailing fluency. It was with rapidity, evidently with ease, and with masterful certainty, that he poured out his long series of vivid and delightful tales. It is true that in his early, imitative, work he shares the medieval faults of wordiness, digression, and abstract symbolism; and, like most medieval writers, he chose rather to reshape material from the great contemporary store than to invent stories of his own. But these are really very minor matters. He has great variety, also, of narrative forms: elaborate allegories; love stories of many kinds; romances, both religious and secular; tales of chivalrous exploit, like that related by the Knight; humorous extravaganzas; and jocose renderings of coarse popular material--something, at least, in virtually every medieval type.

The thorough knowledge and sure portrayal of men and women which, belong to his mature work extend through, many various types of character. It is a commonplace to say that the Prolog to 'The Canterbury Tales' presents in its twenty portraits virtually every contemporary English class except the very lowest, made to live forever in the finest series of character sketches preserved anywhere in literature; and in his other work the same power appears in only less conspicuous degree.

His poetry is also essentially and thoroughly dramatic, dealing very vividly with life in genuine and varied action. To be sure, Chaucer

possesses all the medieval love for logical reasoning, and he takes a keen delight in psychological analysis; but when he introduces these things (except for the tendency to medieval diffuseness), they are true to the situation and really serve to enhance the suspense. There is much interest in the question often raised whether, if he had lived in an age like the Elizabethan, when the drama was the dominant literary form, he too would have been a dramatist.

As a descriptive poet (of things as well as persons), he displays equal skill. Whatever his scenes or objects, he sees them with perfect clearness and brings them in full life-likeness before the reader's eyes, sometimes even with the minuteness of a nineteenth century novelist. And no one understands more thoroughly the art of conveying the general impression with perfect sureness, with a foreground where a few characteristic details stand out in picturesque and telling clearness.

Chaucer is an unerring master of poetic form. His stanza combinations reproduce all the well-proportioned grace of his French models, and to the pentameter-riming couplet of his later work, he gives the perfect ease and metrical varieties which match the fluent thought. In all his poetry, there is probably not a single faulty line. And yet within a hundred years after his death, such was the irony of circumstances, English pronunciation had so greatly altered that his meter was held to be rude and barbarous, and not until the nineteenth century were its principles again fully understood. His language, we should add, is modern, according to the technical classification, and is really as much like the form of our own day as like that of a century before his time; but it is still only early modern English, and a little definitely directed study is necessary for any present-day reader before its beauty can be adequately recognized

Chaucer significantly contributed to the development of English as a literary language. The “General Prologue” to *The Canterbury Tales* has often been praised as “the most perfect poem in the English language.” The *Canterbury Tales* and his other notable works—including *The Book of the Duchess*, *The Parlement of Foules*, *The House of Fame*, and *Troilus and Criseyde*—reflect Chaucer's familiarity with French, English, Italian, and Latin literature, and demonstrate his consummate mastery of a variety of literary genres, styles, and techniques. The originality of his language and style, the vivacity of his humor, and the depth of his understanding are continually cited as reasons for the permanence of his works.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-1**

1. Write note on the following.

- i. Contemporaneity in John Gower's literary works

ii. Significance of the writings of William Langland

2. Write an analytical note on the prose of the Age of Chaucer.
3. Give reasons for calling Chaucer the 'Father of Modern English Poetry'.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-2**

Chose Appropriate Options from Given Below:

1. "Chaucer was not in any sense a poet of the people." Who says like this?

- (A) Lowett
- (B) Hadow
- (C) Hudson
- (D) A.C. Ward

2. Who has been called the "Prince of Plagiarists"?

- (A) Ifor Evans
- (B) Hardin Craig
- (C) Chaucer Geoffrey
- (D) Bernard Groom

3. Who was called the first Protestant and the father of the English-Reformation? He may be called with equal Justice the father of English Prose -

- (A) Pope
- (B) John Wycliffe
- (C) John Barbour
- (D) Marlowe

4. Which of the following books was written by a French-Physician, Jean De Bourgone?

- (A) Sir Gawayn and The Green Knight
- (B) Pamela
- (C) Travels of Sir John Mandeville
- (D) Bible

5. Who was the first to translate the Bible into English? He used the Latin version of the Bible.

- (A) William Langland
- (B) John Wycliffe
- (C) Arnold
- (D) C.H. Mair

6. How many characters are there in The Prologue?

- (A) 25
- (B) 29
- (C) 31
- (D) 39

7. Who were “Lollards”?

- (A) The force of the King
- (B) The followers of Chaucer
- (C) The followers of John Wycliffe
- (D) Agitators of Peasant’s Revolt

8. “It is an encyclopedia of the art of Love “Which of the following”?

- (A) Pamela
- (B) Merchant
- (C) Confession Amantis
- (D) Bible

9. Who is known as the father of English Literature ?

- (A) Langland
- (B) Chaucer
- (C) Edward III
- (D) More

10. Before English, which language was the language of court and nobility?

- (A) Italian
- (B) Greek
- (C) French
- (D) German

11. Chaucer is known much for his

- (A) Realism
- (B) Dialogue

- (C) Action
- (D) Uniformity

12. Chaucer first used his rhyme-royal stanza in his

- (A) The Canterbury Tales
- (B) The Book of Duchess
- (C) The House of Fame
- (D) Triolus and Criseyde

13. Which of the following tales is in prose?

- (A) The Parson's Tale
- (B) The Wife of Bath's Tale
- (C) The Cook's Tale
- (D) The Squire's Tale

14. The first poem in English to use heroic couplet is

- (A) The Legend of Good Women
- (B) The House of Fame
- (C) The Parliament of Fowls
- (D) The Book of Duchess

15. Who tells the last tale in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales?

- (A) The Monk
- (B) The Parson
- (C) The Prioress
- (D) The Nun

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#### 4.4 LET US SUM UP

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The spirit of new learning accelerated the transition from the medieval to the modern. This was the spirit of the Italian Renaissance, which was to reach its full blossoming in England only during the Age of Queen Elizabeth. Chaucer played a most important role in the importing of this spirit from Italy to England. There was vast intellectual awakening and an unprecedented spurt of literary activity. It was the heyday of English poetry. English became a national language from a dialect. The age also witnessed the foundation of an English prose style. Humanism was one of the potent formative influences of the age of Chaucer.

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#### 4.5 KEY WORDS

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- |            |                             |
|------------|-----------------------------|
| Allegory   | : Parable, Symbol, Metaphor |
| Transition | : Change, Evolution , Shift |

|             |                                              |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Upsurge     | : Rise, Expand, Surge                        |
| Nationalism | : Patriotism                                 |
| Chivalry    | : Respect, Courtesy, Politeness ( For Women) |
| Religious   | : Spiritual, Sacred, holy                    |
| Consummate  | : Skillful, expert                           |

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#### 4.6 BOOKS SUGGESTED

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1. History of English Literature by Legouis and Cazamian.
2. A Critical History of English Literature (Vol– I) by David Daiches.
3. An Introduction to the Study of English Literature by W. H. Hudson.
4. The Palgrave Guide to English Literature and Its Contexts by Peter Widdowson.
5. The Short Oxford History of English Literature by Andrew Sanders.
6. A Brief History of English Literature by John Peck and Martin Coyle.
7. History of English Literature by Edward Albert
8. A Short History of English Literature by Ifor Evans
9. "The Beginnings of English Prose," by Alice D. Greenwood, in volume 2 of The Cambridge History of English Literature

#### ANSWERS

1(C) ,2(C), 3(B), 4(C), 5(B), 6(B), 7(C), 8(C), 9(B), 10(C), 11(),12(D)  
,13(A), 14(A), 15(B)