

English Honours, U.G. - I, Paper - 02

Topic: The Canterbury Tales: A gallery of Portrait
[Part-II]

To be continued.

It is indeed one of Chaucer's greatest contributions to study of characters that he gives us people who are very much like us, our kinsmen, made of flesh and blood. Medieval English literature presents to us either supernatural characters, or the characters that we meet in it are natural in the sense that they have weaknesses and strength of ordinary and common human beings. Chaucer does not leave anything pertaining to his characters unobserved and undescribed; so much so while describing the way that he sees on the Miller's nose he says that three slender strands of hair pop out of this tiny tumour. He presents the knight and the squire, the clerk and the Doctor, the cook and the shipman, the Monk and the Friar, the Parson and the Pardoner in such a minute details that we spot them out without any hesitation. We have to pay necessary compliments to Chaucer in view of his rare descriptive power. At the same time we do also come to realise that knight is only a knight, a squire is only a squire, a Monk is only a Monk and a clerk is only a clerk with the result that we look upon each one of his people as the very representative of the

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profession or social segment to which he or she belongs. It certainly goes to Chaucer's immense credit that while F. M. Forster speaks of flat characters and round characters tending to be round, this fourteenth-century English artist combines the individuals and the types in a single character.

There is a third aspect of Chaucer's art of characterisation as well which we can hardly ignore. Chaucer is a great ironist, and he gives us certain characters in "The Canterbury Tales" who seem to be caricatures or people who ~~have~~ are worldly beings. Langland's world is also full of people, but as being a typical Medieval writer his characters are just allegorical beings or cold-blooded representation of sin and purity. It is precisely for this reason that Langland's characters are just allegorical beings or cold-blooded representation of sin and purity. It is precisely for this reason that Langland's characters do not impress us, or that they do not seem to be human at all. In Dryden's The first important thing to note in respect of Chaucer's art of characterisation is that this 14th century English writer gives up people in abundance, and projects them in a realistic manner, and makes them utterly convincing. This unique combination of realism and credibility is the hallmark of Chaucer's treatment of his characters. It is because such panoramic view of the 14th century English society that Dryden

calls "The Canterbury Tales" : "Here's God's plenty"

It is really remarkable to see that Chaucer's characters are both individuals and types. In other words, we may say that Chaucer's characters are both flat and round. Chaucer describes each of his characters so vividly and graphically that they become lively. ~~He~~ The doctor of Physique, the Miller, the Summoner, the Sergeant of the Law and the wife of Bath are the lively portraits of 14th century English Society. ~~Thus, the~~ The Canterbury Tales is rich in its portrayal of real characters.

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