

A Teacher's Guide
THE BOOK OF THE DUNCOW

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To the Teacher

THE BOOK OF THE DUN COW has a wonderful complexity. It participates in the antique *and* the modern world view and spiritual realities co-exist with a naturalistic account of both barnyard and human interaction. Simultaneously, it is the most simple of stories told clearly with comic immediacy. Students at any level will be able to find enjoyment and challenge.

This teacher's guide seeks to offer you a variety of ways to generate class discussion on the novel. Talking about the novel can strengthen a sense of which facts should be focused upon and which of these facts can be tied together for critical statements. Classroom discussion will assist the student in writing about the novel. A list of possible paper topics is included, but you may find other interests developing from the class discussion which could be used for writing assignments. For practical purposes hard words are isolated, and listed after each chapter's questions; these may be selected and used for vocabulary exercises appropriate to the class's level. The novel is unique in its use of language-both fanciful and highly sophisticated- so that drawing the student's attention to words he has already understood and enjoyed in context will provoke interest.

The literary history in the first section of this guide is designed to summarize the novel's connections to broad literary tradition. In addition to making the student aware that authors write out of a tradition, the information goes hand in hand with describing the medieval, or pre-modern, world view. The Ptolemaic universe, the feudal system, holy wars, and the Rules of Battle are all possible topics for discussion. A glossary is provided for quick reference to archaisms and proper names. DUN COW, however, is modern in its psychology and characterization thus offering a good opportunity to examine what in civilization has remained the same: the aggressive nature of evil; the qualities of a good ruler; the desire of mankind to live together in peace and to defend that peace; the varieties of human pride and of human love. More accessible, perhaps, are the well drawn characters of the animals, since much of the comedy arises from the continually surprising justness of their actions and language.

You may find that limited class time prohibits investigating the full richness of the book. If so, it is possible to treat it solely as a fantasy or a modern novel, or as an opening to discussions of literary, cultural, or religious traditions. This guide attempts to present all these possibilities.

Connections to Literary Traditions and the Medieval World View

Within this novel, one may discover many traditional medieval literary forms. Moreover, the cosmography and political structure are, respectively, Ptolemaic and feudal. These notions, described below, may be brought up in class as an introduction to discussion of the European Middle Ages; the time before Copernicus, Locke, and the absolute monarchies which ended feudalism. THE BOOK OF THE DUN COW uses these ideas as fictional images to contrast harmonious order with chaos or threat to that order, embodied in the fabulous creature Wyrn.

Looking back to the feudal period, we find that the heroic epic flourishes; holy wars are being fought, fields run with blood, champions are called upon, and poets record it. In single combat, Charlemagne must fight the "pagan" Saracen yet again because his foster son Roland has been treacherously killed. Beowulf must fight the "devastating vengeance of the Worm" because "its hatred for and humiliation of the Geats was to be seen everywhere" (from Beowulf Penguin Classics edition, p. 81). The violence of the battlefield is never sugared over. The courageous heroes suffer from wounds, exhaustion, and tearful losses. The heroism in the DUN COW and the conflict are similar.

Almost contemporaneous with Beowulf but in northern France and western Germany, the beast epic begins appearing. DUN COW has most in common with this form. Neither bare fables (thinly disguised human morality tales) nor bestiary characterizations (Theophrastian in form but fantastical and of weighty allegorical significance), the beast epics span the early ninth to the end of the fifteenth centuries. These are long narratives of the adventures of Reynard the Fox who finally triumphs over The Wolf. The characters, and plotting are interesting in themselves; they are not mere vehicles for allegory. The more telling point of coincidence with DUN COW is that, although beast epics contain satirical portraits on certain human idiosyncrasies, there is no coherent formal satire attacking a particular abuse. The names for the animals become conventional in the Reynard epics: Chaunticler, Pertolote, and Reynard, who becomes Dom [Lord] Russell in Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*. But some of the animals in DUN COW are drawn from more modern examples: *Uncle Remus*, *Peter Rabbit*, and Walt Disney's animations (for instance, the Turkeys).

The orderly cosmography described in chapter four of DUN COW is at once Ptolemaic, Aristotelian, Hebraic, Scandinavian, and Christian. Earth is the center of the universe; the motions of the other spheres produce a singing harmony (see p. 215); God lives in the empyrean, halfway between earth and the moon; He communicates with mankind by messengers such as Gabriel-God's strength-who appears to Charlemagne before the battle; and pure evil waits its chance under the earth to destroy this natural order. Within this world, mankind-especially the lord (in this case, Chauntecleer)-must combat not only the Hater of God (Wyrn) when he appears, but also his son (the pagan Cockatrice), under the Terebinth Oak (see Glossary) and his sons as well-the Basilisks (of which medieval travelers were wary.) And because Adam fell, mankind must combat the hatred, pride and despair within *himself*. Most often, in this fallen world, suffering and sacrifice accompany victory, so that winning is never clear and vigilance never ceases. The end of the novel is hopeful but as in the endings of many medieval works, we know from the autumnal mood that victory has been achieved at great cost.

Other medieval literary habits may be seen in the novel: the folk ballad; the complaint; the riddle; bestiary lore; the dream vision, the *speculum* convention (or mirror image. See Chapter 21 -critical summary), the rescue of the lady and the characterization of the lovers in chivalric romance, as well as use of weather and other natural occurrences to indicate moral or spiritual life.

The feudalistic social and political structure of the novel is a way of describing both natural animal society and the good order needed for a happy and productive community. The Lord of the Coop is the lord of the manor, and the creatures of his land are on the lord's demesne. The lord predominates because it is a time threatened often by the violence of battle. The liege lord and his vassal have a bond of mutual service and protection. Single combat between lords is popular since the loser's vassals could then simply go home. Faithful service on the manor and the battlefield by the vassal must be rewarded: the lord must protect his life, avenge his death at the hands of the enemy, do justice, and maintain him in time of need. The system has been called a fatherly government. In the novel, it is contrasted to Cockatrice's rule, which has more in common with the autocracy of the Saracens in *Song of Roland*.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

Plot summary: Chauntecleer's sleeping habits and the hens' reactions are described. Mundo Cani Dog howls outside, but cannot be driven away.

Critical summary: Chauntecleer is introduced as the autocrat of the Coop. The hens' timidity, their respect for their lord, and their soft hearts are established, thereby gaining our sympathy. Chauntecleer is satirized as ridiculous in his domestic tyranny. His dreaming alludes both to Charlemagne in Song of Roland and Chaucer's Chaunticler, which enhances his stature. The Dog is humorous as a caricature, but also interesting as a good portrait of one who engenders others' pity through self-deprecation, and by wishing for others what he lacks. The human comedy impresses us in its exaggeration: the Dog's servility and Chauntecleer's vanity.

Questions:

1. What do the hens habitually do about Chauntecleer's sleeping habits?
2. What words make the reader know the Dog is to be pitied? (p. 15)
3. What does the Dog say that tells us he really wants sympathy?
4. What does Chauntecleer do to defend his sleep?
5. Why does Chauntecleer cry? (p. 19)
6. What names does Chauntecleer call the Dog the next morning?

Vocabulary:

contentment despise raucous conversational perturbation lumpish

CHAPTER TWO

Plot summary: A description of Chauntecleer's profession: crowing both the canonical crows and the occasional. Last two paragraphs: a hint of the war to come.

Critical summary: No longer ridiculous, Chauntecleer is shown as the ideal ruler of a happy land. Bringing order to his people, he may be compared to the "priest of the parish," the shepherd with his flock, the benevolent ruler of the well-ruled. The occasional crows compare to the business of the orator and/or poet, who commemorates an event, or inspires one with a work of the imagination. These works (occasional crows) give form to the culture. The hint of war creates suspense.

Questions:

1. What kinds of crows are there?
2. What is the purpose of a ruler in the lives of his subjects?
3. Why does the narrator tell us about what will happen within the year?

Vocabulary:

profession immemorial category treacherous insinuating

CHAPTER THREE

Plot summary: The hens announce their eggs (children) are being eaten, and they grieve. Chauntecleer quizzes John Wesley Weasel, and finds out about Ebenezer Rat.

Critical summary: Beryl, the spokesman for the hens, speaks her natural grief and her great respect for, mixed with fear of, her lord. Chauntecleer performs his ruler's duties by taking action, interrogating the criminal he has previously reformed and brought under rule. The Dog obeys his Lord's command, thereby proving his place in the society. The diffident Weasel has our respect and amuses us with the fast-talking Black English of an Uncle Remus character. The hope of children is seen as a basic emotion, and the crow of grief as a necessary function and release.

Questions:

1. Why does Beryl have such a roundabout way of talking to Chauntecleer, and how does he respond to it?
2. How does Chauntecleer force information out of John Wesley Weasel?
3. Describe Ebenezer Rat.
4. What was John Wesley Weasel before he reformed?
5. What does the crow of grief do for the hens?

Vocabulary:

anguish irritation

CHAPTER FOUR

Plot summary: The cosmos is described: God above, the Keepers on Earth, Wrym below, and his messengers--e.g., the Dun Cow, who move freely between the Heavens and the Earth.

Critical summary: Medieval cosmography is used. God is in the empyrean or heavens, halfway between earth and the moon; and in accordance with Ptolemaic theory, earth is the fixed place around which the planets and stars move. God sends messengers to men, but does not directly interfere. Man's purpose on earth is to guard His kingdom from being overrun by evil, the propagator of which has been condemned by God to live under the ground. This world exhibits the so-called natural order, in which everything is fixed. We can understand from this sense of order both the hierarchy of rule, and the responsibility of those who dwell on Earth. Evil is a function of the hatred of God, unlike the transgressions of the Rat, whose nature leads him to eat eggs, but who is at least capable of control, just as the Weasel is capable of reform. Note that Wrym can be found in the Judeo-Christian image of evil: the snake in the garden, the Leviathan under the seas, the dragon in his deep cave. Wrym speaks Latin because it is the language of the powers, the supernatural, (which can be either good or evil).

Questions:

1. Give a physical description of Wrym.
2. How has God arranged the cosmos?
3. How is that cosmos different from ours?
4. What is the difference between the nature of Ebenezer Rat's wrongdoing and Wrym's evil?

Vocabulary:

cosmography broody (adj.) gouts blustering (v.) putrefaction chittering (v.)

CHAPTER FIVE

Plot summary: Senex weeps for his lack of an heir and the disrespect his hens show him. A voice in a dream promises him a son. The generation and birth of Cockatrice is described. Then Senex is killed by him.

Critical summary: Senex presents the problem of a leader who can no longer command the respect necessary for effective rule and whose land is threatened by civil war because he has no natural heir. Order in his kingdom is also disrupted because his crowing clock is malfunctioning. A mixture of caring for his people and hurt pride allows the voice to tempt him successfully, by appeals to his vanity and through false hope of punishing his mockers. (The smell accompanying the voice should remind us of Wyrn.) Senex is cheated of the hope and honor Wyrn promised him, and violence first enters the novel when Cockatrice kills him.

Questions:

1. What tells us Senex is old?
2. What is wrong in his kingdom because of him?
3. What are we reminded of by the smell which accompanies the voice?
4. By what appeals is Senex tempted to have hope?
5. Compare the son who is promised, and the son that Cockatrice is.
6. List the oddities of the conception, birth, and growth of Cockatrice.

Vocabulary:

constrained ordained (adj.) wither vocal ghastly righteous bung vile sumptuously abdicate

CHAPTER SIX

Plot summary: Chauntecleer carries out a plan to protect the Coop from the Rat, enlisting the help of the Dog and the ants. He triumphs in his fight with the Rat, and allows the Dog to sleep in the Coop.

Critical summary: Chauntecleer's clever plan, courage in the fight, and organizational use of his subjects make us admire him. The army of ants, whose nature is to obey and to work on schedule, and the Dog, provide cartoonlike comedy amidst the strain of the Rat's threat to the community. The Dog is accepted into the Coop, and becomes part of the community, because he has suffered for them. Chauntecleer's plan for counterattack provides us with a good pattern: to find the nature of the threat (in secrecy); decide to meet it on one's own ground (out in the open); determine both how to fight back ("sting" him), and who can give proper help (ants and Dog), and decide what weapons or tools to use (feathers). Rain is a metaphor for bad times.

Questions:

1. What are the ants like? Why is the leader named Tick-Tock?
2. How does Chauntecleer go about solving the problem of the Rat?
3. Why does Chauntecleer allow the Dog to sleep in the Coop at the end?
4. What is the weather like?

Vocabulary:

eternal desperate urgent ferocity

CHAPTER SEVEN

Plot summary: Chauntecleer sits on a mud pile to poultice his wound and complains to God that he needs someone around him who doesn't say "sir." A mouse creeps by, stops, and stares at him.

Critical summary: Sitting on the mud, Chauntecleer once again looks very much a rooster and not the hero of the previous chapter. (Throughout the novel, characters are variously elevated to human action and feeling so that we care for them and about their success, or they are depressed to animal behavior so that they provoke our laughter.) Chauntecleer's prayer is really a complaint, which he finally recognizes; so it ends in a snort. He does, however, define a ruler's problem: his position makes it difficult for others to relate to him as an equal. The problem is aggravated in the question of love and companionship; an equal relationship implies mutual dependence and mutual support. The Dun Cow's nature is revealed-She is not easily provoked.

Questions:

1. Describe Chauntecleer's mood.
2. Why are the fond kisses of the hens "chilly" kisses? (p. 67)
3. Is Chauntecleer praying, arguing, or complaining? (Or all three?)

Vocabulary:

spasmodically drear persist poultice boding (bide, v.) propriety leaden balefully

CHAPTER EIGHT

Plot summary: Chauntecleer finds out Wee Widow Mouse's children are in the river, rescues them, and finds Pertolote, who struggles at first, but finally allows him to rescue her.

Critical summary: Because of the dumb and helpless look of the Mouse, the rooster's irritability explodes in anger, but he is good-hearted enough to feel stupid and ashamed for making her cry. Because her speechlessness is a product of shock and grief, he questions her with patient impatience. With the aid of Beryl, the Dog, and some clever child psychology, he accomplishes the rescue. When others are endangered, he can forget himself, command well, and show heroic courage. Because he is taken with the white hen's beauty in the age-old way, we can guess that his prayer in the previous chapter has been answered. When she relents upon seeing his wound, we know she is as kindhearted as he. Instead of leaving her when she pecks him, Chauntecleer exhibits his role as protector of all weaknesses by continuing to hold her tightly. New information: the Dog's incredible speed; the unnaturalness of the violent water with no sound; the notion that "rain [trouble] makes creatures need one another" (P. 61).

Questions:

1. Why does Chauntecleer make the Mouse cry and how does he feel once he does?
2. What is Mundo Cani Dog's unsuspected talent?
3. What is unnatural about the river?
4. How does Chauntecleer persuade the mice to climb on his wing?
5. Why doesn't Chauntecleer let go of the white hen when she pecks him?
6. Do you think Chauntecleer's "prayer" might be answered?

Vocabulary:

flotsam grist grievous vermillion desperation unready

CHAPTER NINE

Plot summary: The sick and injured recuperate. The rains continue; the fall season has no beauty. The Mouse gives a bare account of her voyage down river. Pertolote won't talk about the past.

Critical summary: The Coop is happy and ordered because all are employed in caring for the sick. But this "warm, blessed island" is only temporarily safe from the encroaching evil (e.g., the unnatural weather) which, since information is withheld, we are eager to hear more about. Chauntecleer is in the excited, bedazzled phase of the courteous lover, and Pertolote is the modest, silently suffering, self-contained "Lady," whose outer beauty evidences her inner beauty and natural superiority. We are kept in suspense awaiting the resolution of both the love plot and the conflict between good and evil.

Questions:

1. Compare a normal fall to this one. (p. 75)
2. Why is the Coop happy? (p. 76)
3. By what behavior do we know Chauntecleer and Pertolote are in love?
4. How does the Dog try to get attention? (pp. 80-81)
5. What questions go unanswered in this chapter?

Vocabulary: cadenzas fumosity nard oblivious

CHAPTER TEN

Plot summary: Snow replaces rain. Chauntecleer asks Pertolote for a song, then asks if she fears him. She is finally able to say she had been afraid because he looked like Cockatrice. He feels cheap for making her remember but rallies when he realizes she needs his comfort. Their marriage takes place in the snow with a procession, dancing, shouting, and snow pictures. Beryl's gift-picture is three eggs.

Critical summary: Pertolote, the beloved Lady, expresses her care for him in a song, probably a madrigal. The proper preparation for marriage: talking about misunderstandings, then feeling snug, unafraid, and at peace. The "bang" of the ice cracking salutes the importance of the moment. Proper marriage: the community witnesses happiness (dancing), beauty (pictures), hope for fertility (eggs), and a blessing.

Questions:

1. Why does Chauntecleer ask Pertolote whether she is afraid of him?
2. Describe the wedding day.

PART TWO

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Plot summary: The animals in Cockatrice's land petition him to bury Senex so that the stench will go away, but they soon discover Senex's body is not the cause of the odor. Further meetings are forbidden. Toad sends the laying hens to Cockatrice, who wants children. Pertolote's ruse is discovered. Cockatrice orders the Basilisks to kill all the animals.

Critical summary: The chapter describes conditions under an evil ruler: disunity, distrust, dishonor. Cockatrice shows his lack of concern for the animals supposedly in his keeping by the "lazy flap of his wings" (p. 95) and by having the Toad speak for him. Toad's cowardly role as a servile flatterer and go-between--a time-server--contributes to Cockatrice's humiliation of the animals. The indignity to which Cockatrice subjects the hens ends only when the Basilisks are born, and we see in him a perverse fatherly love. His children are his war-machine: they kill, making no distinctions. Pertolote seems to match Chauntecleer's cleverness and bravery, and the Mouse appears to be an honest and courageous revolutionary.

Questions:

1. What happens to society under Cockatrice? (p. 96)
2. What is the effect of Cockatrice's rape of the hens?
3. What plan does Pertolote devise to avoid becoming a mother to Cockatrice's children?
4. Describe Toad. Describe Mouse. Describe Hog.

Vocabulary:

blowflies obsessed obsequiousness sepulcher disoriented

CHAPTER TWELVE

Plot summary: Because the Keepers are gone from the land beyond the mountains, Wyrn can surface. He dreams of destroying earth and bringing chaos to the whole universe. God, who has covered the earth with clouds, sends the compassionate Dun Cow to Chauntecleer.

Critical summary: The enemy of God and hater of the earth threatens to destroy the order of the universe. God will let the Keepers take care of Wyrn-it is their purpose or responsibility-but sends one of his messengers so that they will not be "alone."

Questions:

1. By what means do the Keepers usually hold Wyrn in the Netherworld?
(p. 103)
2. Describe what Wyrn would do if he got possession of the earth.

Vocabulary:

festering chaos vulnerable erratic

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Plot summary: Storms precede spring; the river is flooding. Lord Russell, the Fox of Good Sense, lectures his three nephews; the Weasel courts the Mouse. Chauntecleer bursts with pride over his progeny but is secretly worried.

Critical summary: Spring, as is traditional and fitting, is a time of happy renewal and growth, the beginning of love and, in general, the creation of bonds. The Fox is the rhetorician, pedantically self-important, but goodhearted. The Weasel courts the Widow, praising the security and warmth of home life. The flood, metaphorically, is the spreading evil which Chauntecleer the ruler tries to ignore; the vision of heads in the river is the truth he fails to interpret. While worrying about his divided soul, he forgets to share his burden with Pertolote, thus casting a shadow on their bond.

Questions:

1. Describe Lord Russell, the Fox of Good Sense.
2. How does John Wesley Weasel go about 'sparking' Wee Widow Mouse?
3. How close is Chauntecleer's vision to the truth? (p. 111)
4. Why is it Chauntecleer [ruler and protector] who has the vision?

Vocabulary:

loam cavernous blather propitious arcane cannonade

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Plot summary: Chauntecleer dreams: the river rises, and the voice of the river tells him that his subjects have no gratitude; they pass by and ignore him. He shouts his hatred in "righteous wrath, deserved selfpity" (p. 115). The animals pass by dead. Chauntecleer realizes his guilt and denounces the river voice. When he wakes, he touches and names each Coop-dweller with love, telling Pertolote that he can "choose against evil" (p. 118). Pertolote then tells him what happened in Cockatrice's land.

Critical summary: Like Senex, Chauntecleer is attacked in a dream after he has isolated himself. The dreamer's pride is fed, his trust in others is undermined, and he reacts with hatred. When the effect of his hatred is reflected in the dead animals he at last revolts because his love for them is strong and true. Touching and naming the animals reestablishes his contact with them. Pertolote can now tell him about Cockatrice because she, too, chose against evil; thus they renew the necessary trust between husband and wife. It should be clear from the examples of Wyrn's nature, and of Senex's and Chauntecleer's dreams that hatred motivates evil, and that temptation to evil occurs when one is cut off from the others.

Questions:

1. How do we know that the dream is evil?
2. Why is Pertolote reluctant to question Chauntecleer about his worries? (p. 118)
3. Why does the revelation of Pertolote's history solidify their bond? (pp. 119-120)

Vocabulary: Determined-by baneful

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Plot summary: In celebration of the dry weather, the animals take a holiday, which is difficult for the ants, but easy for the chicks. When the Fox shows them the Trick of the Stick, they leave him sleeping and go off to the river alone. Beryl finds them missing from the circle in which she placed them, and goes to find them. Beryl and the chicks are found dead of Basilisk bites, with a circle drawn around them in the dirt.

Critical summary: The first day of summer is a traditional holiday. Ants, by nature, are workers and cannot play. Tick Tock's ballad foreshadows the loss of the chicks, and Beryl's seemingly superstitious fear of the curse in the words proves to be true, just as dreams in the literature of the middle ages traditionally prove true. Lord Russel's clever tricks return to mock him in this instance, since it is the Trick of the Stick which leads to the children's death. The circle around the dead is a mockery of Beryl's former care. Note the dignity of the mourners, including the fact that Lord Russell is not judged guilty of negligence.

Questions:

1. Of what does the 'holiday' consist? (pp. 121-122)
2. If the chicks are bored by the ants' game, why don't they just leave? (p. 123)
3. Why does the Dog growl at the Fox, and why doesn't Chauntecleer let the Dog at him?

Vocabulary:

luminous rheum imprudent sinister incantations stentorian judicious rue halcyon keening

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Plot summary: Chauntecleer remonstrates with God, blames Him, asks why He broke the promise of His gifts. The Dun Cow has compassion for him; meanwhile, no one sleeps in the Coop. The Weasel tries to prove that the Rat killed the chicks; Chauntecleer argues against revenge and hatred. When the Rat dies after a fight with a Basilisk, Chauntecleer calls a council.

Critical summary: Although Chauntecleer demonstrates the enormity of a parent's love by daring to blame God, it is wickedness to do so because there is self-pride in it. Before the Dun Cow eventually takes his pain to herself, Chauntecleer goes through the course of grief: asking why it happened and why he is cut off from his children, becoming resigned; and finally stating simply what he really wants--e.g., his sons. Once he is healed, he once again becomes the good ruler; he demands proof when the Weasel accuses the obvious enemy, and commands that the Rat be allowed to go in peace and absolves him with a kiss. Chauntecleer then calls a council of all the animals.

Questions:

1. What is the course of Chauntecleer's grief?
2. Why does the Weasel think the Rat did it?
3. How does Chauntecleer argue against the accusation?
4. Why does Chauntecleer kiss the Rat?

Vocabulary:

vagrant plenish desolation phenomenal initiative insolent

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Plot summary: Pertolote says Beryl's "sacrifice was not meant for her" (p. 147). Chauntecleer is tormented by helplessness when Pertolote is silent in her grief. All are fretful from the dread of an unknown enemy. The animals--"the meek of the earth" (p. 152)--gather. Chauntecleer has self-doubts before addressing them; he thinks he sees the Dun Cow talking to Mundo Cani Dog, and is jealous.

Critical summary: Beryl was an unknowing victim of Cockatrice's attempt to get at Chauntecleer. The characters of the assembling animals and their familial ties provide clear parallels to human society, and they are "meek" in the Middle English sense: humble, patient, unresentful, and not violent. The presence of the Dun Cow with the Dog arouses Chauntecleer's pride. We realize in Chapter 19, however, that her "talking" is really inspiring him, though he is not conscious of it.

Questions:

1. Describe the characteristics of some of the animals. Which are appropriate to animal behavior and which to human society?
2. What are Chauntecleer's doubts before speaking?

Vocabulary:

fretful contemplative ecumenical orator disdainful catechized

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Plot summary: Chauntecleer speaks to the assembly of animals. The Dun Cow's eyes shine like suns. Pertolote sings "Ah," then "Turalay." The near-sighted Turkeys go to see the Basilisks, but the Dog bumps them back. Vespers is crowed, which repels the Basilisks. Wyrn makes his presence known.

Critical summary: The speech is sermon-like. He questions them both to get their attention and to make them aware of their past blessings: no famine or wars, the laughter of children, and the divinely directed accomplishment of their plans, He tells them of his past as an exemplum of what can be achieved, in order to protect those one loves, and as an assurance that he rules by means of the will of God only. The purpose of his rule is to bring the aimless to lives of resolution, and to inspire those who live only for themselves to live for others. He uses the death of his children as proof of the enemy's true Evil and of the threat to their children. Shocked and drained, the animals are comforted by Pertolote's "Ah, " a hosanna under the gaze of the Dun Cow. The folk ballad "Turalay" makes them understand the enemy, yet the music is calming because from God ... the sun breaks through the clouds for the "Amen." The animals (now a congregation) are united and at peace before danger breaks forth. The Turkeys' stupidity is humorous, and the Dog saves them, prefiguring a hopeful outcome. The Dog is seen as helpful, obedient, fast, and strong. The Basilisks are repelled by vespers because it is a holy time in the presence of God. Wyrn's challenge immediately following suggests the precarious position the animals are in.

Questions:

1. Why does Chauntecleer remind the animals of their past blessings?
2. Why does Chauntecleer tell them his life story?
3. How do Pertolote's songs help the animals?
4. Why do the Basilisks shrink back when vespers is crowed?
5. What are the Dog's attributes?

Vocabulary:

choleric caterwauling belligerent addled craven athwart abomination decorum
minion

PART THREE

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Plot summary: While the Turkeys pout, the others divide up and proceed with their various duties in the war effort. Ocellata Turkey satisfies his pout by pecking off a line of hair across the Dog's body. When Chauntecleer reprimands Ocellata, the Dog takes the guilt upon himself. Chauntecleer reassures him that he is needed and loved.

Critical summary: Each animals' duty is appropriate to his talent, e.g., the Bees seal in the stench with wax. The psychology behind the Turkeys' pout and the Dog's woe is that those who work against a team effort are uncertain of their usefulness and place. They need to be reassured and shown love. The Dog is called Soul of Mine by the Rooster, suggesting a symbolic bond between them. Since the Dog did not see the Dun Cow, we assume that the messenger is visible only to the leader, and that the effectiveness of speech and songs of the previous chapter are made possible through the medium of the Dun Cow. Building the Dog's morale gives hope to the reader for their success.

Questions:

1. Why are the Turkeys ridiculous?
2. On what basis are the duties divided up?
3. Was the Dun Cow really talking to the Dog during Chauntecleer's speech?
4. How does Chauntecleer go about reassuring the Dog?

Vocabulary:

Rampart incisive bulwark convulse trenchant compulsively

CHAPTER TWENTY

Plot summary: Rumbings of mutiny are calmed by Chauntecleer crowing compline throughout the night, and by naming each of the animals individually. When he hears malevolent laughter, he realizes he has lost his bearings, and races in a circle around the wall. He falls off, and is comforted by the Dun Cow. She makes "his spirit bold and his body ready" (p. 189) and in a riddle (*ibid.*) gives him his weapons.

Critical summary: Within the walled city, Chauntecleer brings order with compline and naming. His importance is highlighted by the laughter being directed at him, and by the Dun Cow readying him. That he loves her without knowing why and that she speaks without words and advises him in riddles suggest that faith is ineffable. Our admiration of Chauntecleer builds as the threat against his land builds.

Questions:

1. Why do the animals want to run away?
2. Why does naming each animal help them? (pp. 185-186)
3. What does the Dun Cow give Chauntecleer?

Vocabulary:

volatile insidious hopheaded apprehension excoriate timbre transfiguring illusion deterioration dire malevolent

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Plot summary: In the ferocious heat of the day, animals panic because Chauntecleer is not there. Turkeys are killed by Basilisks, but Chauntecleer finds the Crow Potens, and the serpents retreat. He admonishes the animals for their lack of faith, which invites the Basilisks. He orders them to be smeared with rue; then, in his prebattle speech, he names the evil they face and each of the animals' children. The narrator tells us there are three enemies: Wurm, his son Cockatrice; and his sons the Basilisks.

Critical summary: The stifling heat suggests the oppression of their spirit; only faith in what one does puts evil to confusion. Naming the enemy (what they fight) and the children (why they fight) clarifies and creates order. Chauntecleer sees Cockatrice as a "mirror of himself" (pp. 197 and 206) the notion of *speculum* or mirror being a medieval literary device which allows us to see ourselves better. So, although Chauntecleer must fight pure evil, he also must fight the potential evil within himself: loss of faith; hatred; and despair. Chauntecleer chooses not to think about all three battles at once, because he must fight what is before him in the present.

Questions:

1. What parts of the Dun Cow's riddle are solved?
2. What does Chauntecleer say to make the animals ready for battle?
3. Describe the held of Basilisks.
4. Why does Cockatrice seem like a mirror to Chaunteelear?

Vocabulary:

ferocity hackles mordant taunt scourge

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Plot summary: The battle commences and Wee Widow Mouse is killed, which makes the Weasel fight harder. The day is won, but Cockatrice challenges Chauntecleer. The voice of Wyrms tells him to curse God.

Critical summary: Metaphorically, evil poisons. When the innocent are killed first, we are especially shocked, and support fully the valor of the Weasel. The challenge to single combat is characteristic of epic encounters; the feudal lords stand in for the whole of their people. The voice of evil always comes when spirits are low.

Questions:

1. Describe the progress of the battle.
2. Describe the Crow Potens. (p. 201)
3. Why is the Weasel fiercer when he returns to battle?

Vocabulary:

gutteral carnage innumerable decimated blackguards inert

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Plot summary: Pertolote follows Chauntecleer over the wall, and both get lost. She wants the fighting to stop; neither knows what Wyrn is or why he exists; so they fight a mystery. But they reaffirm their love, and their unity in fight against evil.

Critical summary: They show their need for mutual support in the face of the horror of the battlefield. They choose life despite death. Their 'dark night of the soul' passes' on to affirmation; once more they are choosing against evil. Night, and being lost, are metaphors for loss of faith.

Questions:

1. Why does Pertolote want the fighting to stop?
2. What do both of them realize about Wyrn?

Vocabulary:

fatuous incidental chasm

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Plot summary: The sound from the river confuses Pertolote, but Chauntecleer crows lauds against it, in challenge. He straps on "Gaff" and "Slasher"-his spurs-while Cockatrice laughs in contempt. At third try Chauntecleer kills him, hacks him up, and throws his head to Wyrn, who then challenges Chauntecleer.

Critical summary: Cockatrice's laughter is the ironic and superior laughter of devils and demons. During the fight, the reader's focus on Chauntecleer is directed by Pertolote. Cockatrice dies because his hatred drives him closer to Chauntecleer, thus impaling him further: hatred is self destructive. Chauntecleer's dismemberment of his enemy suggests the vengefulness he feels; it is through this sentiment that Wyrn spies his opportunity.

Questions:

1. What is the difference between the challenging crow of Cockatrice and Chauntecleer? (hatred vs. praise of God)
2. How does Cockatrice die? (p. 221)
3. What does Chauntecleer do to Cockatrice's body?
4. What is Chauntecleer feeling when he says, "I don't know anymore" (p. 223)?

Vocabulary:

benevolent transfixed saber vehement gaff

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Plot summary: Chauntecleer is essentially defeated because he has lost hope, therefore faith, therefore the truth. He despairs, and cares only about his own feelings. He becomes angry because the Dun Cow appears to him to care only for Pertolote and the Dog. The Dun Cow has compassion for the Dog, and breaks off her horn. Chauntecleer wants the Dog to hurt and feel guilt, and so tells both him and his wife to go away. The Dog says, "And a Dog who was this yesterday may be that today" (p. 228). The Dog takes Chauntecleer in his mouth for a walk through the camp.

Critical summary: A Pyrrhic victory: Chauntecleer's despair leaves the animals leaderless, therefore easily defeated. The Dun Cow suffers for the mission the Dog will undertake; i.e., she gives of herself: the horn. Chauntecleer transfers his own feelings of failure to the Dog, and despises him. He is in the 'Slough of Despond,' or the 'Valley of Despair': self-pity ensues as he rejects others and becomes paranoid.

Questions:

1. Why does Chauntecleer get angry with the Dun Cow? (p. 226)
2. Why does Chauntecleer get angry with the Dog?
3. Describe Chauntecleer's despair.

Vocabulary:

jubilant predicament

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Plot summary: Chauntecleer's ride around the camp in the Dog's mouth makes him "ready to live again for the sake of revenge" (p. 234). Mundo Cani Dog must go; so Chauntecleer calls him a traitor. Waters are crashing against the walls.

Critical summary: Chauntecleer's pride suffers from the humiliating ride, from the laughter of those he is supposed to rule. His despair, however, is cured through this satiric attack. Although his faith in the possibility of action has not yet returned, Pertolote and the Dog still have hope. The Dun Cow has been able to support them because they are not proud. A good example of Chauntecleer's malaise is his selfish interpretation of the Dog's departure.

Questions:

1. How is Chauntecleer brought around to wanting to live?
2. How does Chauntecleer say goodbye to the Dog?

Vocabulary:

processional infuriating mortify enormity

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Plot summary: The voice of Wyrn and the dizzy turning of the waters is frightening. Chauntecleer has given up. When the chasm opens, Wyrn is seen. The Dog challenges him with the horn, plays a "lonely game," and finally stabs the monster's eye with the horn of the Dun Cow. The earth closes with the Dog below.

Critical summary: If the Dog's bravery makes Chauntecleer guilty and ashamed, it makes the reader cheer. "Of all the noble, a Dog is chosen" (p. 241): He hath exulted the lowly and the meek. The Wyrn is all the fearful horrors of the world at once, here related to the man-eating Cyclops. When the sun shines, God's eye is once more shining upon them.

Questions:

1. Describe Wyrn. (p. 240)
2. Why does God try to get Wyrn's attention?
3. Why does Chauntecleer say "marooned"?

Vocabulary:

writhed mewling abysmal imperative precipice livid

FINAL WORD

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Plot summary: Others are rebuilding their lives; but the Weasel hates the sunlight because it doesn't shine on the Widow Mouse, and Chauntecleer just wants to forget, but can't. Pertolote cures them both. Chauntecleer realizes he must ask the Dog forgiveness for despising him, and for selfishly wanting the honor of challenging Wyrn himself. The Weasel and Chauntecleer try to best each other in boasting their love for the Dog.

Critical summary: In order to work and rebuild, the Weasel must excise the anger from his grief, and Chauntecleer must own up to his meanness: his hurt pride, and having despised another. They must neither dwell on nor forget the past, but rather make it a part of themselves. The novel ends in hope and human comedy: Weasel and Rooster compete against each other, boasting that he will find the Dog first, in order to express his love to him.

Questions:

1. At the beginning of the chapter, what is wrong with the Weasel and Chauntecleer?
2. How do we know when they have returned to their places in the world?
3. What is Pertolote's method for curing them?

Vocabulary:

abhorrence intuition laggard adversaries

Suggested Paper Topics

A. Less Difficult

- * Discuss the character of John Wesley Weasel.
- * Compare Chapter 18, the council, to a church service.
- * Examine the naturalism of particular animal behaviors.
- * Describe the first battle.
- * Discuss the characters of the Turkeys.
- * How does Pertolote cure the Weasel and Chauntecleer in Chapter 28?

B. More Difficult

- * Examine parental love as motivation for action.
- * What is Chauntecleer's job as a good ruler?
- * Compare John Wesley Weasel to characterizations in *Uncle Remus*.
- * How is Cockatrice a bad ruler?
- * Discuss Pertolote as a courtly lady and as a modern wife.
- * How is natural phenomena, for instance the weather and the river, used in the novel?
- * What are the preconditions for temptation?
- * What is the nature of evil?
- * Discuss compassion, care, and courage.
- * Research the medieval meanings of the hens' names.

C. Most Difficult

- * How is Mundo Cani Dog both a cartoon figure and a hero?
- * Compare Chauntecleer's character to Charlemagne's in *Song of Roland*.
- * Compare Chaucer's ironic treatment of Chanticleer and Pertolote to their treatment in this novel.
- * Discuss the psychology of Chauntecleer's despair.
- * What is the function of the Dun Cow?
- * Examine the structure implied in the three parts.
- * Describe Chauntecleer in the Fallen World with attention to the notion of comic and tragic mankind.

Glossary

BALLAD FORM: a narrative with a sensational subject written in stanzas, with a refrain. The narrator remains objective about his material. (See the ant's song, p. 108)

BASILISKS: a fabulous beast confused in bestiaries with the Cockatrice. His breath and looks were fatal. The weasel was thought to be able to conquer him, however, and medieval travelers often took a weasel along when traveling.

BLITZSCHLANGE: the lightning snake of the sky in Teutonic myth.

CANONICAL HOURS: in medieval monasteries, stated times of the day were put aside for prayers and devotion. These are: prime-before sunrise; lauds-at the rising of the sun; terce-three hours later; sext-six hours later; none-nine hours later; vespers-at sundown; compline-before sleep.

CHAUNTECLEER: traditional name for the rooster in beast epics. From the Old French to sing a crow.

COCKATRICE: a fabulous beast confused in bestiaries with the Basilisk. He appears in natural histories from the Roman encyclopedist Pliny down through the middle ages. Conventionally, he is produced from a cock's egg, and hatched by a serpent. Men were poisoned by his look (but not the weasel) and rue could remedy his bite and the cock crow could kill him.

DUN COW, THE BOOK OF THE: title of a Gaelic folklore manuscript inscribed in 1100 A.D., and so named because it is bound in brown cowhide.

HENS: all are named after popular medieval gem stones: Beryl, Chalcedony, Chrysolite, Emerald, Jacinth, Jasper, Sardonyx and Topaz.

LORD RUSSELL, THE FOX OF GOOD SENSE: traditional name for the clever fox in beast epics. He is "Reynard" in French, and "Russell" in Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale.

MUNDO CANI DOG: from the Italian expression mondo can4 a dog's world.

NETHERWORLD: usually refers to the kingdom below the earth of 'Dis,' or 'Pluto,' in Classical mythology.

NIMBUS: a radiating light around the head; in art history, the name of haloes on figures in medieval paintings.

PERTOLOTE: traditional name for the hen-wife of Chauntecleer in beast epics.

PTOLEMAIC: the system proposed by Ptolemy, according to which the Earth was the fixed center of the universe.

PIKA: name for a guinea pig-like rodent of central Asia.

RULES OF BATTLE: the following steps are characteristic of single combats in epics: 1) the defiance-an insult or threat; 2) fighting with spears; 3) fighting with swords on horse or foot; 4) a mutual summons to surrender during the pause for breath; 5) if one is disabled or disarmed, a call for surrender at discretion, or else delivery of a death-blow; 6) the victor's boast.

SENEX: a characteristic name for the old man, usually a comic character typically foolish, gullible, and nearsighted because of his vanity. Most familiar is the senex amans, old lover, of Latin comedy.

TEREBINTH OAK: in the Old Testament, the sacred tree of the pagans at Shechem. **TURKEYS:** all of their names are food-related except "Ocellata," which is the name for a spotted turkey.

WYRM: Old English for dragon or snake.