

Prologue - Chaucer's Humour Page 1

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P.G. Eng - CC-I

Geoffrey Chaucer is the father of English Poetry. He has been called the 'well of English undefiled'. He stands at the beginning of English Poetry as well as at the close of the Middle Ages. He has a deep insight, a proper understanding and sympathetic outlook. However, Humour, fun, wit, satire and irony - all are found in abundance in his literary works. However, his natural bent is towards humour. He has no intention to teach or to ridicule. He is critical but never didactic. He comes to us with his frankness and laughter as a friend. In the words of a critic, a roguish playful irony is one of his commonest weapons; satire and serious admiration help, but good humour is always in his right.

Chaucer is the first great English humorist. He treats his fellow men with a liberal and indulgent attitude. His humour is superbly subtle and many-sided. It is based on insight and sympathy. It is the outcome of the keen observation of men and manners of every day life. That is why he describes the Squire's locks which seem to have been laid in press and the hat that the Wife of Bath wears weighs 10 lbs. Similarly, the references to the Reeve's, their legs, the Franklin's weakness of the sharp sauce and the Monk or Friar, are very amusing. In fact, Chaucer does not treat with disdain those whose foolishness he has fathomed, nor has he turned away in disgust from the rascals whose tricks he has detected. He exposes the evils and vices of the church with a good humoured laugh. He makes fun of several individuals related to the church.

Chaucer's Humour has a wide range. It ranges from the delicate shades of good natured shyness to downright ridicule which raises an irresistible laughter. Sometimes, his Humour is

is sly. For example, we are told of the Prioress that -

"Full well she poung the service dyvne
Entred in hir nose full devoutly"

The affectations of the Prioress are slyly revealed. She has an exaggerated sensibility. She would weep, if she saw a mouse caught in a trap or if her small dog was dead or struck by some one for humorous intention is obviously present in the portraits of such perfect characters as the Parson and the Ploughman.

Chaucer displays a freshness of outlook and is quite marked by tolerance, charity, forgiveness and sympathy. There is always an element of pity for the foibles of the mankind. The smile and laughter that he raises are always genial in their final effect. Even in the portraits of the Pardoner and the Summoner there is no magisterial or personal feeling. In the portrait of the Wife of Bath we see the tyrannical qualities of a typical woman. But, there is no trace of anger, no sign of harshness. He sympathises with the 'Wife' in her most dominant characteristic, the zest for life.

"But lord Crist, when that it remembreth me

Up on my yowthe, and on my jolitee,

It tikelith me aboute wyf herte bete

That I have had my world as in my tyme."

Chaucer's humour is the expression of his joyous sense of existence. His many sided interests in life and his faith in humanity give a unique quality to his humour. He is capable of remarkable detachment - he can survey the motley scene of life with an amused smile and a tolerant gaze. He is a disinterested onlooker and, that is why, he paints things and persons as they are. The details, the portraits, with an eye to their pictorial and comical effects, produce the most striking impression upon the reader. He has his own way of dealing with characters, which

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makes an advance upon the romance-writers, who gave us only the shadowy abstractions. Really, he is a master of humour. He knows well that speech, action and movement of living men and women are the real living source of humour and so he puts on the stage the living men and women of his age whom he knows well.

Thus, we see that Chaucer is the real master of humour. His humour, as a matter of fact, is the outcome of his deep knowledge of human psychology, his minute observation of things and persons, his realism and humanism. His humour has a compound effect. His humanism, his tolerance of human frailties and weakness, for he is a realist and knows that to err is human, impart a congenial deliciousness to his humour.

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Chaucer - As a poet - As father of English Poetry - Prologue

Geoffrey Chaucer is the greatest figure in

the English literature of the fourteenth century who has thrown all his contemporaries into the shade. He is the father of English Poetry. He has been called the 'well of English undefiled'. He stands at the beginning of English Poetry as well as at the close of middle ages. He has inherited the whole literature of France, enriched with elegant style, new literary trend and new learning, exhibiting liberation of intellect and imagination. He combined the charms of new born things with the experiences of the old ages in his writings and gives a progressive turn to English Poetry. Similarly, he imports words from French and Latin, purifies English Language and shapes it into a fit instrument for English literature. By the lovely charm of his diction and movement he has made our speech and founded a tradition which is visible in Shakespeare, Milton and Keats.

Chaucer is the first English poet of Nature and Humanity. The Prologue opens with a lively description of Nature. It is a morning of April, pregnant with freshness and glory of spring. Flowers, showers and soft winds make the budding world gay and beautiful. The whole of the world is charged with love of life and restless desire of adventures. Every element of nature is motivated and stirred. See the following lines:

• And smale foules maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open ye
So preken hem Nature in hir courages

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"Thanne lorgen folk to goon on pilgrimages"

Chaucer is equally interested in Man and Nature. The chief merit of the Prologue lies in the freshness and truth with which each pilgrim is set before the readers. Every pilgrim, with his goodness and follies springs into life. The Prologue is the complete record of the medieval society with all its varieties of people and their things. Actually, Chaucer enjoys the secret spring of humanity and shows a miracle by putting life and speech of the day into the figures of the middle ages. The praiseworthy point of Chaucer is his objective attitude.

Chaucer is endowed with a peculiar gift of humour. He is a humourist, the quality of detachment. It is related to his humanism that gives a new zest to life. It is sunny, throwing the sparks of indulgent smiles on the vices of society. Chaucer is never rebellious or cynical. He accepts what life gives with a manly courage. He always shows a Shakespearean sympathy with the follies and absurdities he describes. He exposes the worldliness and materialism of the monk who loves hunting instead of scriptures. He points at the Vices of the Friar and the Pardoner who sell religious veeces. He hints at the weakness of every character from the Knight to the Miller, but he is never bitter or grouser. See his tolerant humour and human graciousness in the character sketch of the wife of Bath.

"In al the parisshe Nef he was thir noon

That to the offrynges before hire shoulde goon"

Chaucer is the first creator of human

characters in English literature. His unity of genius and masterly common sense combined with his sense of reality and profound knowledge of human nature impart realism to his work. He is a great master of narrative art as well as realistic art. The men and women of the *Prologue* are as real today as they were in Chaucer's days. They are made of the genuine human stuff and display every essence of humanity. *Dresden* rightly concludes that 'here is God's plenty. In the portrayal of characters, Chaucer gives every detail in dress, person or behaviour. See an example from the character of *Proctor*

"At mete wel y-taught" was she with alle
 she leet no morsel from hir lippen falle
 Ne wette hir fyngres in hir sauce drape"

Some critics opine that Chaucer's characters are more of types than individuals. In fact, Chaucer has created living human figures as contrasted with the shadowy characters of the old metrical romances. Each of the characters of the *Prologue* has individual traits and none is to be confused with other. They are individualised with the qualities of the class they represent. Chaucer's art and his genius have immortalised them. They are the triumph of realism - not the realism of Coarser types but the realism that is related to the representation of living reality. In fact, Chaucer's characterisation demonstrates that type and individual are inseparable.

In short, Chaucer is a great master of poetic art. It is he who marks the beginning of English literature. He has given a proper shape to English

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Language and made it a simple vehicle for literary art. His Prologue is a perfect documentation of the medieval world and reveals his accurate knowledge of human nature. Of course, he has some limitations. But we must not forget that he is founder and the first in every field of literary world. Undoubtedly, he occupies the first place in the history of English literature: =

Pictorial quality or Use of imagery in Shakespeare's Sonnets

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William Shakespeare is admittedly the best poet and the best dramatist of the Elizabethan Period. He enjoys a deep insight into human and presents it with all its minutiae. He is the most original and realistic in his thought and expression. His literary work is a living commentary on human life. He is read with equal interest in all the ages. He is also a great master of Sonnets. His Sonnets are the brightest gems of English literature. As he was a genius he could not follow the trodden track of Sonnets tradition and gave an innovative turn to it, both in its spirit and texture. He did start with the Spenserian mode of Sonnet writing but introduced new literary devices and technique and elevated it to the height of the highest literary genres. That is why we often hear critics say that 'he found a brick and turned it into a marble.' With other attributes of Shakespeare's distinct style, his use of imagery and pictorial devices deserve special attention. Let us see it in a brief.

Sonnet, in truth, is an important form of Poetry. Poetry is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquillity as well as a criticism of life. Hence, the use of images, similes, metaphors and such other poetic devices is quite common in Sonnets. Naturally, Shakespeare has exhaustively and elaborately used these figures of speech in his Sonnets. However, his distinct traits are evidently obvious throughout his Sonnets. His imagery imparts solidity and concreteness to his thought. For example, he attempts to convince his common friend that he must wed by pointing to the harmony in music. See the following lines:-

"Mark how one string, sweet husband to another
Strikes each in each by mutual ordering,
Resembling sire, and child, and happy mother
who all in one, one pleasing note do sing."

The Sonnets of Shakespeare are marked by the felicity

of expression and profundity of thought. But, they are more popular for exquisite word pictures. In fact, Shakespeare is endowed with the gift of painting. Consequently, his imagery is varied, realistic and striking. As he was a great-lover of Nature, his sonnets are rich in Nature's pictures too. Hence, the beautiful sights of Nature, particularly in the month of April, sweet-singing of birds and pleasing fragrance of flowers are picturesquely painted by him. For an example:-

"When proud-pied April, dressed in all his trim

Hath put a spirit of youth in every thing

That heavy Saturn laughed and leaped with him

Yet nor the lay of words, nor the sweet-smell

of different flowers in odour and in hue..."

In some of his Nature pictures, Shakespeare makes use of striking similes. At one place, he compares his friend with the sun which attains its greatest power at noon and in the evening it declines and finally sets completely. That is he conveys that his friend will ultimately grow old. At another place, he compares the patronage of his friend with the glory of the morning sun. See the following lines:-

"Full many of glorious morning have I seen

Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye

Kissing with golden face the meadows green

Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy."

Shakespeare uses the pictures of the ocean to represent the rift with his friend. But the pictures that he depicts to depict the passage of time are very striking. Time is a greater killer. Shakespeare illustrates this with the help of such phenomena of Nature as the bright day giving place to the dark night or the violet gradually fading. The decaying process of Time works havoc with things by depriving them of their beauty and charm, so he says in the following lines:-

When I do count the clock that tells the time,

And see the brave day sunk in hideous night
When I beheld the violet past prime,

And sable curls all silvered over with white?...

Beauty and perfection stay only for a short while. They cannot escape from the cruel touch of Time. The uncertain aspects of Summer are painted in these lines:-

"Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May
And Summer's lease hath all too short a date
Some time too hot the eye of heaven shines
And after is his gold complexion dimmed."

In one sonnet, Shakespeare speaks of the ravages of Time that have the power to blunt even the paws of the lion and can pluck away the sharp teeth of a tiger. That is ^{even} the most cruel of tyrants has to surrender before the furies of Time.

"Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws
And make the earth devour her own sweet brood."

Time is all powerful. It does not spare anything. Not only youth or Beauty but all the stone monuments, brass memorials or statues of great men are subject to decay. But, the poet's love and pleasant experiences with his friend will shine more brightly in his sonnets. Neither the swords of Mars nor the destructiveness of war will deface the beauty of those poems:-

"Nor Mars' sword, nor war quick fire shall burn
The living record of your memory."

To conclude, Shakespeare's Sonnets are replete with word pictures. They reveal Shakespeare's power of minute observation and sharpness of mind which enable him to create the images to suit the situation and clarify his view points. Shakespeare's imagery varied and realistic in character. It contributes to the realism of sonnets, making them more and more life-like in character and spirit. A. Hays

Theme of Shakespeare's sonnets

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William Shakespeare is admittedly the best poet and the best dramatist of the Elizabethan period. He enjoys a deep insight into human nature and presents it with all its minutes. His literary work is a living commentary on human life. He is read with equal interest in all the ages. He is also a great master of Sonnets. As he was a literary genius, he could not follow the beaten track of sonnet tradition and gave it an innovative turn, both in its spirit and shape. His sonnets are the brightest gems of English literature along with the traditional theme of Love, they dealt with other things like that of Time, Death, Beauty, Honour and other elements of human nature. But, friendship gets a special treatment. Besides, Shakespeare himself is the theme of his sonnets.

The vogue of sonnet-writing originated by Petrarch in Italy. It came to England through Wyatt and Surrey. Therefore, the Petrarchan tradition continued with the English Sonneteers. Love and Courtship formed the foundation of sonnet tradition. These were the dominant themes of the Elizabethan Sonnets. Of course, there was friendship but it was always relegated to the subsidiary theme. Shakespeare goes against the dominant Renaissance tradition of sonnets and gives prime importance to the theme of friendship. This may be the outcome of his personal reason. He may have experienced such a deep, passionate friendship with any person. This is the main consideration that has prompted critics to declare his sonnets as deeply autobiographical sonnets, representing real passion and conflict raging within Shakespeare's own soul.

Shakespeare might have been influenced by the Renaissance concept of friendship. The fact that Shakespeare was keenly alive to the spiritual needs of his time determined the choice of his major themes. The age had a dual vision. Love was seen both as an example of preordained cosmic harmony, of the biological urge to increase and also as a struggle of the male and the

female principles of supremacy. It is both creative and destructive. Shakespeare's Sonnets embody his total vision of life, his vision of duality running through nature and human nature alike. The Sonnets can be roughly divided into two sets, beginning with the description of the beauty of the uncommon friend, referring to the pleasures and agonies of a real friendship, and, finally, culminating into the eternity of love. In other words, the intensity of Shakespeare's love has a beginning, a middle and a climax.

The first set of the Sonnets, one to hundred twenty six, describes the friend as a young man. He is beautiful, tender and world's fresh ornaments. He is highly born and handsome with an inheritance that makes Shakespeare want to save his beauty by marriage. He suggests his friend that the cruel effect of Time will destroy his beauty and the essence of beauty will banish away out of existence. Therefore, he wants his friend to marry so that he might preserve his true copy in his offsprings.

"Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake
And die as fast as they see others grow
And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence
Save breed, to brave him when he takes thee hence."

Shakespeare loves his friend so intensely that in a challenging tone, like John Donne in 'Death Be Not Proud' he remarks:

"But my eternal Summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st
Nor shall death brag though wander'st in his shade
When in eternal lines to Time thou grow'st."

Shakespeare's friendship is uncommon. He never thinks of himself away from him. They may have two bodies but their heart is one. See the delicate feelings:-

"Presume not on my heart when mine is slain
Thou gav'st me thine out to give back again."

When ever Shakespeare heart is filled with sorrows caused by the memory of his past griefs and grievances, he thinks of his friend and all of his sadness and gloominess are over:-

"But if the while I think on thee, dear friend
All losses losses are restored and sorrows end."

Some of the Sonnets record Shakespeare's obsession with this boy's love for the dark lady. He is seen in tension when his friend falls in love with the wanton beauty whom he loves. But finally, he compromises with his tension and forgives the gentle robbery of his friend. He consoles himself with the idea that if heavenly bodies can be spotted and darkened by the foul play of nature, his friend, a member of this world may fall prey to the evil's design:-

"Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth
Suns of the world may stain, when Heaven's suns staineth?"

The second set of the Sonnets present Shakespeare's feelings about the dark lady. The lady is dark both in soul and physique. He knows that the lady is not faithful to him and his devotion to her is only the madness of his behaviour. He confesses that he is torn between two kinds of Love - sensual and spiritual:-

"Two Loves I have, of comfort and despair
Which like two spirits do suggest me still?"

The moral Theme of Shakespeare is also obvious at places. He differentiates soul from body - physical pleasure from spiritual pleasures. One develops at the cost of other. Hence, he advocates for the beautification of soul, that is immortal and that can conquer even death:-

"With in be fed, without be rich no more."

Thus, we see that Shakespeare's Sonnets are the documents of his personal experiences. They are remarkable for their depth and varieties of theme. They are really authentic commentaries on human nature. Shakespeare is at his best as a sonneteer. AHAQUE