

Chaucer's humor

[Literature](#), [Poetry](#)



Chaucer has been acclaimed as the first realist, the first humorist, the first narrative artist, the first great character-painter, and the first great metrical artist in English literature. But it is powerful and ubiquitous presence of Chaucer's humour that makes him distinct among others writers and poets of English Literature hitherto. Chaucer perpetually observes or perceives the humorous side of any facade of human life. His humor is not constrained to his emotions but it encircles all of his interests, his beliefs, his whole being and his everything.

If he manifests his knowledge and information about a wide variety of things, he also mocks, creates caricatures, parodies with the help of same knowledge. It seems that manifestation of knowledge in this way, he tries to relieve himself. For example, he shows his interest in astronomy and manifests its knowledge here and there in Canterbury Tales; he also utilizes his extensive and intensive knowledge of astrology as satirical and mocking frequently. He has an unparalleled sense of humor.

The main reason for this outstanding achievement is that his use of humor has an outstanding multiplicity and variety. Unlike most humorists, he does employ the tone of hyperbole and fantasy. He concentrates on the traits and aims at providing the real mirror images. Additionally, his least-cynical observation of realities of life and traits of human beings enables him to produce unparalleled humor. When this effort mingles with his in-depth knowledge of things and his witticism, humorist effect is created.

He achieves humor through a variety of elements including plot, characterization, language, pace, and timing,. For example in 'The Merchant's Tale', he juxtaposes genre of courtly love and religion against each

other and mocks them. Different precepts of courtly love are satirized by characterization and are undermined to an extent by effective utilization of images, descriptions and tone that it seems comical and illogical.

So there is no reason to deny the fact that a great deal of liveliness and reality in Chaucer's poetry is due to his all-pervasive humor and he is unsurpassable in this art of creating humorous sketches and verbal renderings that represent a probably every facet of the contemporary life. Kemp Malone and Albert Croll Baugh observation that 'Chaucer is sometimes denied the rank of a great poet, on the ground that he lacked higher seriousness, that his poetry is without great themes nobly conceived' is true to some extent but not utterly.

The assumption that his poetry is devoid of great themes is based on misconception. His major contribution towards the content of poetry is in his advocacy of and strict adherence to realism. His Canterbury Tales embodies a new effort in the history of literature, as it strictly deals with real men, manners, and life. He realized, to adopt Pope's famous couplet (with a little change): Know then thyself: presume not dream to scan, The proper study of mankind is man. And the product of this realization was The Canterbury Tales.

This poem, as it were, holds a mirror to the life of Chaucer's age and shows its manners and morals completely, "not in fragments". Chaucer replaces effectively the shadowy delineations of the old romantic and allegorical school with the vivid and pulsating pictures of contemporary life. (Brewer, 1978) Chaucer's tone as a poet is wonderfully instinct with geniality, tolerance, humor, and freshness which are absent from that of his

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contemporaries and predecessors who are too dreamy or too serious to be interesting. References Brewer, Derek. Chaucer and his world. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1978.