

Poetry
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The Prologue

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The Prologue



- The Arrival of the Pilgrims
- Chaucer's Portraits - Humor
 - Class, Profession, Activities, Skills,
 - Social Status, Appearance, Dress, Age,
 - Beliefs and Values, Behavior, Speech
 - Patterns, Possessions, Equipment,
 - Horse, Special Identification Markers
- The Narrator's Comments
- Aspects of Poetry
 - Metaphor, Simile, Irony, Zeugma
- Ideological Readings



Hello! Now we come to the prologue by Geoffrey Chaucer. In this discussion, we see the arrival of the pilgrims, Chaucer's portraits of various characters belonging to different classes, focusing on the humor, and also various aspects of characterization – Class, Profession, Activities, Skills, Social Status, Appearance, Dress, Age, Beliefs and Values, Behavior, Speech Patterns, Possessions, Equipment, Horse and even some Special Identification Markers as in the case of the Miller, who is identified as a character with a wart on his nose.

We will examine the narrator's comments in this Prologue and then finally we will look at two dimensions – one is aspects of Poetry; another is ideological readings. When we deal with the aspects of Poetry, we will examine Metaphor, Simile, Irony, Zeugma. Actually, as we are looking at some selected characters, we will examine those features as we discuss the characters themselves. Finally, we will have summary of these features of poetry at the end. We also attempt one ideological reading in this poem.

(Refer Slide Time: 1:48)

The Arrival of the Pilgrims



1. When in April the sweet showers fall (season)
2. And pierce the drought of March to the root, and all
3. The veins are bathed in liquor of such power (metaphor)
4. As brings about the engendering of the flower,
5. When also Zephyrus with his sweet breath (allusion)
6. Exhales an air in every grove and heath
7. Upon the tender shoots, and the young sun
8. His half-course in the sign of the Ram has run,



Let us start with The Arrival of Pilgrims. You can see some points on my right side in brackets, these deal with certain figures of speech or thought and also. they refer to the points of characterization.

1. “When in April the sweet showers fall
2. And pierce the drought of March to the root and all
3. The veins are bathed in liquor of such power
4. As brings about the engendering of the flower,
5. When also Zephyrus with his sweet breath
6. Exhales an air in every grove and heath
7. Upon the tender shoots and the young sun
8. His half-course in the sign of the Ram has run,”

The first line tells us about the beginning of the season that is April season. In this season, the renewal of life happens, that is given to us through the metaphor of the veins being bathed in the

water with such power. There is also an allusion to Zephyrus, the god of winds, gentle winds in Greek mythology. And it tells us about the time, the passing of time during the day.

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The Arrival of the Pilgrims



9. And the small fowl are making melody
10. That sleep away the night with open eye
11. (So nature pricks them and their heart engages)
12. Then people long to go on pilgrimages
13. And palmers long to seek the stranger strands
14. Of far-off saints, hallowed in sundry lands,
15. And specially, from every shire's end
16. Of England, down to Canterbury they wend
17. To seek the holy blissful martyr, quick
18. To give his help to them when they were sick.



Now we move to the next nine lines.

9. “And the small fowl are making melody
10. That sleep away the night with open eye
11. (So nature pricks them and their heart engages)
12. Then people long to go on pilgrimages
13. And palmers long to seek the stranger strands
14. Of far-off saints, hallowed in sundry lands
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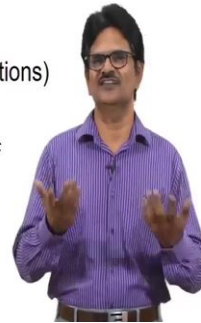
18. To give his help to them when they were sick.”

As we summarized in the previous presentation, the Pilgrims are here in Tabard Inn to visit Canterbury, to seek the blessings and also to express their gratitude to the martyr who helps them whenever they are sick or whenever they need some help.

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The Knight

43. There was a *Knight*, a most distinguished man,
44. Who from the day on which he first began
45. To ride abroad had followed **chivalry**, (knightly tradition)
46. **Truth, honor, generousness and courtesy**. (personal qualities)
47. He had done nobly in his sovereign's war (war)
48. And ridden into battle, no man more,
49. As well in Christian as in heathen places, (battle locations)
50. And ever honored for his noble graces.
51. When **we** took Alexandria, he was there.
52. He often sat at table in the chair (respect)
53. Of **honor**, above all nations, when in Prussia. ...



One of the characters we have chosen to focus on is a Knight. As we have said earlier, this is again a translation.

43. “There was a Knight, a most distinguished man,
44. Who from the day on which he first began
45. To ride abroad had followed chivalry,
46. Truth, honor, generousness and courtesy.
47. He had done nobly in his sovereign's war.
48. And ridden into battle, no man more,
49. As well in Christian as in heathen places,

50. And ever honored for his noble graces.

51. When we took Alexandria, he was there.

52. He often sat at table in the chair

53. Of honor, above all nations, when in Prussia. ...”

In this short extract, we see the Knight being described with reference to the Knightly tradition. The personal qualities of the Knight, his participation in different wars in different locations, and the kind of respect he commands from his peers. The use of ‘we’ is something interesting, that is how Chaucer takes the reader into confidence. He invites us to see the character for ourselves.

(Refer Slide Time: 5:19)

The Knight



69. He was of **sovereign value in all eyes**.

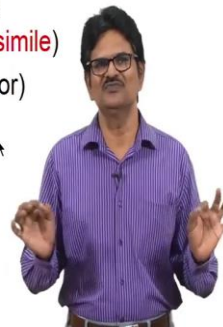
70. And though so much distinguished, he was wise
(wisdom)

71. And in his bearing modest as a maid. (human **simile**)

72. He never yet a boorish thing had said (demeanor)

73. In all his life to any, come what might;

74. He was **a true, a perfect gentle-knight**.



We have something more about the Knight here.

69. “He was of sovereign value in all eyes.

70. And though so much distinguished, he was wise.

71. And in his bearing modest as a maid.

72. He never yet a boorish thing had said

73. In all his life to any, come what might;

74. He was a true, a perfect gentle- Knight.”

It is interesting to see that such distinguished man does not have arrogance, pride. He has humility. And that is portrayed in the form of the character of a maid, “as modest as a maid.” That we identify this as a human simile. And his behavior, that is demeanor is very courteous, very kind, very polite. And that is summed up in the last line “a true, perfect gentle-Knight.” No problem with this character. He is an ideal knight.

(Refer Slide Time: 6:22)

The Nun

122. There also was a Nun, a Prioress,
123. Her way of smiling very simple and coy. (smile)
124. Her greatest oath was only “By St. Loy!” (oath)
125. And she was known as Madam Eglantyne. (name)
126. And well she sang a service, with a fine (song)
127. Intoning through her nose, as was most seemly, (nose)
128. And she spoke daintily in French, extremely, (French)
129. After the school of Stratford-atte-Bowe; (English French)
130. French in the Paris style she did not know. (Paris French)
131. At meat her manners were well taught withal; (manners)
132. No morsel from her lips did she let fall,
133. Nor dipped her fingers in the sauce too deep;
134. But she could carry a morsel up and keep
135. The smallest drop from falling on her breast. ...



We move on to another character in this Prologue. We are not looking at all of the m. We have selected some, the first is the Knight, the second is a Nun. You have the line numbers on my left and some points of discussion on my right in brackets.

122. “There was also a Nun, a Prioress,

123. Her way of smiling very simple and coy.

124. Her greatest oath was only “By St. Loy!”

125. And she was known as Madam Eglantyne.

126. And well she sang a service, with a fine
127. Intoning through her nose, as was most seemly,
128. And she spoke daintily in French, extremely,
129. After the school of Stratford- ate-Bowe;
130. French in the Paris style she did not know.
131. At meat her manners were well taught withal;
132. No morsel from her lips did she let fall,
133. Nor dipped her fingers in the sauce too deep;
134. But she could a carry a morsel up and keep
135. The smallest drop from falling on her breast. ...”

She is identified as a Nun, with a smile with her oath on Saint Loy. Her name is also given as Madam Eglantyne. She sings through her nose. She speaks French not the Paris variety but the variety that is used in England. She is known for her excellent table manners.

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The Nun



162. She wore a coral trinket on her arm,
(possessions)
163. A set of beads, the gaudies tricked in green,
164. Whence hung a golden brooch of brightest sheen
(brooch)
165. On which there first was graven a crowned A,
166. And lower, *Amor vincit omnia*. (love)



We also noticed some more characteristics of this lady, The Nun.

162. “She wore a coral trinket on her arm.

163. A set of beads, the gaudies tricked in green,

164. Whence hung a golden brooch of brightest sheen.

165. On which there first was graven a crowned A,

166. And lower, *Amor vincit omnia.*”

The Nun is a woman living in a nunnery. She has some possessions which are extremely attractive, costly and they are glittering. She has also some letter A to indicate *Amor vincit omnia* that means love conquers all. So, we have a lady living as a nun certain characteristic which do not fit in with her own nunnery. That is how Chaucer is able to show the difference between a nun and her own behavior and he invites us to look into the character of the Nun and understand for ourselves.

(Refer Slide Time: 9:13)

The Friar

212. There was a *Friar*, a wanton one and merry, (energy)
213. A Limiter, a very festive fellow. In all (attitude)
214. Four Orders there was none so mellow, (hyperbole)
215. So glib with gallant phrase and well-turned speech.
(speech)
216. He'd fixed up many a marriage, giving each
(social function)
217. Of his young women what he could afford her.
(gratification)
218. He was a noble pillar to his Order. (irony)
219. Highly beloved and intimate was he (relational sk.)
220. With County folk within his boundary,



Another character for our discussion is the Friar, The Friar is a mendicant. Let us see him.

212. “There was a Friar, a wanton one and merry,

213. A limiter, a very festive fellow in all
214. Four Orders, there was none so mellow,
215. So glib with gallant phrase and well-turned speech.
216. He'd fixed up many a marriage, and giving each
217. Of his young women what he could afford her.
218. He was a noble pillar to his Order.
219. Highly beloved and intimate was he
210. With county folk within his boundary,"

Before we go to the next part, let us see the comments we have on my right. The major characteristics of this Friar is wantonness, merry making. So, throughout the characterization of this Pilgrim, we have many of the ideas relating to his being a jolly fellow, a festive fellow, he is a very energetic person. His attitude is wonderful. And this energetic wonderful attitude is indicated to us through this hyperbole. In all the 4 orders, there was none like him. And his speech is also given some focus, "So glib with gallant phrase and well-turned speech." He could attract his players. He also participates in social functions for his own gratification and that is where we have this Irony as well. He is "a noble pillar of his order." And one of the most important characteristics of this particular character is he is able to relate to all kinds of people in his area very well. He was intimate. That is very interesting,

"Highly beloved and intimate was he

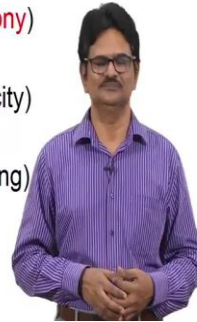
With county folk within his boundary."

(Refer Slide Time: 11:27)

The Friar



221. And city dames of honor and possessions;
(choice of society)
222. For he was qualified to hear confessions,
(professional function)
223. Or so he said, with **more than priestly scope**; (irony)
224. He had a special license from the Pope.
(religious capacity)
225. Sweetly he heard his penitents at shrift
226. With pleasant absolution, for a gift. (profiteering)
227. He was **an easy man** in penance-giving
228. Where he could hope to make a decent living;



221. “And city dames of honor and possessions.

222. For he was qualified to hear confessions,

223. Or so he said with more than priestly scope:

224. He had a special license from the pope.

225. Sweetly he heard his penitents at shifts

226. With pleasant absolution, for a gift.

227. He was an easy man in penance-giving

228. Where he could hope to make a decent living;”

The kind of people that he mixes with is what is given in city dames of honor and possessions. His job what he does is to receive confessions from others. And he has more functions, or he claims he has more power to do certain things like, getting a special license from the Pope. And whatever he does there is a profit motive, that is why this idea of profiteering we have mentioned here. He gives mercy easily to people who come to him for confessions. He was an easy man in penance giving.

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The Friar's Service

237. He kept his tippet stuffed with pins for curls,

238. And pocket-knives, to give to pretty girls.

239. And certainly his voice was gay and sturdy,
(voice)

240. For he sang well and played the hurdy-gurdy.
(singer)

241. At sing-songs he was champion of the hour.

242. His neck was whiter than a lily-flower (simile)

243. But strong enough to butt a bruiser down.



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What is his service? How does he do it? We have these lines to tell us about the kinds of service he does.

237. “He kept his Tippet stuffed with pins for curls

238. And pocket-knives to give to pretty girls.

239. And certainly, his voice was gay and sturdy,

240. For he sang well and played the hurdy-gurdy.

241. At sing songs he was the champion of the hour.

242. His neck was whiter than a lily-flower

243. But strong enough to butt a bruiser down.”

His relationship with pretty girls is given more importance. He sings, he plays music with this instrument hurdy-gurdy and even Chaucer notices the white color of his neck to tell us about how soft he is and at the same time he tells us, he is strong enough to butt, the bruiser that is a fighter.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:41)

The Friar



244. He **knew** the taverns well in every town (zeugma)
245. And every innkeeper and barmaid too
246. Better than lepers, beggars and that crew,
247. For in **so eminent a man** as he (irony)
248. It was not fitting with the dignity
249. Of his position, dealing with a scum
250. Of wretched lepers; nothing good can come
251. Of commerce with such slum-and-gutter dwellers,
252. But only with the rich and victual-sellers.



We have a few more characteristics of this Friar.

244. “He knew the taverns well in every town
245. And every innkeeper and barmaid too
246. Better than lepers, beggars and that crew,
247. For in so eminent as he
248. It was not fitting with his dignity
249. Of his position, dealing with a scum
250. Of wretched lepers, nothing good can come.
251. Of commerce with such slum-and-gutter dwellers.
252. But only with the rich and victual-sellers.”

We have an interesting case of this Poetic Device called Zeugma here in line number 244. He knew that is only one verb that connects two objects. Here, he knew the taverns well, he knew the innkeeper as well and when it comes to barmaid that ‘knew’ will have additional connotative

meanings, which tells us about the Friar's own character and wantonness. And so eminent a man will not stoop down to give pardons or to give confessions for poor wretched people like lepers or slum and gutter dwellers.

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The Friar's Scholarship



263. And how he romped,
264. Just like a puppy! He was ever prompt
(animal simile)
265. To arbitrate disputes on settling days
266. (For a small fee) in many helpful ways,
267. Not then appearing as your cloistered scholar
268. With threadbare habit hardly worth a dollar,
(dressing for occasion)
269. But much more like a Doctor or a Pope.
(human simile)



Next, we have the knowledge or the scholarship. What kind of knowledge that the Friar has?

263. “And now he romped
264. Just like a puppy! He was ever prompt
265. To arbitrate disputes on settling days
266. (For a small fee) in many helpful ways,
267. Not then appearing as your cloistered scholar
268. With the threadbare habit hardly worth a dollar
269. But much more like a Doctor or a Pope.”

He was a learned man or a man with some knowledge to solve disputes among people in his own area. Of course, for a fee that is important. We have this animal simile in line number 264 where

Chaucer connects puppy with this Friar. On the one hand it tells us about the energy of the character. At another level, it tells us the character's lower instinct. Chaucer describes the Friar as a man who wears dress properly according to occasion like a Doctor or a Pope. Here again we have a human simile that is a man being connected with another man, a doctor or a pope.

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The Friar's Scholarship



270. Of double-worsted was the semi-cope
271. Upon his shoulders, and the swelling fold
272. About him, **like a bell about its mold** (material simile)
273. When it is casting, rounded out his dress.
274. He lisped a little out of wantonness (speech quality)
275. To make his **English sweet upon his tongue**.
276. When he had played his harp, or having sung,
277. His eyes would twinkle in his head as bright
278. As any star upon a frosty night. (astral simile)
279. **This worthy's name was Hubert**, it appeared. (irony)



His knowledge is extensive it continues, along with his physical appearance.

270. "Of double worsted was the semi-cope
271. Upon his shoulders, and his swelling fold
272. About him, like a bell about its mold
273. When it is casting, rounded out his dress.
274. He lisped little out of wantonness
275. To make his English sweet upon his tongue.
276. When he had played his harp or having sung,
277. His eyes would twinkle in his head as bright

278. As any star upon a frosty night.

279. This worthy's name was Hubert, it appeared."

With this description, we come to the end of the Friar's character. In this particular section, we see that one 'material simile.' We identified it as material simile because there is a reference to a bell in this line number 272. And we also notice how this character uses English sweet upon his tongue. He, by focusing on this speech quality, again Chaucer connects with the wantonness or merrymaking quality of this Friar. At the end the ironic twist is given to us, he is called 'a worthy,' but Chaucer does not take any responsibility. He says it appeared. It appeared that he was a worthy and his name was Hubert.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:53)

The Franklin

341. There was a *Franklin* with him, it appeared;
342. White as a daisy-petal was his beard. (flower simile)
343. A sanguine man, high-colored and benign,
(disposition)
344. He loved a morning sop of cake in wine. (drink)
345. He lived for pleasure and had always done,
(aim of life)
346. For he was Epicurus' very son, (allusion)
347. In whose opinion sensual delight (material life)
348. Was the one true felicity in sight.



Now we move on to another character, The Franklin. He belongs to the landed gentry class.

341. "There was a Franklin with him, it appeared;

342. White as daisy-petal was his beard.

343. A sanguine man, high-colored and benign,

344. He loved a morning sop of cake in wine.

345. He lived for pleasure and had always done.

346. For he was Epicurus' very son,

347. In whose opinion sensual delight

348. Was the one true felicity in sight.”

In this section, we see ‘a flower simile’ used to describe the beard of this Franklin. His disposition is sanguine optimistic. He is known for his drink that is wine. Also, we find that he has some aim in life that is to live life very happily. And the allusion to Epicurus is interesting to tell us that he wants to live life very happily. Eat, drink and be merry is the philosophy of Epicurus it is said. So, his interest is more in material life.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:12)

The Franklin



349. As noted as St. Julian was for bounty

(generosity/ character)

350. He made his household free to all the County.

351. His bread, his ale were finest of the fine

352. And no one had a better stock of wine.

353. His house was never short of bake-meat pies,

354. Of fish and flesh, and these in such supplies

355. It positively snowed with meat and drink

356. And all the dainties that a man could think.



We have something more about the generosity of this Franklin. He may live a material life but then he is a good character.

349. “As noted as Saint Julian was for bounty

350. He made his household free to all the county.

351. His bread, his ale were finest of the fine
352. And no one had a better stock of wine
353. His house was never short of bake-meat pies,
354. Of fish and flesh, and these in such supplies
355. It positively snowed with meat and drink
356. And all the dainties that a man could think.”

‘Fish and flesh,’ ‘fish and flesh’ is part of this alliteration and the entire passage tells us about all his belongings particularly those items of drink and food, everything is available to everybody.

(Refer Slide Time: 20:01)

The Wife of Bath

455. A **worthy woman** from beside *Bath* city
(gender and location)
456. Was with us, **somewhat deaf**, which was a pity.
(hearing capacity)
457. In **making cloth** she showed so great a bent
(skill)
458. She bettered those of Ypres and of Ghent.
459. In all the parish not a dame dared stir
460. Towards the altar steps in front of her, (pride)
461. And if indeed they did, so wrath was she
462. As to be quite put out of charity.



We come to a very interesting character in the whole of Canterbury Tales, that is The Wife of Bath.

455. “A worthy woman from beside Bath city
456. Was with us, somewhat deaf, which was a pity.

457. In making cloth she showed so great a bent

458. She bettered those of Ypres and of Ghent.

459. In all the perissh not a dame dared stir

460. Towards the alter steps in front of her,

461. And if indeed they did, so wrath was she

462. As to be quite put out of charity.”

In this part we see her gender that she is a woman. And she comes from a particular location called Bath city. Chaucer describes the wife of Bath with reference to her gender and also the place of origin that is Bath city. He also points out the hearing capacity difficulty in her. At the same time, he highlights the extreme skill expertise of this lady in making cloth. She is actually able to do better than people from Ypres and Ghent who might have taught her to make cloths.

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The Wife of Bath

463. Her kerchiefs were of finely woven ground;
(possessions)
464. I dared have sworn they weighed a good ten pound,
465. The ones she wore on Sunday, on her head.
466. Her hose were of the finest scarlet red
467. And gartered tight; her shoes were soft and new.
468. Bold was her face, handsome, and red in hue. (face)
469. A worthy woman all her life, what's more (irony)
470. She'd had five husbands, all at the church door. (M)
471. Apart from other company in youth; (irony)
472. No need just now to speak of that, forsooth.
473. And she had thrice been to Jerusalem, (travel)
474. Seen many strange rivers and passed over them.



Let us continue with The Wife of Bath now.

463. “Her kerchiefs were of finely woven ground;

464. I dared have sworn they weighed a good ten pound,
465. The ones she wore on Sunday, on her head.
466. Her hose were of the finest scarlet red.
467. And gartered tight; her shoes were soft and new.
468. Bold was her face, handsome and red in hue.
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470. She'd had 5 husbands, all at the church door
471. Apart from other company in youth;
472. No need just now to speak of that, forsooth.
473. And she had thrice been to Jerusalem,
474. Seen many strange rivers and passed over them.”

In this section, we find certain aspects of *The Wife of Bath* with reference to possessions whatever she has like her kerchiefs, her hose, her shoes. We come to the physical appearance of the lady in terms of her face, handsome, red in hue. And also, about her travels which we will see a little more in the next part. Most importantly, we see her marital status. She had already had 5 husbands. And she has also had many other men in her relationship. This is one aspect that feminist writers or critics may have some exception. But then at that time Chaucer was writing about this lady for a particular audience. And so, we have this ironical presentation of *The Wife of Bath* but at the same time Chaucer does not comment, saying that she was a bad lady or a good lady.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:09)

The Wife of Bath

475. She'd been to Rome and also to Boulogne,
476. St. James of Compostella and Cologne,
477. **And she was skilled in wandering by the way.** (irony)
478. She had **gap-teeth**, set widely, truth to say. (mouth)
479. Easily on an ambling horse she sat
480. Well wimpled up, and on her head a hat
481. As broad as is a buckler or a shield;
482. She had a flowing mantle that concealed
483. Large hips, her heels spurred sharply under that. (look)
484. In company she liked to laugh and chat
485. **And knew the remedies for love's mischances,**
486. **An art in which she knew the oldest dances.**



475. "She'd been to Rome and also to Boulogne,

476. St. James of Compostella and Cologne

477. And she was skilled in wandering by the way.

478. She had gap-teeth, set widely, truth to say.

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483. Large hips, and her heels spurred sharply under that

484. In company she liked to laugh and chat

485. And knew the remedies for love's mischances,

486. An art in which she knew the oldest dances.”

Again, we have this ironical presentation. Her mouth, particularly with reference to her gap-teeth is focused. Her appearance with reference to the large hips that she has and also her knowledge of the world, worldly life that she knows.

(Refer Slide Time: 24:12)

Narrator's Comment



735. Now I have told you shortly, in a clause,
736. *The rank, the array, the number and the cause*
737. *Of our assembly in this company*
738. *In Southwark, at that high-class hostelry*
739. *Known as *The Tabard*, close beside *The Bell*.*
740. And now the time has come for me to tell
741. How we behaved that evening; I'll begin
742. After we had alighted at the Inn,
743. Then I'll report our journey, stage by stage,
744. All the remainder of our pilgrimage.



We have a story, that is a tale; an imaginary tale or a real tale that he saw and that was a common art form in his period. Chaucer, the narrator now tells us about his own way of telling. Now he takes the reader into confidence and tells,

735. “Now I have told you shortly, in a clause,

736. The rank, the array, the number and the cause

737. Of our assembly in this company

738. In Southwark, at that high-class hostelry

739. Known as the Tabard, close beside *The Bell*

740. And now the time has come for me to tell

741. How we behaved that evening; I'll begin

742. After we had alighted at the Inn,

743. Then I will report our journey, stage by stage

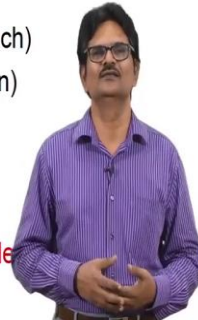
744. All the remainder of our pilgrimage.”

Here we have many characters, but we have only looked at some. And also, the narrator tells us he has presented all these characters according to the rank in some order and the number of characters and the cause that is a reason for which the company has arrived here in this Tabard Inn.

(Refer Slide Time: 25:20)

Narrator's Comment

745. But first I beg of you, in courtesy,
746. **Not to condemn me as unmannerly**
747. **If I speak plainly and with no concealings (gossip)**
748. And give account of all their words and dealings,
749. Using their very phrases as they fell.
750. For certainly, as you all know so well, (listener touch)
751. He who repeats a tale after a man (representation)
752. Is bound to say, as nearly as he can,
753. Each single word, **if he remembers it,**
754. However rudely spoken or unfit,
755. Or else **the tale he tells will be untrue, (Truth of tale)**
756. The things pretended and the phrases new.



He continues the commentary on his own narration.

745. “But first I beg of you, in courtesy,

746. Not to condemn me as unmannerly

747. If I speak plainly and with no concealings

748. And give account of all their words and dealings.
749. Using their very phrases as they fell.
750. For certainly, as you all know so well,
751. He who repeats a tale after a man
752. Is bound to stay as nearly as he can,
753. Each single word, if he remembers it,
754. However, rudely spoken or unfit,
755. Or else the tale he tells will be untrue,
756. The things pretended and the phrases new.”

This is a story about a story, about the way in which the story is told. The narrator begs of the reader to understand the way in which he has told the story. He tries to be honest, genuine and tells this is what he knows, and he shares.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:23)

Narrator's Comment

757. He may not flinch although it were his brother,
758. He may as well say one word as another.
759. And **Christ** Himself spoke broad in Holy Writ,
760. Yet there is no **scurrility** in it, (diction)
761. And **Plato** says, for those with power to read,
762. “The word should as cousin to the deed.”
763. Further I beg you to forgive me (listener touch)
764. If I neglect the order and degree
765. What is due to rank in what I've planned
766. **I'm short of wit as you will understand**
(self-deprecation)



Here we come to an important point about the story telling method of Chaucer. He continues.

757. "He may not flinch although it were his brother,

758. He may as well say one word as another.

759. And Christ Himself spoke broad in Holy Writ,

760. Yet there is no scurrility in it,

761. And Plato says, for those with power to read,

762. "The word should as cousin to the deed."

763. Further, I beg you to forgive me,

764. If I neglect the order and degree

765. What is due to rank in what I have planned

766. I am short of wit as you will understand"

The poet quotes Christ to say that, there is no scurrility or offence in telling the truth. He also refers to Plato who says the word and deed should be similar. And if there is any problem, he says, tells the reader, "I'm short of wit as you will understand." But as you know very well Chaucer was a great poet. He had enough wit to entertain the royal court of his time and he continues to entertain people to this day. His writing at that time something like an equal to what we have in our TV serials today, telling about people and their characteristics and their difficulties throughout their life.

(Refer Slide Time: 27:50)

Aspects of Poetry



Form: Tale

Poetic Devices: Metaphor, Simile, irony, Zeugma,
(Lost in translation is Hyperbaton)

Meter: 10 syllables, five feet, iambic pentameter

Sound: alliteration: seken straunge strondes

assonance: shoures soote

rhyme, caesura, enjambment:

5. Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete **breeth**

6. Inspired hath in every holt and **heeth**

7. The tendre croppes, / and the yonge **sonne**

8. Hath in the Ram his half cours **yronne**,

Syntax: first 18 lines, one long sentence



What are the aspects of poetry that we have in the Prologue? First look at the form, it is a tale. It need not tell everything true about whatever we have in these characters. Some may be imaginary; some may be made up; some exaggeration will be there to make the story more interesting for the reader. To make the story interesting, Chaucer uses certain poetic devices like Metaphor, Simile, Irony, Zeugma. There is an element called Hyperbaton which we find being lost in translation. Here we have one example in the original here.

The metrical aspect of this poem refers to the 10 syllables we have, and the 5 feet we have, and on the whole making iambic pentameter. We have alliteration in some examples like ‘seken straunge strondes;’ Assonance in ‘shoures soote.’ We have rhyme, end rhyme, at the end. We have caesura enough pause in the beginning, enough pause in the middle here and there. And then we have enjambment that is in line move from one to another continuously.

Let us read these 4 lines, for understanding, rhyme, caesura and enjambment.

5. “Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth

6. Inspired hath in every holt and heath.

7. The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne

8. Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne,”

The line 5 continues with line 6 and we have a pause in the middle in line 7 after croppes, we have indicated through a slash line. And end rhyme we have ‘breeth,’ ‘heath,’ ‘sonne,’ ‘yronne,’. We have this continues that is run on line from ‘breeth to inspired,’ from ‘sonne to hath.’ And these first 18 lines make up one long sentence. However, the poem is simple for us to understand.

(Refer Slide Time: 30:10)

Ideological Readings

- **Why** did Chaucer write *The Canterbury Tales*?
- **How** does the tale represent the medieval society?
- **What** is the ideological function of the tale?
- Why does not Chaucer say anything negative about the knight?
- Why does he almost caricaturize the Reeve?
- Why does he idealize the parson and the ploughman?
- Did Chaucer criticize the aristocratic society?
- Why does he group the guildsmen together and describe them in a few lines?



Certain ideological readings of this poem can be undertaken, and this ideology can refer to many persuasions, particularly the class structure that we have in this poem. We may not give answers to all these questions but then these questions will lead you to understand the hierarchical society that we have in this poem. Why did Chaucer write *The Canterbury Tales*? He wrote some poems in French, some in Italian. Find then, why did he choose to write in English.? How does the tale represent the medieval society? The question of representing a society of a particular time. It is said that Chaucer’s poetry, particularly these *Canterbury tales* tells us more about medieval society than any historical book. What is the ideological function of the tale? In this particular question, we focus on the power structure hierarchy. Why does not Chaucer say anything negative about the Knight?

All other characters have some kind of defects in their characterization, whereas the Knight alone does not have any problem in his character. He is the most idealized character we have. We also have one idealized character in 'the parson or ploughman,' but particularly critics have asked questions about why the Knight is so idealized? Why does Chaucer almost caricaturize the character called the Reeve? One group of characters who have many defects in them, they are almost caricatures.

Why does the Chaucer idealize the parson and the ploughman? Did Chaucer criticize the aristocratic society of his times? We have to remember that Chaucer did not belong to aristocratic society. He was born in less than a middle-class family. He rose steadily in his life. He always had contacts with aristocracy in his life. Why does he group the Guildsmen, the tradesmen together and described them in a few lines? He does not give more lines for the tradesmen.

In fact, the cook of these guildsmen is described more vividly than the guildsmen. Why is it so? We have many questions. These questions relate to hierarchy and this hierarchy has some connections with the religious society of the time or the economic practices of the time or the social practices of the time. It will be very interesting for us to see what kind of attitude did Chaucer have towards upper class people or middle-class people or lower-class people. Or we refer to the peasant's revolution at the beginning of Chaucer's poetry. And what kind of role did Chaucer have during that time? In fact, Chaucer was a representative of the king. He was a member of Parliament. He was an officer to deal with the problems of the peasants at one point of time. So, how did he really examine or look at things of his day? These are questions, we can answer these questions, based on our own convictions.

A person with a Marxist tendency or with a completely economic background will look at this in one way. A person, a reader with religious understanding will say some other things like this is a religious poem or it is a poem about pilgrimage. And the host is connected with the Jesus Christ, Holy Ghost and all that. It is a Christian poem; someone will argue like this. These are questions from different points of view. And we will not be able to look at this poem from linguistic point of view because what we deal with is a translation, although from English to English.

(Refer Slide Time: 34:46)

1-8 Lines in Chaucer's English



1. Whan that Aprill with his shoures **soote**
2. The droghte of March hath perced to the **roote**,
3. And bathed every veyne in swich licour
4. Of which vertu engendred is the flour; //
5. Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breath
6. Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
7. The tendre croppes, / and the yonge **sonne**
8. Hath in the Ram his half cours **yronne**,



Lines 9-18 in Chaucer's English



9. And smale foweles maken melodye,
10. That slepen al the nyght with open ye
11. (So priketh hem Nature in hir corages),
12. Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
13. And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
14. To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes; //
15. And specially from every shires ende
16. Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,
17. The hooly blisful martir for to **seke**,
18. That hem hath holpen whan that they were **seeke**.



Now, let us have some fun with Chaucer's English. Even this English is slightly modified, I believe. Let us have some fun as I said. We will read the first 18 lines.

1. "Whan the April with his shoures soote
2. The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
3. And bathed very veyne in swich licour
4. Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
5. Whan Zephirus eek with this sweete breath

6. Inspired hath n every holt and heeth.
7. The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne,
8. Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne,

9. And smale foweles maken melodye,
10. That slepen al the nyght with open ye
11. (So priketh hem nature in hir corages)
12. Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
13. And palemeres for to seken straunge strondes,
14. To ferns halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
15. And specially from every shires ende
16. Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,
17. The holy blissful martir for to seke,
18. That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.”

(Refer Slide Time: 36:03)

Summary



- The Arrival of the Pilgrims
- Chaucer's Portraits - Humor
 - Class, Profession, Activities, Skills,
 - Social Status, Appearance, Dress, Age,
 - Beliefs and Values, Behavior, Speech
 - Patterns, Possessions, Equipment, Horse,
- Special Identification Markers – Wart in the Miller
- The Narrator's Comments
- Aspects of Poetry
 - Metaphor, Simile, Irony, Hyperbole, Zeugma
- Ideological Readings



We hope you enjoyed listening to Chaucer's presentation of his characters. In this presentation, we have seen the arrival of the pilgrims in the prologue. We have examined Chaucer's portraits of certain characters, like the Knight, the Nun, the Friar, the Franklin, the Wife of Bath, with

reference to class, profession, activities, skills, social status, appearance, dress and age, beliefs and values, behavior and speech, patterns, possessions, equipment even horse.

We mentioned about special identification markers, with reference to the Wart in the Miller. We focused on the narrator's comments about telling his own story, taking the reader into confidence, telling them I am trying to tell you the story as truthfully as possible. We examined some aspects of poetry in the prologue with reference to the metaphor at the beginning and simile throughout the characters that we have discussed, plus irony and hyperbole and also zeugma in some context.

You might have noticed that Chaucer uses more of similes than metaphor. He also uses more of irony. Occasionally he uses hyperbole and zeugma to indicate different characteristics of individuals. Finally, we focused on ideological readings of the Canterbury Tales with reference to The Prologue. It all depends on the kind of critical persuasion or viewpoint that we have.

Chaucer's poetry is a source of inspiration for a number of readers, just for entertainment, just for enjoyment. It is also a source of critical interpretations to understand the medieval society. We have some references for you.

(Refer Slide Time: 38:22)

References

- Blamires, Alcuin. 2000. "Chaucer the Reactionary: Ideology and the General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales," *Review of English Studies, New Series*, 51(204): 523-539.
- Chaucer. Geoffrey. 1977. *The Canterbury Tales*. Trans. Nevill Coghill. Penguin Books, London.



If you refer to Blamire's article "Chaucer the Reactionary: Ideology and the General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales," you will understand more about the ideological readings of this poem.
Thank you.