

Tools of the Trade

Geoffrey Chaucer was a author of the 12th century. Chaucer is known as the father of

English poetry. He wrote Canterbury Tales which is a collection of narrative short stories written

in verse. "The Pardoners Tale is among the more popular of these varied tales. It is told by a

pardoner who uses the story to preach against those who are blasphemous and gluttonous. In an

odd twist, after he tells the story he tries to sell others counterfeit relics. In this short story about

greed, disrespect and death Chaucer utilizes three important literary tools personification, irony,

and symbolism.

In the tale by Chaucer Personification is utilized on the character of Death. When a young

boy is asked what happened to a man who had just died he responds in saying "There came a

sneaking thief that men call Death, who slays all the people in this country, and with his spear he

struck his heart in two, then went his way without saying another word." They show their feelings

by pledging to each other to murder death. "Let each of us hold up his hand to this false traitor

Death. He that slays so many shall be slain himself before nightfall."

In "The Pardoners Tale" personification is employed to make Death a person instead of a

process. Death is given human characteristics to make him more real to us. This tool allows the

main characters to focus their feelings. With the use of personification the three men are allowed to

focus their feelings of vengeance on a person instead of a biological process.

Another tool that was heavily relied on was irony. There are many examples used to show

irony in the story. The old man sends the three drunkards down a path where he says death is,

however, a pot of gold awaits them there instead. "If you're so anxious to find

Death, turn up this

crooked path; for in that grove I left him, by my faith, under a tree, and there he'll stay." The

irony in this event is that the three men who were ready to kill Death totally forget about him once

the gold is found. After the three villians find the gold they send one into town for supplies.

During the absence of the villian who went into town, one of the others suggest the murder of the

absent one to increase there share of the money. "You are well aware that you're my sworn

brother. I'll you something that will profit you. . . you know very well that there are two of us,

and two are stronger than one. Watch him when he sits down, then get up and go for him in jest,

and I'll stab him. . ."This villian plans to kill a man he has just sworn to brotherhood only to

increase his finacial gain. Instead of trying to find Death and kill them they relax and without

even knowing it they find Death upon them..

Irony has many uses it can be used to teach or to humor us. The irony in this story is used

to teach a lesson. The use of irony is very important to the moral of the story. It shows us that

Death is impossible to escape. It may also add that we have no control over our lives that

everything that happens is set.

This particular tale is very symbolic. Symbolism is the representation of one thing for

another. The path that the old man send the three men down is crooked. This is used to show

that the path they are taking is evil or sinful. When they reach the grove the gold is under a tree.

"Every one of these rioters ran until he came to that tree, and there they found it, it seemd to them,

nearly eight bushels of fine gold florins." The tree could be a representation of the tree in the

garden of eden and the gold of the apple in the garden. The most important form of symbolism is

that of the symbolism of Death. I believe Death is symbolized by one character in the story, the

old man. The old man seems to have magnificent powers that are superhuman. It seems to be

more than just being a "wise old man." "Because I can't find anyone. . . that will change his

youth for may age; and so I must keep my age as long as it's God's will. Not even Death, alas,

will have my life. Thus I walk like a restless prisoner, and on the ground, which is my mothers

gate." He is imortal, forced to wonder the earth forever much like Death. He also refers to the

earth as his mother which may mean mother nature was his mother, again similar to Death. Even

though he refers to death as another person this may only infer that even he would not have his

life.

In retrospect, Geoffrey Chaucer exploited many different literary forms to create a

cohesive story line. Personification is used to focus our feelings on the character of Death as a

living being rather than a process. Chaucer use irony to teach a lesson to the readers. Symbolism

is used to relate the lesson to our lives. With these factors all combined it creates a story which

we can relate to even today because greed is universal.

