

Example of essay on comparing the knights tale and the millers tale

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



Chaucer's "The Canterbury Tales" is a selection of stories that pilgrims use to tell stories that occurred as they traveled to a holy shrine in Canterbury. At first reading, "The Miller's Tale" and "The Knight's Tale" appear inconsistent and incomparable. Nevertheless, a closer reading of the two stories shows that the both stories are similar. The elements in the "The Miller's Tale" reflects those in "The Knight's Tale". Arguably, the characters' identities are different, yet the romance in both tales remains the same to an extent. In essence, the characters are basically the same in the two stories. Chaucer presents the "The Knight's Tale" and "the Miller's Tale as similar stories, but the contrast in the stories remain striking and gives the element of dissimilarity as the readers carefully analyzes the pieces.

Spinrad notes that in order to understand Chaucer's works one must first understand the factors that influences Chaucer's work, (Spinrad, p. 2). To the modern-day reader work is a collection of works that reflect the social conventions of the medieval period. Interestingly, Spinrad writes "Chaucer borrowed the French fabliau genre to create a work in the English vernacular," (Spinrad, p. 2) in "The Miller's Tale." Additionally, "The Knight's Tale leans heavily on the tradition of the romance," (Spinrad, p. 2). The fabliau was a popular form of short tales in medieval France and includes a "low-brow humor," (Spinrad, p. 2) that readers sees Nicholas's actions in the tale. In addition, Spinrad postulates "Chaucer used the lewd French genre to create a distinct form of literature that is humorous on more than one level," (Spinrad, p. 8) and allows the reader the opportunity to enjoy the "higher satirical purpose," (Spinrad, p. 8) of the tales. The fact is that "Chaucer's unique blend of low-brow subject matter and courtly style

can be read as a satire of literature,” (Spinrad, p. 8) especially with the love conflict in both tales.

On the one hand, Palamon and Nicholas share similar qualities because in the end both characters end up with the girls. On the other hand, these two characters are different as Nicholas appears as the victor and Palamon gets his girl by default. Both Absalom and Arcita are similar; still, they are different in many ways. The clear distinction is that both characters want the girls, but none of the characters have her in the end. Additionally, Arcita wins the war but he dies and Alison turns away from Absalom as she deceives him and he kisses her rear. Emily and Alison have similarities, but they are different. The two characters are the ultimate prize. Nevertheless, Alison chooses who she falls in love with, but Emily does not choose. Agreeably, the Miller shows that women are not to be trusted as “ every man that has a wife is in danger of being cuckolded,” (Gestsdottir, p. 22). Conversely, the reader sees that only men who do not have wives are safe from the disgrace of adultery in “ The Miller’s Tale,” while Theseus gains “ the realm of Femininity/ by his chivalry,” (“ The Knight’s Tale, lines 19 – 20).

Based on the elements of Medieval Literature, one sees that “ The Knight’s Tale” has an eminent narrator who shows the historical element of romance that is almost tragic in hits conclusion. Nonetheless, the themes in the two tales are universal. Conversely, “ The Knight’s Tale” shows the relationships as one of free will and fortune. On the other hand, the “ The Miller’s Tale” has a sound plot, but no striking themes unless one reads the story with a clear knowledge of the events of “ The Knight’s Tale” in mind. Arguably, both girls in the two tales share similar relationships, despite the condition of “

women's inferiority to men," (Gestsdottir, p. 4) during the period.

Conversely, Chaucer gives a powerful voice to these women as he allows Alison to choose the men in her life in "The Miller's Tale." Nonetheless, "The Miller's Tale" represents a perverted adaptation of "The Knight's Tale." The disagreement in "The Knight's Tale" ends with a fight, but Absalom is the victim of a cruel joke in "The Miller's Tale."

At the end of "The Knight's Tale" everyone agrees that the story is worth remembering because it is noble. The Host calls the Monk to tell a story that could surpass the Knight's story. But, the overly drunken Miller protests and suggests that he has a wonderful tale that would suit the occasion and one that could easily rival the Knight's story. Still, the Host sees that the Miller is drunk and tries effortlessly to deter the Miller. The Miller unwaveringly proclaims that he can tell a tale regarding the deceit of a carpenter by an intellectual. The Reeve objects passionately because of the obscenity of the idea, but none of the characters could stop the Miller sharing his offensive tale. Chaucer apologizes for telling the story even as he reminds the readers that he must tell all of the stories because there is a prize to be won. Arguably, Chaucer's tales reflect "the complex relationship between the sexes with irony and humor," (Gestsdottir, p. 1) and leaves the reader intrigued by the lifelike characters.

"The Miller's Tale" has an incredible, but bizarre plot that shows the credibility of the characters on their pilgrimage. There are a number of cases of absurdity. It is inconceivable that Old John easily believes Nicholas' tale that Noah's flood recurs and that he follows the directions and hangs the tubs from the ceiling. Conversely, he appears as quite stupid, but he adds to

the comedy or humor of the tale. Clearly, "The Miller's Tale" is an example of Chaucer's ability to relate a practical joke to his audience. The main theme in the tale is that of adultery, but Chaucer reiterates the practical joke in the tale and makes this his central idea. The fact is that the witty spirits in the tale hides the flaws of the tale. Chaucer makes use of character portraits to enhance his story as Old John maintains the role of an indistinct background individual who is foolish and jealous. On the other hand, the Clerk, Nicholas, is devious, stylish, and lecherous. Alison is not merely an erratic or lascivious wife. Nonetheless, Chaucer presents her as a village wench who lacks the conventional beauty of the typical medieval woman. The reader sees that Alison is amusing, but has airs when she pretends to rebuff Nicholas' advances. This action contributes to the wit and humor of the tale. Nevertheless, her swift reciprocation of the love he shows adds humor to the story. In addition, Absalom appears as a meticulous character. His effeminate characteristics show that he is the definitive Don Juan. In contrast to Alison, Emily "represents the obedient woman that accepts the patriarchal order even though she comes from a long line of strong, independent women," (Gestsdottir, 28) and shows that the role of women was not restricted to the fickle minded woman who commits adultery. Emily want to remain a virgin, but she falls at the center of the dispute between the two knights.

The real action in "The Miller's Tale" starts with John going on a day trip to a town nearby. John's jealousy does not prevent Alison from choosing a young lover in Nicholas as she commits adultery. While he is away, Nicholas encourages Alison to engage in sex with him. This experience starts the

affair between the two. Alison later goes to church. Absalom immediately falls in love with her when he sees her at church. He attempts to get Alison to give him sexual favors when he sings love songs at the base of her window. He tries to win her attention by joining the local play, but Alison rejects his efforts, because she is involved with Nicholas. Interestingly, Nicholas' desire for Alison intensifies as he wishes to spend an entire night with her instead of a few moments. He convinces John that a flood similar to that of Noah would reappear. John gullibly believes this story and spends a night in a bucket. With these events Chaucer shows how gullible people can become. Nicholas and Alison spend the night together.

Chaucer adds to the humor with the appearance of Absalom during the night. After Absalom realizes that John is not around, he notes: " Now is the time to wake all night;/For certainly I saw him not stirring/About his door since day began to spring," (" The Miller's Tale," lines 517 - 518), Additionally, he " knock[s] cautiously upon that window low," (" The Miller's Tale," line 521) as his " mouth's been itching all this livelong day," (" The Miller's Tale," line 527). One can question Alison's virtue when Absalom asks Alison for a kiss during the night. At first she refuses to kiss him, but gives in to his demands. But, instead of giving Absalom her lips, Alison turns her rear and he kisses that end. Absalom's anger can be justified as and he attempts to brand her for her actions. Nicholas takes the humor a step further as he sticks his posterior for Absalom to kiss. Absalom brands him with the iron instead. The raw humor in the tale intensifies as Nicholas cries out for water to ease the burn from the hot poker. John hears his cries and cuts his bucket loose. He falls to the ground with a loud crash that draws the attention of the

townspeople. They laugh at the situation when Nicholas tells the tale.

On the other hand, "The Knight's Tale," tells the tale of two knights who are from Thebes. They fall in love with one woman, the princess Emily. Both knights swore to support the other in whatever they do, but the love they have for Emily forms a barrier between the two. In "The Knight's Tale" Chaucer presents chivalry as an important element in the story. In fact, chivalry is important in "The Knight's Tale" and Chaucer shows chivalry as a series of duties, rituals, and behaviors that these two knights should adhere to in order to act with honor. The chivalric rule included the ability to keep promises, defend those who are helpless, and maintain loyalty to the lords and fellow knights regardless of the circumstances.

The tale does not have much of suspense, variety, excitement, or swift pace that makes for the typical tale. One can easily agree with Muscatine when he writes that the central idea in the tale concerns the "those two noble activities, love and chivalry, but even more important is the general tenor of the noble life, the pomp and ceremony, the dignity and power, and particularly the repose and assurance with which the exponent of nobility invokes order," (Muscatine, p. 181). Conversely, these elements add to the chaos and disorder in the society. The imagery is predictable as the story expresses the magnificence that depicts the nobility. While women have choices in "The Miller's Tale," Theseus shows the dominance of men in "The Knight's Tale."

In addition, "The Knight's Tale" involves courtly love that demands that the knight shows loyalty to his love. The fact is that there are rules to the "system" of love. The female embodies the role of a deity which makes her

perfect in every respect. The knight worships his lady-love and this makes him stronger and even more honorable. In "The Knight's Tale" both chivalry and courtly love contradict each other as Arcite and Palamon are brother knights, who swore to protect each other. Nevertheless, their courtly love for Emily, forces them to break their promises as sworn brothers. The Duke Theseus brings out the theme of order as he tries to calm both Arcite and Palamon with his commanding presence. Of course one hopes that both friends would understand or appreciate that one cannot help to object of love. In fact, one can only hope that the chivalric code could prevail.

In concluding, "The Knight's Tale" and the "The Miller's Tale" are similar in respect to Chaucer's conflicting treatment of the theme of love. Chaucer skillfully connects both tales with humor and love, but he uses contrast to show that people are able to choose their moments of love or who they love. In presenting the theme of love, Chaucer gives the tales in a humorous way that seeks to entertain the readers while he deals with the themes of adultery and courtly love. The reader sees that Alison is an adulterous woman who shows no remorse about having an affair with another man. Arguably, Alison's actions mirror much of the adulterous behaviors in the modern society and lead the reader to conclude that the issue of adultery and love is not unique to the medieval society.

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