

How does chaucer's  
prologue prepare us  
for 'the miller's tale'?  
essay sample



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Chaucer introduces us to the Miller in the prologue, who appears to personify his own story. By introducing the Miller as a crude ruthless man Chaucer prepares for what is to come in the tale, we see his personality and which becomes the basis for the themes which run through the Miller's tale. In the prologue we are introduced to the Miller's views of women, his frustration with the Reeve and his insult to the church and they are all then continued through the tale.

The prologue is a conversation between The Miller and Harry Bailey, who as well as being the landlord is also the man who created the story telling contest and therefore would be seen as the authoritative figure in the novel. When the Miller interrupts to give his story we see him challenging the authority of Harry for it is not his turn to speak, this is an insight into his personality and that of the story which he is to tell. We see him challenging those whom have power during the tale by striking out against The Church. We see the preparation for this disregard of The Church's authority in the prologue for it is in front of the monk, a member of the group, that the Miller speaks. This is showing great disrespect for as a religious figure the monk would be seen as the Miller's superior.

This can relate to how the only member of the clergy in the tale is one who is thought of as inferior to everyone else. It would be thought of as disrespectful towards the monk to tell his tale, not only for the acts which take place but also because of the creation of Absolon. The Miller's creation ridicules The Church, showing them to be chauvinistic and fools; though this was a wide spread view of The Church at the time, however through fear it would be unwise to voice this opinion. The Miller was introduced as a brave

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man and how he is physically capable as well as being able to break doors with his head. This shows that he takes problems head on and will not skirt around an issue such as The Church. Of all the members of the group we see more of Chaucer's own voice in the Miller and this is shown through the Miller's more contemporary ways of thinking as it has been said countless times that Chaucer too was born before his time.

The Miller also cries out in 'Pilates vois', this would initially be seen as the voice of the man who condemned Jesus, however Pilate also tried to help Jesus by trying to convince him to lie about his heritage in the court, and was eventually forced into sentencing him through pressure from the government. Therefore there are different views on what is meant, in the same way that there are different interpretations of what the Miller says. This therefore prepares us for the vast amounts of second meanings and underhanded comments in the Miller's tale.

The monk was asked to speak after the knight as the host wanted a 'better man' than the Miller, an uncontroversial reference at the period to the Miller's rank in society. However this is also a potential insult towards the miller personally, as his morals and his mannerisms have been shown to be uncouth and frowned upon by some members of the group; this shows us the class systems set in Chaucer's time. Again we are shown that the Miller has a modern way of thinking, as he is challenging his stereotype and does not feel that he should be treated differently because of his heritage.

Everyone one is on the same journey, and they are staying in the same places, however some were thought of as better than others and by putting them all into the same situation. Chaucer is attempting to show that <https://assignbuster.com/how-does-chaucers-prologue-prepare-us-for-the-millers-tale-essay-sample/>

underneath everyone is the same and showing his view of the class system. This sets us up for how he has the Miller's tale turn these classes around; the clergyman who is mocked, the rich man who is cuckolded and the woman who has free independent thought.

The tale of the knight was an aristocratic romance telling of the competing love of two young men for a beautiful girl. The host had then asked for something to 'quite with the knight's tale'. Though he is implying that he wishes for a story to balance it, we see the Miller misinterpreting what is meant and he intends to pay back the knight's tale. The Miller's tale has a shift in tone from the previous tale in which women are beautiful, pure, virginal and unattainable and men are brave strong and courageous. This tale was very traditional in the ideals of courtly love as is the image of the knight. This is compared with a tale where women are devious and unfaithful and men best not to enquire too closely into their wives' affairs. His warning that men should not probe into their wives' private affairs any more than into God's is foresight into the major theme of the tale. Chaucer is showing the contrast between the realm of knights and that of the common people. The Miller's tale shows great similarities to the knight's tale however the perceptions created have had the fairy tale, and niceties removed.

The Miller's intrusion not only upsets the order of telling but also provokes frustration through the pilgrims; especially the reeve who takes the subject of the tale personally, 'stinte thy clap'. The Miller's suggestion that a carpenter's wife would cheat on them whilst he is away is very clearly directed at the reeve whom the Miller had previously argued with. Though he is seen as a man of higher standing than the brutish Miller the reeve is left

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helpless as the tale unravels leaving him paranoid. There is no doubt that the Miller chose for John to go on a pilgrimage whilst his wife plotted to cheat on him in the tale as this is too like the situation that they are in. We also see a similarity between the names of the reeve and where John went for his pilgrimage.

Oswald and ospney are too similar to avoid and I believe that it was this which created the greatest doubts in the reeve's mind. We know that this had an effect on the reeve as in his own prologue it is said that ' Nor at this tale did I see one man grieve, Save it were only old Oswald the reeve,'.

Rather than being irritated we know that the reeve is hurt inside as his tale tells of a miller who ' wrestle well' and steals from others. This reference is to the Millers prologue in which his wrestling abilities and brawn are shown off and we are also told of how he charges ' thrice' what he should for his produce. The Reeve tries to insult every part of the Miller and therefore we see from the vindictiveness of his counter attack that the Miller appears to have crossed the line. And he has done so In the same way that he insulted the knights story and he interrupted a monk. The Miler's prologue shows this friction, and conflict . This is what we are prepared for as conflict is what the tale is about. Conflict between characters in the tale, conflict between the miller and members of the group and Chauces conflict with views he disagrees with dominates the scene.