

# The miller's tale essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

“ The presence of pairs or of doubles and doubling often appears in works of art. How and for what purpose has Chaucer made effective use of such patterns? ” The Miller's Tale is taken from the fabliau genre while The Knight's Tale is set in the romance tradition of courtly love. Fabliau is generally a fairly bawdy tale which includes elements such as trickery, scatological humour, practical jokes, etc. Courtly love is the typical “ man worships woman” type of love that is seen in plays such as Romeo and Juliet. By juxtaposing the tales with such contrasting styles, Chaucer heightens the humour in The Miller's Tale.

Chaucer's satirical portraits of the characters in The Miller's Tale are parodies of the characters presented in The Knight's Tale. Both of the plays have the theme of two men that both want a beautiful woman. The pairing of Alison and Emily and Absalon and Nicholas and Arcite and Palamon serves to heighten the humour in The Miller's Tale. By comparing the description of Alison in The Miller's Tale and Emily in The Knight's Tale, it is clear that Chaucer parodies the conventions of romance to portray Alison in a comic light.

The convention of using floral imagery to describe a beautiful lady in Romance tales is evident in the description of Emily in The Knight's Tale. “ That Emily, who was fairer to be seen Than is the lily upon its green stalk And fresher than the May with new flower For her hue vied with colour of the rose I do not know which was the finer of the two. ” The reference to lilies suggests Emily's purity as well as her elegance and her beauty while the reference to the rose suggests her delicate complexion. These flowers are

cultivated and therefore imply Emily's high rank as she comes from a cultured society.

The narrator develops the images over several lines, comparing her favourably to the freshness and colour of these blossoms. Chaucer also employs floral imagery in the description of Alison. " She was a primrose, a pig's eye. " The primrose, unlike the roses and lilies, is a wild flower and not as elegant; it suggests Alison's untamed nature and the fact that she is a country girl. The reference to the pig's eye is highly ironic. While the narrator appears to be complimenting Alison on her beauty in the high style of Romance, in fact he mocks her through this farmyard image inherent in the name of the flower.

In his long description of Absalon in The Miller's Tale, Chaucer comically subverts the romance convention of describing the lady in great detail. The way Absalon is described doesn't make him appear very masculine. " Curly was his hair, and as the gold it shone, And stretched out like a fan large and broad; Very straight and even lay his elegant parted hair" " Very fair and thick are the laces set. And over that he had a gay surplice As white as in the blossom upon the branch. " " And plays songs on a small fiddle, To which he sometimes sang a loud high. "

The fact that Absalon is described using words such as, " elegant", " blossom", " loud high", make him seem quite girly in comparison to the description of one of the knights who fought for Palamon in the final battle for Emily. " Black was his beard and manly was his face. " " With shaggy hairs on his stout brows; His limbs large, his muscles hard and strong, His

shoulders broad, his arms round and long; And as was the fashion in his country, He stood full high upon a chariot of gold. ” This comparison of the knight contrasts with the more feminine description of Absalon.

This makes the character of Absalon in The Miller's Tale more humorous to the reader because he is a parody of such a manly knight, when he is quite the opposite. In The Knight's Tale Arcite and Palamon suffer many years, pining for the fair, but unattainable Emily, and are willing to die for her love. The description of this suffering offered in The Knight's Tale is ironically subverted in The Miller's Tale in the brief description of Nicholas' suffering and his rapid seduction of Alison. The description of Arcite's suffering is extended throughout 25 lines. Very often each day he grew faint and said ‘ Alas! ‘ For he shall never more see his lady. ”

“ So much sorrow never had creature That is, or shall (be), while the world may endure. ” “ And he was solitary and ever alone, And wailing all the night, making his moan; And if he heard song or instrument, Then would he weep, he could not be stopped. ” Arcite's suffering is described in a manner that makes the reader believe the pain. Because the play is of the courtly love theme, it is believable that someone in this play could feel that amount of pain.

The description of Nicholas' pain and suffering is brief and short-lived. The description of his pain only extends throughout 6 lines. “ And intimately he caught her by the crotch, And said, ‘ Indeed, unless I have my will, For secret love of thee, sweetheart, I die. ’ ” “ And said, ‘ sweetheart, love me immediately Or I will die, so save me god. ’ ” These descriptions of Nicholas'

pain seem over exaggerated. This contrasts with the lengthy description of Arcite's suffering. This adds another comic element to the tale as it seems that Nicholas doesn't really love Alison like how Arcite loves Emily.

It juxtaposes a serious and a miserable tone to a “ love me or I'll die” overstatement used by Nicholas in his rapid seduction of Alison. In conclusion, the presence of pairs and doubles is very effective. Chaucer has made a successful use of them to help emphasise the humour in The Miller's Tale use of the juxtaposition and the contrasting between pairs from both The Miller's Tale and The Knight's Tale. By parodying The Knight's Tale with a more exaggerated and humorous play; it makes The Miller's Tale more funny to the reader because there is something to compare it to.