

To what extent can Chaucer's Canterbury tales be seen as reflecting class structure in the medieval period.

Intro- background into social change at the time- change in feudal system after the plague and peasants revolt (why there was a change in class structure)

Miller's tale compared to knights (Romance vs Fabliau)

Reeve's tale compared to Millers (Miller wants change- interrupts the monk disrupts hierarchical order. Reeve doesn't want change has a position of authority?)

Social climbing in Fabliau (mocking of the lower class)- Fabliau originally told by aristocracy-

Reeve mocking the pilgrim Miller by having the miller in the tale have social aspirations above his station

Lee Patterson on Chaucer

Pg 3- "the traditional feudal structures of lordship and obedience were under strain

- " the plague shifted the balance of power dramatically and hastened the end of feudalism as a social and economic system"
- " Before the plague land and food were scarce while labour was abundant and demand was voracious; after the plague the the situation was exactly the opposite- more land less people to feed
- " empowered both the labourer + tenant" - negotiate better rent + wages with landlords
- Threatened the income of the ruling class in Medieval Europe
- Restrictive legislations- restricted the rights of tenants- could not leave his manor, had to accept work when offered , return to pre plague wages
- Dispute over whether these legislations worked but led to social friction " class warfare"
- Peasants revolt "had little lasting impact but threatened the ruling classes

Riverside Chaucer

Pg 7- "the time is present and the settings real familiar places"- ordinary people (working class) " plots are realistically motivated tricks and ruses"- much more realistic and relatable than the romance of the knights tales

- "The Fabliau thus present a lively image of everyday life among the middle and lower classes"- only seems real- life not that exciting in Medieval villages and towns- plots seem convincing but unbelievable amounts of gullibility and sexual appetite

Pg 8- victims in Fabliau usually those whom society respects- merchants hard working tradesmen

- Mocks the "idealistic pretensions of the aristocracy and its courtly literature which the fabliaux frequently parody though just as frequently they parody lower class attempts to adopt courtly behaviour"- Reeve's tale the miller +wife attempt to marry their daughter to aristocracy and both wear red- only can worn by aristocracy by law

General notes

- Fabliau originally told by aristocracy to mock lower classes- now lower classes telling fabliau
- Knights tale- ancient Greece in the past/ Millers tale modern day cambridge
- Knights tale- kings and nobles/ carpenters scholars clergy ect
- Chaucer gives this fabliau to the Miller- Miller wants things to change- the reeve does not
- Robert E Lewis (MT slide 7)- original fabliaux aristocratic genre- usually have a “considerable contempt for the middle class a contempt that grows to hateful and bitter scorn whenever the tale is about a bourgeois who transgresses into the world of the nobles buys a castle wants to marry a noble girl or the like” interesting that the miller is given this tale and the miller in the reeve's tale is aspiring to be part of the upper class- wears red clothes and wants to marry his daughter off to the aristocracy
- 3118-19 “ Now telleth on Sir monk if that ye konne/ Somewhat to quite with the Knyghtes tale” 3126-27 “ I kan a noble tale for nones/ With which I wol now quite the Knyghtes tale”
- “Right in his cherles terme wol I speke” - Reeve uses the same genre as the Miller- mocks the Millers profession because John who was cuckolded had same profession as Reeve- both carpenters- “ This dronke miller hath ytold us heer /How that bigyled was a carpenteer”
- Miller in tale parody of knight “ Ay by his belt he baar a long panade/ And of a swerde ful trenchent was the blade”
- “ gyte of reed; And Symkym hadde hosen of the same” - red can only be worn by the aristocracy

Chaucer's Fabliaux: The Miller's Tale and The Reeve's Tale- Amanda Hopkins
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Pg 3-As soon as he hears that the Miller's story is about a carpenter, he at once realizes that the Miller is intending to mock him: he takes the Miller's words personally – as they are clearly intended

Pg 6- In MilT, Alison 'is described in such a way that parodies the formal description of the beautiful court lady, but the parody, though splendid comic poetry, does not mock the formal ideal; it mocks its lower-class subject- stories would have been told in court to an aristocratic audience

Pg 8-9- How is this an insult? First, a parson is a parish priest, and medieval priests were, of course, supposed to be celibate. They were, indeed, barred from the sacrament of marriage. Symkyn's wife was conceived through a sinful union; and she herself is illegitimate. Symkyn's belief that he is improving his social position in marrying her is plainly

risible; and his wife, too, is a snob: her father had her well brought up in a convent, which makes her think she is better than her peers.

ycomen of noble kyn

; The person of the toun hir fader was.

With hire he yaf ful many a panne of bras,
For that Symkyn sholde in his blood allye.

She was yfostred in a nonnerye;

For Symkyn wolde no wyf, as he sayde,
But she were wel ynorissed and a mayde,
To saven his estaat of yomanrye.

And she was proud, and peert as is a pye. (I [A] 3942–50)

Pg 9- First, a parson is a parish priest, and medieval priests were, of course, supposed to be celibate. They were, indeed, barred from the sacrament of marriage. Symkyn's wife was conceived through a sinful union; and she herself is illegitimate. Symkyn's belief that he is improving his social position in marrying her is plainly risible; and his wife, too, is a snob: her father had her well brought up in a convent, which makes her think she is better than her peers. The parson, too, has delusions of grandeur:

This person of the toun, for she [Malyne] was feir,
In purpos was to maken hire his heir,
Bothe of his catel and his mesuage,
And straunge he made it of hir mariage.

His purpos was for to bistowe hire hye

Into som worthy blood of auncetrye;

For hooly chirches good moot been despended
On hooly chirches blood, that is descended.

Therefore he wolde his hooly blood honoure,

Though that he hooly chirche sholde devoure. (I [A], 3977–86)