
The Miller's Tale By Geoffrey Chaucer: Fiction Invented To Please Should Remain Close To Reality

According to Horace, "fiction invented to please should remain close to reality." This paper shall discuss this proponent of literary theory based on The Miller's Tale by Geoffrey Chaucer. This story is the second tale among the Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer. A miller narrates to us the story about a rich carpenter, John, his young wife Alison, and the two lodgers, Nicholas and Absolon. The story dwells on deceit and infidelity by Alison to her husband John. The two of them live in Oxford. The tragedy begins when John brings in both Nicholas and Absolon, two poor scholars who need a home. Nicholas, as well as Absolon, grow lustful interest in Alison and begin a plan to seduce her to bed. Indeed, Alison gives in to Nicholas and they go to bed for a short moment as the husband is away on a day field trip. Further, Nicholas and Alison devise a plan to spend a whole night together in the husband's bed by using the biblical allusion of Noah's flood. Nicholas promptly confuses John that God once again will destroy earth with flood so they can make 'arks' to survive the flood. Simultaneously Absolon, on the other hand, uses love songs to convince Alison to bed.

This poem reveals the conflict brought by contrast in age among couples. In this manner, it directly agrees with Horace's belief that literature invented for pleasure should remain close to reality, because the poem mirrors the challenges that come with marrying a woman very younger than you. First, Horace's contention carries a simple meaning that literature should depict reality in life as it gives pleasure to the readers. Literature mirrors life as it is. To Horace, this is the major purpose for designing art. He defines and blends the entertainment purposes with reality so that we may see our characters and morality or character and vices as we read any piece of work. In regard, it therefore means that we should be able to draw a moral lesson from fiction as we relate the events, themes, and characters in the fictional work to the ones we see in real life. It is only in this manner that we can find literature or fiction applicable to offer a moral lesson to us.

Chaucer uses The Miller's Tale to not only provide humor, but it also foregrounds the moral lesson from the story by including the tragedy John befalls due to his gullibility, he falls from the ceiling and injures himself. This is not to instill empathy into the reader. It acts as a warning to those who are gullible that the consequence of their gullibility is destined to bring injury and deception upon them. Humorous parts of the poem are indeed fictional, but the poet works within the contention of Horace's theory so that he only uses humor to give pleasure to the audience as they see reality in this piece of work. Humor also serves to capture the audience's attention as it grounds a magnetic field of significance to drag the audience to pick a moral

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lesson richly contained in the story.

From the prologue of the story, we see the Miller taking over the narration of the tale. However, the poet disengages his character from that of the Miller and makes apologies indicating he is only retelling the story as was first told by the Miller. "M'athynketh that I shal reherce it here. And therefore every gentile wight I preye, For Goddess love, demeth nat that I seye of evel entente, but that I moot reherce". Already, we see two narrators of this story, the Miller and Chaucer. The Miller is a fictional narrator whose voice, and authority, Chaucer, the poet, uses to tell the tale. In essence, this depicts the reality in the folklore narrative where one narrates the story as was told by another one. The poet uses this technique to conform to the theory that fiction should be real. He uses narrative techniques employed by old folklore narratives to tell a story of his own making. Actually, other viewers and interpreters can see and understand Chaucer as the Miller. It is the more reason he offers his apology to convince the reader that he only borrows the tale from the owner and so he is just a mouthpiece retelling the story. In addition, the poet uses characters with flaws fictionally to portray reality in life. The flaws of these characters are typical reality of human beings across the borders. For instance, the infidelity depicted by Alison is a typical behavior common of both women and men at that time. The poet has used satire to offer mockery through the reality of life itself. In other words, the satirical nature of the story is meant to offer humor on the surface, but is deeply calculated to condemn the vices depicted by most people in the real world. Furthermore, the character of Miller is a pure reality of chauvinism and patriarchy the society at the time of the poem depicted. Chaucer reveals to us that Miller was a cruel and jealous man. He frequently isolates his wife in a cage or in a chamber so that she has no freedom to mingle around with other people as illustrated in this line, "Jalous he was, and heeld hire narwe in cage".

The portrayal of Miller also indicates lack of wisdom in him. "He knew nat Catoun, for his wit was rude". Consequently, Chaucer makes a similarity of Miller's character to that of John. The two characters are not intelligent, a trait that makes John submit to the trickery of his wife and Nicholas. Although the characters here are fictional, the reality of life presents us with such characters in the society. In fact, the poet wants the readers and the audience to do a cross examination of themselves and the people around them to determine whether such follies as depicted in the characters of Nicholas, John, Alison, and Miller exist amongst them. He further directs the audience to study the consequences of the follies in the fiction in order to rectify their own, lest they befall the same consequences.

It is also proper to consider the vulgarism of the language used in the poem. In the prologue, the poet calls for our understanding that he is not the actual storyteller of the tale. His artistic and stylistic nature to write in the disguise of Miller, the drunken, is not questionable; nevertheless, it gives him the freedom to call a spade, spade, as he narrates the story using vulgar language as chosen diction. The poet uses this technique to represent two realities in

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life. The first one is the fact that it is common for drunken people to be careless and lack manners in their language as they discourse. The second reality is that more often than not, drunken people will never paint wrong picture of a situation, as they know not of disguise but reality. The vulgar language in the poem therefore acts as a vivid description to take the audience to the actual situation without camouflage. For instance, the poet through the actual narrator, Miller, gives Absolon crude language to use as he asks for kiss from Alison next to her bedroom window. "This Nicholas anon leet fle a fart, as greet as it had been a thonder-dent".

In conclusion, the poet has highly achieved Horace's contention that "fiction invented to please should remain close to reality" through the depiction of his characters, using satire, vulgarism of the language, and achievement of contemporary themes such infidelity, patriarchy, love, and deceit. Most characters in this tale are full of flaws such as gullibility, foolishness, trickery, and deceitfulness. These flaws are common realities of human behavior in the world then and today. They are traits that any human being can easily identify with. Likewise, the themes the poet gives are obvious of any society. Around the time of the poem for example, most love stories were known to consist of betrayal and some sense of infidelity. However, the poet entertains the audience through the story thus meeting the aesthetic nature of literature alongside its educative purpose. Miller's Tale is a humorous, moral tale.

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