

The Canterbury Tales: The Miller's Tale

The Miller's Tale is notoriously bawdy and crude, which is no surprise given The Miller's unpleasant description in *The General Prologue*. This tale features a love triangle, Biblical trickery, and a surprising and uncomfortable amount of farting. Even with the light-hearted content, Chaucer manages to include satirical critiques of the Church as an institution.

Question Before You Read: Revisit your notes on the Miller from *The General Prologue*. Based on this description, what actor (alive or dead) would you cast as the Miller? Use Peardeck (code TBD) to submit your answer (include a picture of the actor!) and be sure to back up your decision with some sort of explanation or evidence.

Characters

The Miller's Tale contains an entirely new and often confusing cast of characters. Use the list below as you read to help you keep track of them.

- **Slick Nicholas**- student of astrology who rents a room from the Carpenter. Along with being extremely intelligent and cunning, Nicholas is well-informed on “secret love and pleasure” (l. 15). He coerces Alison into having an affair.
- **The Carpenter/John**- Nicholas' landlord and husband to Alison. He is known for being prone to jealousy and is extremely protective over his wife.
- **Alison**- Wife of John who is known for her beauty and her “wanton eye.” She has an affair with Slick Nicholas and ignores the affections of Absolon.
- **Absolon**- Parish clerk who tries (and fails) to win Alison's affections.

Translation Activity

Reread this passage from *The Miller's Tale* in the original Middle English. Then, using Peardeck (access code TBD), rewrite your interpretation of the passage in modern English.

The dede sleep, for wery businesse
Fil on this carpenter right, as I gesse
About curfew-time or litel more
For travail of his goost he groneth sore,
And eft he routeth, for his heed mislay (ll. 457-460).

Compare your translation with the translation provided in the answer guide. Discuss which words were easy to translate and which words you found difficult to translate.

Reading and Discussion Questions

Answer the following questions with evidence from the text.

1. The Miller spends quite a bit of time giving specific details about Alison's appearance. Why does he do this? (i.e., why might it her appearance be important to the story?)
2. Reread Absolon's description in ll. 127-152.
 - a. What is his position, and how does he use this position to his advantage?
 - b. How might Absolon's character be a critique of the Church?
3. Explain the aphorism described in ll. 205-208 in your own words.

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- a. How does this aphorism relate to the plot of the tale?
4. What story do Nicholas and Alison devise to trick John?
5. Reread ll. 471-495. Why does Absolon believe that this is the opportune moment to try to woo Alison?
6. What happens when Absolon tries to kiss Alison?
 - a. Why is this a particularly fitting punishment for Absolon?
 - b. How does Absolon get revenge on Nicholas and Alison?
7. In ll. 268-268, John berates Nicholas for being a student. Why does he think that Nicholas shouldn't study astrology?
 - a. Why is this ironic?
 - b. How might this scene be a critique of those who choose to be ignorant under the guise of religion?