

10-1-2009

The Friar

Joly Wu '11

Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.imsa.edu/fall2009>



Part of the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Wu, Joly '11, "The Friar" (2009). 2009 Fall Semester. Paper 3.
<http://digitalcommons.imsa.edu/fall2009/3>

This Junior Honorable Mention is brought to you for free and open access by the Award for Excellence in Expository Writing at DigitalCommons@IMSA. It has been accepted for inclusion in 2009 Fall Semester by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@IMSA. For more information, please contact pgarrett@imsa.edu, jean@imsa.edu.

Joly Wu

Lit III/Cain

9-19-09

The Friar

Though Hubert the Friar is supposed to be a shepherd for the devout, he (as revealed through the Geoffrey Chaucer's sly, ironic writing) prances around in expensive clothing, lusts after anyone he wishes, and generally violates the teachings of the Church he vowed to represent. Thus, through its abundant detail and description of the Friar, the Canterbury Tales by Chaucer paints a portrait of a unique character that contradicts his commitment to the 14th century Catholic Church.

Chaucer illustrates the Friar as a playful and well-dressed fellow. Although friars are required to take vows of poverty, Hubert's clothing sends a different image: "... the semi-cope/Upon his shoulders, and the swelling fold/About him, like a bell about its mould/When it is casting, rounded out his dress" (270-272). Though he is supposed live a frugal life, the friar sports fine garments. Chaucer also reveals his mastery of detail with his irony ridden description of the Friar's reputation in society, exclaiming that "He [the Friar] was a noble pillar to his Order./ Highly beloved and intimate was he/With County folk within his boundary,/And city dames of honour and possessions" (218-221). Though the naïve narrator praises Hubert, the author ridicules the Friar's naughty actions. Hubert is described as "A Limiter, a very festive fellow" (213), which by itself is a contradiction since a friar is limited to their begging district and a simple life. To make matters worse, the Friar is festive in very disgraceful ways: "He'd fixed up many a marriage, giving each/Of his young women what he could afford her" (216-217). These lines indicate that

he sends girls off to marriage that he himself impregnated, hiding his awful renunciation of chastity vows.

Chaucer explains the Friar's greed, trickery, and willingness to defy his Order's rules with the excuse that "He was an easy man in penance-giving/Where he could hope to make a decent living;... For many a fellow is so hard of heart/He cannot weep, for all his inward smart. Therefore instead of weeping and of prayer/One should give silver for a poor Friar's care" (227-237). Even if friars were licensed to hear confessions (which they definitely were not), penance needed to be sincere and from the heart, not from the pocketbook. The friar turns sin into a joke, a mere fine that he can profit from.

Thus, by detail and wit, Chaucer creates Hubert, the quintessential representation of a friar that breaks all his vows and thus is able to fund his expensive clothing and taste for women. All of this, however, does not come from a cursory glance at the text; it takes analysis to pinpoint Chaucer's subtle digging at the Friar's true deceiving self.