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MACMILLAN MASTER GUIDES

THE MILLER'S TALE

BY GEOFFREY CHAUCER

MICHAEL ALEXANDER

palgrave
macmillan

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First edition 1986

Published by
MACMILLAN EDUCATION LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS
and London
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

Typeset by TecSet Ltd,
Sutton, Surrey

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Alexander, Michael
The miller's tale by Geoffrey Chaucer.—(Macmillan master guides)
1. Chaucer, Geoffrey. Miller's tale
I. Title II. Chaucer, Geoffrey, *1340-1400*.
Miller's tale
821'.1 PR1868.M6
ISBN 978-0-333-40258-0 ISBN 978-1-349-08334-3 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-08334-3

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The aim of the Macmillan Master Guides is to help you to appreciate the book you are studying by providing information about it and by suggesting ways of reading and thinking about it which will lead to a fuller understanding. The section on the writer's life and background has been designed to illustrate those aspects of the writer's life which have influenced the work, and to place it in its personal and literary context. The summaries and critical commentary are of special importance in that each brief summary of the action is followed by an examination of the significant critical points. The space which might have been given to repetitive explanatory notes has been devoted to a detailed analysis of the kind of passage which might confront you in an examination. Literary criticism is concerned with both the broader aspects of the work being studied and with its detail. The ideas which meet us in reading a great work of literature, and their relevance to us today, are an essential part of our study, and our Guides look at the thought of their subject in some detail. But just as essential is the craft with which the writer has constructed his work of art, and this may be considered under several technical headings — characterisation, language, style and stage-craft, for example.

The authors of these Guides are all teachers and writers of wide experience, and they have chosen to write about books they admire and know well in the belief that they can communicate their admiration to you. But you yourself must read and know intimately the book you are studying. No one can do that for you. You should see this book as a lamp-post. Use it to shed light, not to lean against. If you know your text and know what it is saying about life, and how it says it, then you will enjoy it, and there is no better way of passing an examination in literature.

JAMES GIBSON

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Cover illustration: Detail from *Pilgrimage to Canterbury* by Thomas Stothard (1806-7). ©Tate Gallery Publications.