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A Comparison of Good and Evil: The Franklin's and Pardoner's Tales

The Chaucerian portrayal of social classes highlights the vices and virtues of each key actor in society through the words they speak and the way in which they narrate their tales.

Both the Franklin and the Pardoner are representatives of the ecclesiastical class, with distinctive character traits that project a contrasting image of good versus evil and reveal how these characters interpret morality in their own way. Both good and evil can prevail within human beings in different forms; however, the Chaucerian portrayal of good and evil in the Pardoner's and Franklin's Tales are contrastable on account of the degree of projections and justifications present.

Both the tale of the Franklin and that of the Pardoner reveal the hypocrisy and exploitation prevailing under the umbrella of organized religion. Essentially, in Chaucer's era, pardoners worked as the pope's representatives, authorized to collect money in the form of charities and remissions of sins. They were entitled to a specific share of that collected money; however, most of them were dishonest and would either extract a larger share or, in some cases, keep the whole amount for themselves. Ironically, the pardoners were themselves practicing the vices for which they were to sell indulgences and grant salvation to others. They were indulging in sensuous pleasures including "gluttony," "drinking," and other social evils (Chaucer, 20-40). Interestingly, the Pardoner's narrative not only recounts the prevalence of these social evils but also serves as a kind of boast in presenting the pardoner's persona as the master of all such evil feats.

The keynote of “The Pardoner’s Tale,” “money is the root of all evil,” not only exemplifies the rampant materialism amongst the general public but also elucidates its incessant role in corrupting religion-minded and apparently pious members of the clergy. Likewise, “The Franklin’s Tale” also underscores the attitude of Medieval society wherein socially objectionable freedom in relationships and status were obtainable through individual endeavors, as happened in the case of Arveragus and Dorigen. The Franklin’s tale revolves around the philosophical and moral notions of Providence and man’s approach toward it.

Both the Pardoner’s and the Franklin’s tale reflect inherent human vices and the way those vices are justified. Dorigen’s remark, “thise grisly rokkes blake” embodies not only curiosity but also apprehension over how a benevolent God’s creation could be destructive in its effect, rather than producing any good (“The Franklin’s Prologue, 859). To her, God’s scheme of things and role-attributions might have been done differently to produce a greater gain, as if those rocks had been blessed with different characteristics. Another key concept highlighted in the Franklin’s tale is the need for flexibility in human relationships and contracts. For instance, Arveragus’ behavior with her suiter undergoes consistent yet enormous reconsiderations and changes. Initially, Arveragus is so adamant about winning her that he hires a magician for a large sum to displace rocks, albeit temporarily, to please his mistress. Later in the tale, upon learning that Dorigen has entered into an oath with another man during his absence, he shows his willingness to accept the course of events by allowing her to keep her promise. Arveragus here exerts his great “Emprise,” possibly to heighten his good intentions, or else to further impress his lady by being broad-minded.

In a nutshell, Chaucer has painted a vivid and realistic picture of good and evil in the Pardoner’s and Franklin’s tales, with a major focus on how people conceal evil under different guises. The theme of superficiality resonates in the Pardoner’s use of the assertion of money’s power to corrupt people as an excuse for his malpractices. Both the Pardoner’s

and Franklin's tales project a complex intermix of good and evil. The Pardoner's tale elucidates the dominance of evil over ideal good, and similar to the tale narrated by Franklin reveals the personal exploitation of good as a way of hiding inherent evil and strengthening an individual's persona and/or personal relationships.

Work Cited

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