

Degrees of Essay Sophistication

AN ESSAY WHOSE OVERALL THESIS IS:

Chaucer's "A Friar's Tale" criticizes 14th century English society by revealing the hypocrisy in time-honored traditions and institutions.

LEVEL 1

The description of the Friar contains much irony, a contrast between what is stated and what is meant. He really seems interested in material things.

LEVEL 2

The description of the friar contains much irony, a contrast between what is stated and what is meant. He is a "champion" at parties. He deals with "city dames of honor and possessions." He believes that he is "better" than "lepers" and "beggars." He even cons a "poor widow" into giving him money.

LEVEL 3

The description of the Friar contains much irony, a contrast between what is stated and what is meant. Being a cleric, a Friar is expected to be uninterested in the material things of this world so he can devote his life to serving God and his fellow man. This Friar, however, is a "champion" at parties. He deals with "city dames of honor and possessions." Having little interest in the sick, he shows interest in the poor only so he can monetarily exploit them. He believes that he is "better" than "lepers" and "beggars." He even cons a "poor widow" into giving him money.

LEVEL 4

In describing the Friar, Chaucer uses irony to show how this Friar's life is clearly inappropriate to his holy calling. Not only does he go to parties, but he is a "champion" at partying. While a proper Friar would not behave indiscreetly around women, this Friar is interested in "city dames," especially if they have "honor and possessions." Having little interest in the sick, he shows interest in the poor, such as the "poor widow," only so he can monetarily exploit them.

LEVEL 5

In describing the Friar, Chaucer uses irony to show how this Friar's life style is clearly inappropriate to his calling. While a proper Friar would not generally go to parties, not only does this one go but he is what we today would call the "life of the party." In fact, if there were a contest to see who would be the best at partying, this Friar would likely be the "champion." He apparently does not take celibacy seriously either since his association with "city dames" suggests a fondness for the company of prostitutes. If women happen to have "honor and possessions," we can speculate that he seeks their favor for both their respectability and their wealth. It is easy then to understand why this Friar has little or no interest in the sick or poor of his society, any interest being limited to "poor [widows]" whom he can monetarily exploit.

LEVEL 6

In describing the Friar, Chaucer uses irony to show how the Friar's life style is inappropriate to his calling. While a proper Friar would not generally go to parties, not only does this one go but he is what we today might call the "life of the party." He does not take celibacy seriously either since his association with "city dames" suggests a fondness for the company of prostitutes. If women happen to have "honor and possessions," he seeks their favor for both their respectability and their wealth. It is easy then to understand why this Friar has little or no interest in helping the sick or poor of his society, except for the "poor [widows]" he can monetarily exploit. Considering this lack of concern for his own public image, he apparently enjoys flaunting his lifestyle. Some may admit to a grudging admiration for someone with no apparent moral ambivalence or for whom no fear of public opinion necessitates deceit or stealth. In this sense, the irony here is that such a Friar is even tolerated. The real object of Chaucer's criticism may be a society that can allow the Friar not only to exist but to flourish and prosper.