

Outline

Thesis Statement: Chaucer reflects the social changes taking place for women by creating complex, often inconsistent female characters who echo the contradictions of the times.

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II. Prioress' spiritual vs. worldly concerns

A. Appearance

1. Fine forehead
2. Jewelry

B. Interests

1. French language
2. Aristocratic manners
3. Animals

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Sample of introduction, ending with thesis statement

In the Prologue to Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, the Prioress wears a gold brooch inscribed with the motto "*Amor Vincit Omnia*" (Chaucer 25)—"Love Conquers All"—a motto that could mean spiritual love or romantic love. If the Prioress represents nuns in general in the late fourteenth century, then the motto is ironic. Later in the Prologue, Chaucer introduces the independent and gregarious Wife of Bath, proud widow of five husbands. She, too, seems to represent an ironic version of fourteenth-century wives in general. Chaucer, "one of the most wonderful observers in the whole of English literature" (Powers 94), reports everything he observes about people with accuracy—even if he sees contradictions. His ability to "tell a good story" with "vivid and familiar" character types and a "wickedly modern sense of irony" is well known to contemporary readers (Powers 97). The last half of the fourteenth century was a time of contradictions (Thompson and Johnson 863). Most of the traditional relationships of society were changing, and "the times were filled with war, plague, suffering,

and anger” (Bishop 334). Amid all this upheaval, the relation of women to society was also changing. By creating complex, often inconsistent female characters who echo the contradictions of the times, Chaucer reflects the social changes taking place for women.

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Sample paragraph of section II. A. on outline – type in cards/rough & choppy sound

The Prioress is a woman of the Church. She is vain and has worldly interests. She is simple, but has a coy smile, which seems artificial. She has a graceful manner, but she calls attention to herself and takes pride in her “well-shaped head, / Almost a span across the brows” (Powers 89). She is supposed to wear her veil “pinned tightly down to their eyebrows, so that their foreheads were completely hidden” (Power 89). She has some very fancy, green beads and a golden brooch. These items are fancy and show her vanity. The brooch states “Love Conquers All” but she does not say whether the love is spiritual or romantic (Powers 89).

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Sample paragraph of section II. A. on outline – after revision/transitions, smoother flow, stronger diction

The Prioress appears in the General Prologue as both a woman of the Church and a vain woman with worldly interests. Her simple but coy smile seems artificial, and her graceful manner ironically calls attention to herself. She prides herself for having a “well-shaped head, / Almost a span across the brows” (Chaucer 25). Even though nuns were expected to wear their veils “pinned tightly down to their eyebrows, so that their foreheads were completely hidden” (Power 89), Chaucer’s Prioress does not hesitate to flaunt one of her finest features. Furthermore, the Prioress possesses some very fancy, green beads and a golden brooch, demonstrating her vanity. The gold brooch proclaims her faith in the power of love; however, she coyly refrains from specifying whether that love is spiritual or romantic (Powers 89).