



# Will The Miller's Tale be "Washed Away" in the Next Century? -- The Fate of Chaucer's Flood Motif in a Modern Setting

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## The Suspended Plot-Element

A strategy in which the reader is given information crucial to the conclusion early on, but in such a subtle way that the conclusion is not anticipated



Part of what sets Chaucer's Miller's Tale apart from both medieval and modern analogues is his superior use of the suspended plot-element

## The Flood Motif's Importance

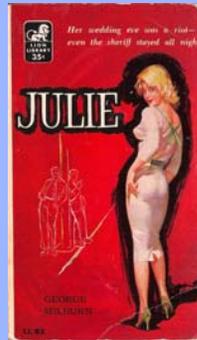
The second flood provides the reason for John the carpenter to spend the night in a hanging tub. Later, the fear of the flood at the call for "water" is why he cuts the ropes, only to come crashing to the ground.

"The circumstance that accounts for the superiority of the Miller's Tale over its analogues, some of which are relatively sophisticated, is that Chaucer is particularly adept in handling the suspended plot-element. More than to any other single feature Chaucer's Miller's Tale owes its success to the poet's masterful subordination of the flood motif to the misdirected kiss and branding story" (Bratcher and Kreisler 332)



## Examination of Two "Modern" Analogues with Respect to the Flood Motif

1. *Julie* - a novel by George Milburn. Pub. 1956.
2. The Miller's Tale Episode from the BBC *Canterbury Tales* televised series. Originally aired in 2003. Written by Peter Bowker.



## A Brief Compare and Contrast

	The Original	<i>Julie</i>	BBC Version
Inclusion of Flood Motif	Yes	Yes	No
Misdirected Kiss	Yes	Yes	Yes
Branding	Yes	Yes	Yes
Occupation of Nicholas	Student and Astrologer	Astrologer and Salesman	Con-Artist ("producer")
Motivation for John to Trust Nicholas	Religion - belief in Nicholas's ability to read the stars	Religion and prior experience	Prospect of fame and riches and drugs
General Outcome	General feeling of poetic justice for all characters	General feeling of poetic justice for all characters	Dark undertones - everyone seems to lose out but Nick

## *Julie* - Why Milburn Can Keep the Flood Motif



Ozark (Arkansas) Setting in the Mid-1900s

- Written in the style of well known southern writer Erskine Caldwell - creates stereotypical religiously superstitious characters
- Bible Belt - Holy Rollers
- Most recent time period the Miller's Tale can be set and still maintain the flood motif?

## BBC Miller's Tale - A 21st Century Setting and Why the Flood Motif Becomes Problematic

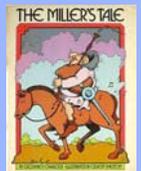
- The BBC version chooses to add some things and leave some out, but, due to the drastic change in religion since, the flood motif had to be left out
- In both England and America there is a declining trend in religious affiliation
- Most people, religious or otherwise, do not believe the earth was completely covered in water at one time, or could be in the future
- Atheists like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens are not only around, but respected

## Future of The Miller's Tale

As we have seen, the flood motif is of central importance for the Miller's Tale, but in a modern setting it is becoming increasingly difficult to incorporate into the plot. The flood motif was never meant to be outstandingly realistic, but its inclusion in a story requires that the religious aspects are at least plausible - simply not true in most cases for society today. It seems that as we move farther into the twenty-first century, many medieval themes, including religion, may become more and more obsolete - Does this mean the Miller's Tale loses value in modern society?

## Conclusion (Thesis)

While the Miller's Tale may lose its brilliance in a modern setting due to the difficulty of including the flood motif, Chaucer's masterful manipulation of the suspended plot-element is likely the insurance that the original Miller's Tale will remain relevant and enjoyable well into the future.



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