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

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?

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.

A Brief Compare and Contrast

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<td>Inclusion of Flood Motif</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Misdirected Kiss</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Branding</td>
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<td>Occupation of Nicholas</td>
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References