
KEY WORDS IN THE MILLER'S TALE

If you read *The Canterbury Tales* in a modernized version, you can't fully appreciate Chaucer's delicately precise vocabulary choices. Consider, for example, three key words that appear repeatedly in "The Miller's Tale": *hende*, *sely*, and *privitee*. None of these words have exact modern English equivalents, and their constellations of meanings can deeply inform our understanding of the characters and the story.

Look over the definitions of these words — adapted from the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Then, as you read "The Miller's Tale," note where these words occur, which characters they're associated with, and what themes and ideas they highlight.

hende (adjective)

1. Near by, at hand
2. Ready to hand, convenient, handy
3. Ready or skillful with the hand, dexterous; expert, skillful, clever
4. Pleasant in dealing with others; courteous, gracious; kind, gentle, 'nice'
5. Pleasing to the sight; comely, fair, 'nice'

sely (adjective)

1. Happy, blissful; fortunate, lucky, well-omened, auspicious
2. Spiritually blessed, enjoying the blessing of God
3. Pious, holy, good
4. Innocent, harmless (Often as an expression of compassion for persons or animals suffering undeservedly.)
5. Deserving of pity or sympathy; pitiable, miserable, 'poor'; helpless, defenseless
6. Insignificant, trifling; mean, poor; feeble

privitee (noun)

1. A thing kept secret or hidden
 2. A divine or heavenly mystery; a hidden truth or secret of God or nature
 3. A secret matter or plan; a secret
 4. One's private thought or counsel; private business; personal affairs
 5. The genitals, the private parts
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