

**Depiction of Clergy in Short Story Collections of Early Renaissance West European Literature (on the Examples of "Decameron" by G. Boccaccio, "Canterbury Tales" by G. Chaucer and Anonymous "One Hundred Merrie And Delightful Stories")**

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*The present article considers perception of clergy by Early Renaissance West European literature within the bounds of novel genre. As a result of comparing portraits of churchmen in three short story collections of the period mentioned one can conclude to which extent each of the literature works only follows the canons of the genre and which one reflects Renaissance ideas.*

It is quite a difficult task to define a distinct border between Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance in literature. This border can be fixed not by time limits, but only by contents of this or that literature work. A complex and thorough investigation is needed to study bulky and compound works. Quite debatable literature phenomena are, for example, "Decameron" by G. Boccaccio (Italy, 1350-1353) [1], "Canterbury Tales" by G. Chaucer (England, 80-s – 90-s XIV century) [2] and anonymous collection "Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles" (France, 1462) [3]. A number of books are dedicated to deciding which literature epoch they belong to: in his book "Middle Ages Boccaccio"<sup>1</sup> [4] V. Branka points at middle ages features of "Decameron", and R.I. Khlodovsky [5], for example, analyzes Renaissance influence. Russian researcher I. Kashkin [6] underlines the novelty of ideas with which G. Chaucer filled "old" literature forms in "Canterbury Tales". A.D. Mikhailov notes that one can feel in "Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles" the influence of popular in the middle ages literature fabliau, but "at the same time one can feel spirit of Renaissance, i.e. interest in a man's secular deeds, clearly marked anti-asceticism" [7]. The chosen works are interesting not only for them being "transitional", but also for their importance for each of their native literatures, as well as for the whole West European literature of the mentioned period. They are significant not only as examples of the incipient at that time novel genre, but also as completely new works for each of the literatures. Thus, for instance, G. Boccaccio introduced a new principle for composing a short story collection, without speaking about the method of new time ideas reflection. G. Chaucer developed the frame structure, gave it independence and introduced portrait psychological insight into it. For French literature "Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles" are the first prose story collection. And all of the three books were among the first ones to facilitate each of their literatures perceiving Renaissance spirit.

Renaissance culture suggested substituting slavish worship to God and clergy by "alive" religion, i.e. belief in a person and secular life. Such an idea existed hand in hand with the following notions: belief in a layman, his virtue, good will and freedom. The best method which was chosen by Humanists of Renaissance to struggle against old-fashioned church canons turned out to be humour and satire. It is no accident that one of the most popular topics of the mentioned period's works was to ridicule clergy. J. Burckhardt describes clergy condition in Italian culture in the following way: "Outside the Roman Curia, some respect seems to have been felt for the best men among the bishops, and for many of the parochial clergy. On the other hand, the mere holders of benefices, the canons and the monks were held in almost universal suspicion, and were often the objects of the most scandalous aspersions, extending to the whole of their order. It has been said that the monks were made the scapegoats for the whole clergy, for the reason that none but they could be ridiculed without danger. But this is certainly incorrect. They are introduced so frequently in the novels and comedies, because these forms of literature need fixed and well-known types where the imagination of the reader can easily fill up an outline. Besides which, the novelists do not as a fact spare the secular clergy. In the third place, we have abundant proof in the rest of Italian literature that men could speak boldly enough about the Papacy and the Court of Rome. In works of imagination we cannot expect to find criticism of this kind. Fourthly, the monks, when attacked, were sometimes able to take a terrible vengeance" [8, p. 198]. Thus, for example, dissipated life of monks is displayed in seventeen "Decameron" novels, G. Chaucer portrayed bright, sometimes repulsive images of ten clergymen that are introduced in General Prologue and characters' tales. The authors of "Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles" present monks and nuns as main characters in twenty stories. Such characters served as main heroes in middle ages farces and fabliau, and they quite naturally fit short story collections. However, humanists had their own vision of things and an individual approach. That is why it should be found out whether depiction of clergy means only keeping to the genre canons or it expresses some other ideas.

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<sup>1</sup> Here and further the translation is done by the author of the article.

Starting the research with "Decameron" one should underline that the educated, humanistic society, which consists of seven ladies and three young men, who gathered to avoid the Plague, does not include clergymen. We can only "hear" stories about them. Each of the parts of "Decameron" has its own subject matter that in fact reminds of the subjects of naughty fabliau: "how people due to their cunning gained what they were fervently dreaming of or regained the lost" (the third day), "how people who were stung by somebody's joke paid back in the same way or with the help of witty responses avoided loss, danger and disgrace" (the sixth day), "about the tricks that wives played with their quick-witted and slow-witted husbands in the name of love or for the sake of their own reprieve" (the seventh day), "about the tricks that a woman daily plays with a man, a man plays with a woman, and a man plays with a man" (the eighth day). G. Boccaccio purposefully did not include tales about monks in the parts of "Decameron" with serious, even tragic subject matter: "how for people who suffered different trials everything turned to the good in the end" (the second day), "how the beloved after misadventures eventually had a happy end" (the fifth day), "about people who showed generosity and magnanimity in affairs of the heart as well as in other affairs" (the tenth day). In this way the author clearly defines the category of such people as monks, i.e. they are not able to love sincerely, to show generosity and, as the tales contents show, they rarely have happy ends. Noteworthy is the fact that main characters of "Decameron" frame story, after having stated during the first day to tell "what everyone likes best", choose stories about monks' depravity and hypocrisy (1.2;1.4; 1.6; 1.7 novels).

So, what were the clergymen in the times of Boccaccio busy with? In his describing the author of "Decameron" starts from the general, i.e. from the Roman Court clergy depravity, and proceeds to individual cases in which he blames negative features of individual monks. The majority of monks' characters are licentious (1.4; 4.2; 3.1;3.8; 7.3; 8.2; 8.4; 9.2 novels), hypocritical (1.6), mean (1.7), cunning (3.8; 4.2; 6.10; 7.3), and foolish (3.4). Monastery life is not as boring as laymen imagine. For brethren and abbots life is in full swing just like outside the "sacred" walls: they entertain themselves with citizen women, nuns, they are exposed and they expose their brethren for the sake of reprieve. Nuns are not different from them. One of the stories tells about a pious hermit who "under the pretence of piety" [1, p. 186] deceives an unsophisticated girl. Priests usually make a profit out of the faithful when they claim coal as sacred things (6.10). Nuns are jealous and cannot resist the dictates of flesh just as ordinary women cannot (3.1; 9.2). All of these images are created in a realistic manner for they are taken from real life. In the majority of novels monks' and nuns' tricks and sins go unpunished. And only in rare cases they are themselves fooled (3.4), exposed (8.4) and punished (4.2). One can meet a "pious" priest who, without knowing it, assisted adultery, but beforehand he asked for payment (3.3).

However, G. Boccaccio was looking at clergy with humanist eyes, therefore in majority of his novels monks are depicted humorously. The author of "Decameron" together with his ten characters laughs in a kind manner at monks' simplicity and tricks. The storytellers do not criticize clergy's secular desires, they protest against hypocrisy and meanness, viciousness and money swindling. Clergymen have a right to enjoy secular life equally with laymen, and their deeds should be oriented towards man-serving.

The Englishman G. Chaucer quite truly showed the real life of his times by introducing his auto character in the company of pilgrims, among which one can encounter almost all clergy representatives: a prioress, a monk, a nun, a friar, a parson, a summoner, a pardoner, and a nun's priest. Their descriptions in General Prologue correspond not to the image of a humble and God-fearing God-servant but to the image of a layman, who is happy with life and a master of its joys. Prioress with courtier morals and manners; monk who is a damsel and hunting lover; friar who is a feast frequent customer and who will give absolution to whoever has money; summoner who is a glutton and drunkard, a gambler and reveller; trickster pardoner – all of them are opposed by parson: "This noble ensample to his sheep he yaf, That first he wrought, and afterward he taught" [2, p. 249]. G. Chaucer caustically mocks at universal vices of clergy, thus giving the modest and positive priest as an example. Innocent secular desires are viewed by the author of "Canterbury Tales" as natural for clergy. For instance, when comparing decorous and pleasant prioress, her courtier manners and the desire to make everybody respect her with the repulsive pardoner who has eyes "as an hare", and voice "as small as hath a goot", we cannot but notice whose side G. Chaucer takes [2, p. 253].

The characters from General Prologue just as storytellers from "Decameron", cannot leave out the subject matter of monks' trickery, and already in the second story there appears a "parish clerk Absolon" [2, p. 294], who is handsome, merry and who courts other men's wives (miller's tale). In shipman's tale a trickster monk don John deceives his kinsman's wife and does not pay her as they have agreed. Friar tells about a very mean and inhuman summoner who fairly enough is taken to hell by devil. Summoner tells about a mercenary and foolish friar, who was deceived by a layman. One cannot but note that prioress in her miracle about an innocent boy who was killed by the Jews for his belief, doubts monks: "This abbot, which that was an hooly man, As monkes been – or ellis oghte be..." [2, p. 345]. Nun's priest makes his wish to have several wives come true in his tale about a cock. Stories of four clergy representatives have a serious tone and have no trace of mock. These are short tragedies about men who were overthrown from happiness peaks (monk's tale), pardoner's exempla about the young men who were idling their lives in vain and who in the end killed one another because of

greediness, the second nun's tale about Saint Cecile and the closing parson's sermon. With the help of such correlation of serious tone and humour, and often satire G. Chaucer gives a clear picture of the clergy of his times: the majority behaves even worse and more indecent than laymen; but one can find among them really pious people. And they are also men, and all of the old canons make the belief artificial and incomprehensible. G. Chaucer's humanism to clergy can be best expressed in the following words: "The reule os seint Maure or of seint Beneit, By cause that it was old and somdel streit This ilke Monk leet olde thynges pace, And heeld after the newe world the space. He yaf nat of that text a pulled hen That seith that hunters been nat hooly men, Ne that a monk, whan he is recchelees, Is likned til a fish that is waterlees, – This is to seyn, a monk out of his cloystre. But thilke text heeld he nat worth an oyster; And I seyde his opinioun good" [2, p. 241].

The French collection "Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles" does not have as detailed characters as "Canterbury Tales" have for there is no any frame story. The tales themselves are good examples of novel that attaches importance not to all-in-one character but to separate traits that become apparent in certain situations with the twist in the end. And again the main topics of stories about clergy are their cunning, resourcefulness, dissipated way of life and sometimes stupidity. In the majority of stories priests try to gain other men's wives (44, 56, 64, 76, 85, 95 novels), mentioning God's name or sacred things serve as disguise for their deeds (14, 93, 99), curé like eating and dress ultra-fashionably (83, 94), abbesses and nuns behave indecently (15, 21, 46), priests conceal their servility or ignorance (74, 89). One can encounter simpletons at who one cannot help laughing (2, 53, 64, 73, 76, 96). 44<sup>th</sup> novel shows how a priest-procurer, who demanded a certain payment from a girl, was deceived by her husband, a layman. Some clergymen commit their deeds unpunished, some of them pay the full price. For example, in the 56<sup>th</sup> novel a priest and his lover were burnt by her husband in a pit-trap where a wolf had got. The narrator of this story has not a trace of pity on the people, for wolf that gave his life for the mistakes of others was a more pitiful sight. In the 64<sup>th</sup> and 85<sup>th</sup> novels a curé lost a certain part of his body for making court to married women of his parish.

The absence of one obvious author and his remarks hinders the understanding of author's clergy appraisal in "Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles". Features of all mentioned novels can be consolidated to fabliau or facetiae canons (for plots of the majority stories were taken from the old fabliau and "Facetiae" by Poggio Bracciolini, XV century). Storytellers quite rarely express their opinion about their characters' deeds. For instance, 44<sup>th</sup> novel opens with the words: "In the present day there are many priests and curés who are good fellows, and who can as easily commit follies and imprudences as laymen can" [3]. 46<sup>th</sup> novel starts with the line: "It is no means unusual for monks to run after nuns" [3], which can mean a statement of fact as well as a narrator's excusatory remark. In 76<sup>th</sup> novel a chaplain falls in love with his master's woman. The teller of this story does not consider his love demonstration as unnatural: "He cast all sense and decency to the winds, and only thought of satisfying his foolish lust, – albeit it was quite natural" [3]. The prime goal of the authors of the French short story collection under consideration is obviously the reflection of their modern life in which priests are no way different from their parishioners. Definitely, in "Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles" clergymen are mentioned within the frame of middle ages fabliau canons. However, in such as the abovementioned ambiguous lines one can notice the influence of Renaissance ideas which justify any person's mistakes.

When comparing the three mentioned short story collections one should note a more appreciable Renaissance influence which "Decameron" by the Italian G. Boccaccio put on the English "Canterbury Tales" and a less marked influence in the French "Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelle". Evidently, such a correlation depends on the aims the authors set for their books. G. Chaucer directs his book towards the perception and spread of Renaissance ideas. The French authors, most probably, headed on to the adoption of prose novel genre. One can insist with certainty that if the authors of "Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles" patterned "Decameron" fully and work out a frame story, one would be able to find in it proof of a considerable Renaissance influence.

Thus, novel genre ideally fits for the depiction of clergy. G. Boccaccio creates the novel tradition and includes in it resembling fabliau features (conciseness, captivating plot, and twist in the end). The French "Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles" are an exemplary follower of the Italian tradition (which they accepted mostly through "Facetiae" by Poggio Bracciolini). G. Chaucer did not use prose form, instead on its basis he worked out a verse novel, having directed it as well as the more developed than in "Decameron" frame story towards the creation of characters' psychological portraits.

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