



The Monk

This is the description of a pilgrim belonging to the clergy taken from the 'General Prologue' to The Canterbury Tales.

Geoffrey Chaucer
The Canterbury Tales
(ca 1387-1400)
General Prologue

A Monk there was, one of the finest sort¹,
Who rode the Country; hunting was his sport.
A manly² man, to be an Abbot able;
Many a dainty³ horse he had in stable.
5 His **bridle**, when he rode, a man might hear
Jingling⁴ in a whistling⁵ wind as clear,
Aye, and as loud as does the chapel **bell**
Where my lord Monk was Prior of the cell.
The **Rule** of good St Benet⁶ or St Maur⁷
10 As old and **strict** he tended to ignore;
He let go by⁸ the things of yesterday
And took the modern world's more spacious way. [...]

This Monk was therefore a good man to horse;
Greyhounds⁹ he had, as swift¹⁰ as birds, to course¹¹.
15 Hunting a hare¹² or riding at a **fence**
Was all his fun, he spared for no expense¹³.
I saw his sleeves were garnished¹⁴ at the hand
With fine grey fur¹⁵, the finest in the land,
And on his hood¹⁶, to fasten it at his chin
20 He had a wrought-gold cunningly fashioned pin¹⁷;
Into a lover's knot¹⁸ it seemed to pass.
His head was bald¹⁹ and shone like **looking-glass**;
So did his face, as if it had been greased²⁰.
He was a fat and personable priest²¹;
25 His prominent eyeballs never seemed to settle²².
They glittered²³ like the flames **beneath** a kettle²⁴;
Supple²⁵ his boots, his horse in fine condition.
He was a prelate fit²⁶ for exhibition,
He was not pale like a tormented soul.
30 He liked a fat swan²⁷ best, and roasted **whole**.
His palfrey²⁸ was as brown as is a berry²⁹.

- 1 one of the finest sort. Eccezionalmente bello.
- 2 manly. Virile.
- 3 dainty. Pregiato.
- 4 Jingling. Tintinnare.
- 5 whistling. Che fischia.
- 6 St Benet. San Benedetto introdusse la regola della preghiera e del lavoro nella vita claustrale.
- 7 St Maur. San Mauro, discepolo di San Benedetto, organizzò il monachesimo in Gallia.
- 8 He let go by. Lasciava andare.
- 9 Greyhounds. Levrieri.
- 10 swift. Veloci.
- 11 to course. Da far correre.
- 12 hare. Lepre.
- 13 spared ... expense. Non badava a spese.
- 14 sleeves ... garnished. Maniche profilate.
- 15 fur. Pelliccia.
- 16 hood. Cappuccio.
- 17 to fasten ... pin. Per allacciarlo sotto il mento aveva uno spillo d'oro lavorato in modo originale.
- 18 lover's knot. Nodo d'amore.
- 19 bald. Calva.
- 20 greased. Unto.
- 21 personable priest. Prete di bell'aspetto.
- 22 to settle. Calmarsi.
- 23 glittered. Scintillavano.
- 24 kettle. Paiolo.
- 25 Supple. Morbidi.
- 26 fit. Pronto, adatto.
- 27 swan. Cigno.
- 28 palfrey. Palafreno, cavallo addestrato ad essere cavalcato soprattutto da una donna.
- 29 berry. Mora.

READING COMPETENCE

1 READ the text and do the activities below.

- 1 The text introduces a member of
 - A the aristocracy.
 - B the high clergy.
 - C the lower clergy.
 - D the middle classes.



2 Read the text again and match the highlighted words with their meaning.

- 1 severe
- 2 mirror
- 3 building where horses are kept
- 4 a metal object which makes a ringing sound, usually inside a church
- 5 under
- 6 entire
- 7 strips of leather put around a horse's head to control its movements
- 8 a wall or other structure which horses jump over in a competition
- 9 instruction (of behaviour)

3 Decide whether the following statements are true or false. Correct the false ones.

- 1 The Monk's favourite hobby was riding **T F**
- 2 He was the head of a monastery **T F**
- 3 He rode in a silent way **T F**
- 4 He followed the Rule of St Benet **T F**
- 5 He was interested in new ways of behaviour **T F**
- 6 He was careful with money **T F**
- 7 He was dressed in a modest way **T F**
- 8 He looked troubled in his soul **T F**
- 9 He likes roasted meat **T F**

4 Write down the adjectives referred to the Monk.

- | | |
|---------|---------|
| 1 | 6 |
| 2 | 7 |
| 3 | 8 |
| 4 | 9 |
| 5 | |

5 The Monk is described as

- A a slim modest man.
B a man who cannot ride.
C an elegant, good-looking man.

6 Write down the main features of the following items belonging to the Monk.

- 1 His dogs;
- 2 the sleeves of his coat;
- 3 his hood;
- 4 his boots;
- 5 his horse.

7 Write down the rhyme scheme.

8 What do you call the form used by Chaucer?

9 Lines 1-4 contain

- A inversions.
B run-on-lines.
C onomatopoeia.

10 Underline the correct alternative.

The function of this device is *to emphasise some details / to help memorisation*.

11 Consider Chaucer's method of description of this pilgrim. What traits does he focus upon?

- A His job and vocation.
B His modesty and humility.
C His interests and appearance.



12 Define the narrator's attitude.

- A Sentimental.
- B Satirical.
- C Detached.
- D Angry.

What is his target in the passage?

13 Complete the summary with the words from the box.

conscious	jewellery	satire	eating	lust
bald	fasting	roll	rule	sporty



Chaucer describes the Monk as a **(1)** man whose favourite pastime is hunting. This is why he has horses and greyhounds. He likes **(2)** and wearing expensive clothes and gold **(3)** He does not lead a life of hard work, study, and **(4)** , as the monastic **(5)** requires. His excuse is that he is a modern man and dislikes the old traditions.

As regards the Monk's physical appearance, he is fat, **(6)** , and greasy. His eyes **(7)** in his head, which, in medieval physiognomy, could be a sign of impatience and **(8)**

The technique used by Chaucer in the Monk's portrait is **(9)** The Monk, like Chaucer's Prioress, is a clergyman who is supposed to live a monastic life of renunciation and hard work, but instead leads a life of luxury and pleasure. The Monk, however, seems **(10)** of his departure from the pious life, justifying his behaviour as a choice of modernity.