

The Sergeant of the Law and The Merchant

The Merchant has a forked beard and is a representative of the rising middle classes. The Sergeant at Law is a man of considerable importance as he is in the highest rank of barrister group from which the judge chooses at court proceedings. He is the first professional pilgrim that Chaucer introduces. Both the Merchant and the Sergeant at Law are experts in their professions.

The Merchant is well dressed with motley which implies that his clothes are in mixed colours. This indicates variety and that the Merchant may be showy in appearance. "Hye on horse he sat" which may mean literally that he sat high on his horse perhaps because his horse was lively or it can also imply that he is riding in an arrogant way. The Merchant wears a fashionable Flemish beaver hat, "Flaundrissh bever hat". This creates a sense that this may be held against him as there is competition between Flemish and English craftsmen. He wears expensive, good quality boots. His overall appearance is stylish and showy may be because it may help to attract more clientele. He is solemn in speaking his opinions and bases it on what would be favourable to his trade "sowninge alwey th'encrees of his winning". The Sergeant of Law has often been at the 'parvys'; i.e., porch of St. Paul's church where lawyers often met for consultations. He is highly renowned for his knowledge and knows all the statutes by heart. The Sergeant as well as the Merchant is very skilled in his profession yet in contrast the Merchant does not wear his legal uniform and instead is dressed in a homely way.

The Sergeant of Law is a man of "great reverence" which suggests that he attains a large clientele. He receives many fees and robes as rewards for negotiating the purchase of land and Chaucer implies that he is a buyer himself "so greet a purchasing was nowher noon". The Merchant exchanges French coins and he manages his financial affairs so cleverly that nobody knows that he is actually in debt. However, money from currency dealings is illegal. This creates a sense that he does not strictly keep to society's rules and regulations. Chaucer mentions that the Merchant uses "his chevissaunce" in business deals which not only is illegal but the Church opposes lending money and charging an interest rate as there is no set rate which means a large amount can be charged on loans. This conveys the Merchant as non traditional and perhaps not as religious. Similarly to the Merchant, everything is a matter of a fee to the Sergeant. He is a busy man but he pretends to be busier than he really is.

Chaucer does not reveal the name of the Sergeant nor Merchant. Both use certain personal elements for monetary gain. The Sergeant of the Law applies his studies for monetary gain while the Merchant uses his stylish appearance to attract clients. However, the Merchant is portrayed as a non traditional man who does not live by rules but instead creates his own in order to gain money. The Sergeant of Law, on the other hand, is portrayed as a man who is very involved in society's rules and regulations and gains his profits legally instead.

