THE PARDONER, NO FINAL VERDICT

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THE PARDONER, NO FINAL VERDICT

It was left to twentieth century Chaucerian scholars to discover, sponsor, and dissect the character of the Pardoner in Canterbury Tales. Today he has become more controversial than any of the figures created by the poet. This variance of opinion among modern scholars arises from the seeming contradictions with which the author drew his rogue. Though some discrepancies in this work obviously are due to its unfinished condition, it is pretty well conceded that this portion of the Tales is no rough draft, but has been polished until it is an example of the perfection of the author's genius. Apparently Chaucer consciously limned this individual with characteristics that appear inconsistent to the modern reader and dissension has arisen from diverse attempts to reconcile or explain his meaning. In 1880, J. J. Jusserand, in a paper to the Chaucer Society, pointed out the paradox in the Pardoner's delineation, gave his own tentative interpretation of the facts and invited further study and suggestions on the subject.[1] Since this challenge an evergrowing spate of commentaries and explanations has been published by learned critics. These, in turn, have called forth respectful, but fervent, disagreement and alternate explications from other authorities. Reactions from their studies of this fictional role have differed as widely as loathing, amusement, pity, and indignation. As will be noted below, one case history has been offered which finds the answer to his personality to be the result of the disillusionment which followed his earlier

idealism at the time when he took orders[2] (though it is not certain that he ever entered the clergy); and another purports to analyse his disposition as an effect of his abnormality at birth.[3] He has been assigned a modern counterpart in the traveling salesman;[4] while, on the other hand, several have found in him an analogy to the medieval conception of Lucifer.[5]

The Pardoner, despite his fascination for modern minds, was, with few exceptions, little noticed by readers for five hundred years. They took him at face value and did not question the discrepancies or complexity with which Chaucer formed him. Considering all the current debate on the subject, one may find this neglect incredible. But a survey of the history of the allover criticism of Chaucer for the first half millennium shows the disregard natural and inevitable.[6]

After the unqualified adulation meeded to Chaucer and all his works by his contemporaries and successors for nearly a hundred years, _Canterbury Tales_ was largely overlooked and the author's reputation rested on his stories in the courtly love genre. (Until 1750, _Troilus and Criseyde_ was by far the most popular of his books.[7]) The _Tales_ received a brief revival under Henry VIII, but only for their implied moral doctrine when the advocates of the new religion lumped Chaucer with Gower and Lydgate and hailed them as the vanguard of Protestantism. His so-called "clerical group" was pointed to as evidence that Chaucer had been a Wycliffite and had censured the Roman Catholic Church under a cloak of jest. Any reference to the Pardoner at that time allegorized him as the personification of hypocrisy or,

surprisingly, more often, this very characteristic of mendacity was overlooked and his sham sanctimonious diatribes against the "tavern sins" were quoted as ethical percepts. In 1544, Roger Ascham, in Toxophilus, quoted from the "Pardoner's Tale," commenting:

> ... therefore gladly do I remembre these verses of hys:
>
> Hasardry is very mother of lesinges
> And of deceyte and cursed sweringes
> Blasphemie of Christ, manslaughter and waste also,
> Of catel of tyme, of other thynges mo.[8]

John Northbrooke, in 1577, writing a treatise against dicing in the form of a dialogue between Age and Youth, had the former quote from the "Pardoner's Tale" (VI C ll. 603-28),[9] which deal with a foreign power whose ministers were "Pleyynge atte hasard."[10] And Bishop Babington, in a sermon against gambling, crediting the author with his creature's sermon, prefaces his retelling of the story with:

> Old Chaucer so long agoe set his sentence downe against this exercise, and spares not to display the virtues of it in this manner: ...[11]

But side by side with this homiletic view of Chaucer's great masterpiece was the growing opinion that the Tales were coarse and gradually the term "Canterbury tale" was perjorated to mean any vulgar or far-fetched yarn. Cranmer, Latimer, and Becke all used this phrase in referring to profane histories, fables, or trifling stories.[12]

Though a few poets, notable among whom was Spenser, continued to revere the "Master," by the seventeenth century he had sunk into general disrepute. English grammar, pronunciation, and

much of the vocabulary had changed from that of the fourteenth century and his poetry was difficult to understand and impossible for those readers to scan. He was still given the honor of being the first national poet, but considered a poor one. Richard Brathwait, refuting this estimation, praised his poetry for its good "invention," called Chaucer's time the "Dark Ages," and patronizingly deplored the state of the English of that day with which tool, he declared, good writing was out of the question.[13]

At the end of the century Dryden recognized and appreciated Chaucer's ability and translated some of the Tales into modern English in his Fables of 1700.[14] However he was content to use the "General Prologue" as a setting for them and to present the tales out of context of the link pieces.[15] As the greatest living poet and literary arbiter of his time his appraisal influenced others to a new interest in these stories. His accompanying "Preface" to the volume, in which he compared Chaucer to Ovid, announcing that he preferred Chaucer, probably can be considered the beginning of modern criticism on the poet. Though he extolled Chaucer's humor in Canterbury Tales, most readers of the time were inclined to regard them as an enlightening footnote to English history. However, the "Pardoner's Tale" was not in the group. Prominent authors continued to translate various Tales until the middle of the nineteenth century, still using this isolative method without the link pieces. Wordsworth instigated the last important attempt of this kind, suppressing the fabliaux, deeming them best left in the obscurity of middle English. Since the "Pardoner's Tale," per se, was not ribald

it was printed with the other moral stories.

William Hazlitt, in his critical work, Lectures on the English Poets, comments on fourteen of the twenty-three Pilgrims who tell a tale but apparently did not notice the dramatic possibilities of the Pardoner; he does give an explication of his "Tale" which he calls "The story of the three thieves who go in search of death to kill him."[16]

Perhaps because of its once-upon-a-time setting, at first the legend was not given much serious adult attention but was thought especially suitable for the edification of youth. In 1833 Charles Cowden Clarke gave it a place in his Tales from Chaucer in Prose: Designed chiefly for the Use of Young Persons; and as late at 1876, Mary Hawes included it in her Chaucer for Children with a preface "To the Mother."

Leigh Hunt who, along with the other Lake Poets, was devoted to the works of Chaucer, retold the tale for mature readers under the title "Death and the Ruffians," leaving out the Pardoner's role as narrator.[17] We know he indulgently saw the Pardoner as, at worst, only a mischievous fellow, for in a lecture on "Chaucer's Humour," given in 1846, he observed:

> The third great quality of Chaucer's humour is its fair play. Even the Pardoner, however impudently acknowledges himself to be a 'vicious man.'[18]

In America, as well, the poets could not see the Pardoner for the moral of his story. James Lowell said that Chaucer's "chief merit is sincerity" and among the examples he cited was the "Pardoner's Tale."[19] Whittier commented, "I think old Chaucer hath it right in his Pardoner's Tale:

> A likerous thing is wine and drunkenness
> Is full of striving and of wretchedness.[20]

The modern student who has cut his teeth on Kittredge's dogma that consigns the Pardoner to the part of the one "lost soul" on the Pilgrimage, is inclined to shudder at this comparative naivete of last century.

Henry Hart Newman showed a harsher insight,

> In his religious characters ... Chaucer is by no means happy ... he had penetrated into the inner depths of the religion ... the Prioress, the Friar, the Pardoner, the Summoner, are impersonated to the life, with all their weaknesses, follies, affectation, even vices and falsehoods, in unsparing freedom ...[21]

But it must be remembered that his observation was made in the framework of the history of church reformation.

Blake, alone, foresaw the truly sinister implication that our century was to attach to the charlatan--and was reconciled to it:

> But I have omitted to speak of a very prominent character, the Pardoner, the Age's Knave, who always commands and domineers over the high and low vulgar. This man is sent in every age for a rod and scourge, and for a blight, for a trial of men, to divide the classes of men, he is in the most holy sanctuary, and he is suffered by Providence for wise ends, and has also his great use, and his Grand leading destiny.[22]

The assumption that the Pilgrims existed for the sake of the Tales continued until the foundation of the Chaucer Society in 1868. Under the spur of Furnivall's energy and enthusiasm dedicated amateurs began to systematize their study and nothing that was obscure escaped their questioning. The <u>Canterbury Tales</u> was no longer regarded as a group of narratives, loosely strung together on a contrived frame, but was reexamined as a

whole. Students began to perceive that there was a meaningful method in Chaucer's assignment of a particular tale for a certain person, and that this gave a fuller significance to the parts. Under that scrutiny the paradoxical facets of the Pardoner's character, as seen in the "General Prologue," his interruption of the Wife of Bath, his own "Prologue" and "Tale," became glaringly manifest.

A short sketch will be made of these for the purpose of reference in this work. At his appearance in the "General Prologue" the narrator says, "Ful loude he soong. 'Come hider, love, to me (I A 672).'" Yet fifteen lines farther he states, "A voys he hadde as smal as hath a goot." A little later he calls him "... in chirche a noble ecclesiaste," who must "file" his tongue well on the offertory since that is the last song before he will start preaching for silver, and concludes, "Therefore he song the muriely and loude." In the Pardoner's own prologue he boasts that when he preaches he takes care, "... to han an hauteyn speche, and ring it out as round as gooth a belle (IV C 330-331)." Chaucer, as narrator of the Canterbury Tales, interjects his own opinion, "I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare." This is offset by the Pardoner's banter to the Wife of Bath that he has had plans of marrying but after her revelations of feminine practices he will now give it a second thought. He also brags that he will "have a joly wench in every toun." Is he impotent, or not? A more disturbing factor is why a hypocrite should first be so devastatingly frank and then try to sell his admittedly fraudulent wares to his fellow travelers. The sharpest

controversy is concerned with the passage at the end of his tale which concludes with an honest and beautiful benediction that is followed by, what may be termed, the most irritating commercial in history.

> ... And lo, sires, thus I preche.
> And Jhesu Crist, that is our soules leche,
> So graunte yow his pardoun to receyve,
> For that is best; I wol yow nat deceyve.
> But, sires, o word forgat I in my tale:
> I have relikes and pardoun in my male,
> As faire as any man in Engelond,
> Which were me yeven by the popes hond.
> If any of yow wole, of devocion,
> Offren, and han myn absolucion,
> Com forth anon, and kneleth heere adoun,
> And mekely receyveth my pardoun;
> Or elles taketh pardon as ye wende,
> Al newe and fressh at every miles ende,
> So that ye offren, alwey newe and newe,
> Nobles or pens, which that be goode and trewe.

Jusserand's tempting invitation to work on the Pardoner was made even more fascinating by Professor Manly's conjecture that Chaucer had based his characterizations on real people whom he had observed. Many scholars of stature responded and proffered their theories. These differed in details and conclusions, even when the evidence was founded on identical passages.

G. G. Sedgewick, in an article, "The Progress of Chaucer's Pardoner, 1880-1940," wrote an incisive account of those sixty years of criticism.[23] Like a school master, he called upon each commentator to speak his piece and after his recitation gave him a pat on the back for a valid argument or a gentle remonstrance for one that appeared insupportable to him. From these contributions he built up a plausible "amalgamation" of his findings and added an extremely persuasive conclusion.

One of the earliest, and perhaps the most appealing, explanations that he disposed of, reluctantly, was that of G. L. Kittredge who professed to see, in the benediction, a brief moment of self-conversion on the part of the Pardoner.[24] He argued that the rascal's own eloquent story reminded him of his genuine piety when he had taken his vows as a young man. The corruption he had encountered in the Church led to his present cynicism. Here, for just a moment, there was a flickering of conscience, a surge of nostalgia for his former innocence and he was moved to momentary sincerity. It was so brief as to be unnoticed and was immediately followed by a reaction of violent repudiation which sent him into wilder and wilder absurdities to the point where he offered celestial term insurance by the mile. The professor found in Harry Bailey's reply a coarse but good-natured echo to the Pardoner's earlier scoffing, for, of course, he did not know about that momentary "paroxysm of agonized sincerity." The Pardoner's anger was due to a revulsion towards the whole joke. Not only does this account for any seeming contradictions but "God's elect" (Sedgewich's term) would wistfully like to accept it as an example of His grace still trying to redeem the "lost soul" who, once more, passionately denies Him. However, Sedgewick cannot endorse a theory known only to God, the Pardoner, Chaucer, and, much later, Kittredge.

In discussion of Frederick Tupper's argument, that Chaucer artistically caused the tavern sins (drunkenness, gluttony, gambling, and swearing) to be exposed in a tavern,[25] Sedgewick refutes the implied Seven-Deadly-Sins pattern because it

"... puts stress on the wrong thing--on the sins not on the sinner, on the situation not on the person in it." At the same time Kittredge discredits what he dubbed the "tavern heresy." This "heresy" assumed that the Pardoner's "Prologue" and "Tale" were performed in an ale-house instead of on the road. Among other reasons for his disbelief was the incongruous picture of the Prioress in a belly-up-to-the-bar position. (A reader who has whole-heartedly conceded to the convention that every Pilgrim could hear perfectly, although the procession would have been strung along the road for some distance and the harness and hoof-beats of the horses would have been fairly noisy, may be inclined to discard the idea on the grounds that they would never get to Canterbury with such dilly-dallying.)

He deplored Professor H. R. Patch's impassioned indignation against the Pardoner whom, Patch uncompromisingly declared, Chaucer hated more than any of the other Pilgrims.[26] Patch found the clearest proof of this in the comradeship between the Pardoner and the Summoner, which he called "violent irony." It was obviously the Summoner's duty, he pointed out, to hail the Pardoner into ecclesiastical court instead of harmonizing with him in a love song. Sedgewick admitted the inappropriateness of such a friendship but amended "violent irony" to "broadly comic contradiction."

W. C. Curry took a more moderate view and thought that "... he [the Pardoner] is to be pitied rather than censured."[27] His contention was that Chaucer, rather than having drawn his scamp from a living identity, composed him by following the

dictates that physiognomy laid down for the description of a enuchus ex nativitate. He reasoned that the benediction was, in modern salesman cant, "a softening up process" for his sale. It was preceded with "And lo, sires, thus I preche," which Curry paraphrased to mean: "That kind of preaching is good enough for ignorant rustics, but as for YOU intelligent people, I will be aboveboard." But his ruse failed because he picked on the Host who probably was the most worldly of any of the group. Sedgewick dismissed this as an insult to Chaucer's meter for it placed the emphasis on "yow" in "For that is best; I wol yow nat decyve," as well as an affront to the Pardoner's intelligence. He wrote, "... there is no need to write him down as an ass."

Sedgewick's own "subjective interpretation" held that Chaucer skillfully set this villain up for a fall, working on his greatest weakness, which was not avarice, but pride. Like a master chess player the author maneuvered him from place to place, each move narrowing his opponent's choices, until he was in a position where his collapse was inevitable. When the "gentils" bade him tell a moral tale he realized that his essential quackery was known to these sophisticated people and it was impossible to preach any "moral thing" to them as he would to the "lewd folk." He resolved, in his pride, to show himself the greatest charlatan, and, with this in mind, Chaucer left him with the decision to brag about his methods. After he told his wonderful exemplum which naturally led to the disputed benediction, Sedgewick concluded that the group of Pilgrims was truly moved, just as every reader of it has been; the Pardoner suddenly

realized that his story had been as effective to this audience as to any other. Succumbing to vain glory, he could not resist throwing the fact in their faces by impudently giving them a version of his "hard sell" which he had previously exposed. He was not attempting to gain money but to flaunt his art. Harry Bailey, ashamed of being made a fool of when he considers himself so worldly wise, hit back at the Pardoner's weakest point, below the belt, literally and figuratively, in an obscene tirade which brought about the villain's complete confusion, in the Biblical sense of the word.

The professor's explication is so comprehensive, so psychologically feasible, and so satisfactory in accounting for every line of the text that the reader might well consider this to be the definitive word and the subject of criticism of the Pardoner to be settled for all time.

However, that did not happen. In the past two decades conjecture about this fictional personality has equalled that of the previous six, with greater discrepancies in their assessments than ever before. One may wonder if anything is to be gained when one article in a book or an essay in a learned magazine calls forth two, in contradiction. Is all this minute research profitable or valid? Caroline Spurgeon gave a positive and far-seeing answer to that question in her "Introduction" to _Chaucerian Criticism_, applying it, of course, to discussions of all his works.

> Today we prize Chaucer above all because he is a great artist, we delight in his simplicity, his freshness, his humanity, his humor, but it is possible that these may not be the only or even the principal reasons why he is liked three hundred years hence. If, as would seem to be the case, the common consciousness of a people becomes enriched with time and experience enabling them to see more and more in the work of a great poet, the lovers of Chaucer three centuries hence will be capable of seeing more in him and will be able to come actually nearer to him than can those who love him to-day.
>
> Three directions may be indicated in which this enrichment of consciousness is here seen.... The first is the development of self-consciousness, of the art of criticism itself; the second is the development of a new sense, and the third is intellectual development as seen in accuracy and trained scholarship.[28]

She bases her forecast firmly on the past, reviewing briefly the progress made up to our present modern criticism. In illustration of the first point she cites the growth of Chaucerian criticism from the idolatry of his contemporaries, through the stages in which he was upheld as a moralist, looked down upon as a vulgarian, regarded as an historian, appreciated as a humorist, and in our present day valued for all of these qualities, with the added esteem we have for his humanity. As an example of new senses she points out that love of nature and a sense of humor are comparatively recent, and most highly developed in Anglo-Saxon culture. Expansion of these traits has deepened our enjoyment of his literature. In contrasting our trained scholarship with the old, she gave ludicrous examples of errors in the past. One was the fact that, although the best authorities cited the author's death in 1400, they still gave credence to the belief that he was the official poet to the courts of Henry IV and V. In speaking of our higher standards in literary study she gives

due credit to literature's relative, philology. Miss Spurgeon's predictions are scarcely a half century old and have already begun to be proved prophetic. At the time of her writing, philology had nearly completed the obvious necessity of recovering the meaning of obsolete words and expressions. It was beginning to realize a more subtle fact that common words have t taken on different nuances in succeeding generations and that they even had slight differences in significance in separate regions. This has cleared up many seeing incongruities in our understanding of East Midland Middle English. The invention of computing machines will accelerate the mechanics of this work and probably bring a new understanding to some passages of Chaucer.

Caroline Spurgeon indicated that other areas of study would intensify our comprehension of past centuries. History, philosophy, and psychology have justified her confidence. History is becoming increasingly skeptical of much of its earlier scholarship, especially in regard to some of the pat labels and neat pigeonholes that formerly were accepted without question. The explosion of the theory that there was a sharp cleavage between the "Medieval Mind" and the "Renaissance Mind" has given an impetus to medieval studies that are necessary for a comprehension of the people of the fourteenth century. The terms "rising bourgeoisie," "nobility," and "laboring classes" are convenient but not exact when applied to the English people in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Primogeniture, with its accompanying need for disposition of younger sons, kept the

upper social classes in an overlapping, fluid stage while the Germanic origin of the Anglo-Saxons, with its comparatively recent tribal freedom, and their resentment of the Conquest, prevented the peasant class from subsiding into abject servility. This breakdown of a belief in sharp boundaries between the ranks of society makes the inclusion of the Ploughman in the group probable. It even puts Chaucer's obviously close connection with court circles in a clearer light. Researchers have ransacked all available records for mention of Chaucer's name and that vein would appear to have been almost exhausted. But further search into letters and journals contemporary with his era may reveal events, too insignificant for historical mention, which will give a new meaning to some of his allusions.

Another line of study that is proving profitable is theological history. The Catholic Church has not been static and it is necessary to reestablish its atmosphere as it was when Chaucer lived. Its influence was one that pervaded all human thought and activity though it made a different impact on people according to their social and geographical position. Fortunately it was an institution that made and sought to preserve its records. This work is especially germane to the case of the Pardoner.

The philosophy and common knowledge of an age is the most apt to be misunderstood by another for it is so subtly a part of everyone's nature and so taken for granted that mention of it is seldom made. This careless assumption is especially insidious because an outsider does not realize that there is anything

missing. Ophelia's "flower scene" is comprehensible and tragic to any audience; but it takes on a greater poignancy in the light of the sixteenth century's "language of the flowers." Modern analyses that combine philosophy, history, and literature clarify some points that formerly were abstruse and enrich others with deeper meaning.

Psychology has been applied legitimately to Chaucer's characters for, though he did not know the term, he had an immense apperception of human behavior. Modern commentators, applying the art to the poet's Pilgrims, have made them more alive than ever. We can hope for still greater achievements as this science progresses in the detection of thought processes, word association and, even possibly, the "Freudian slip." Everyone has had the experience of writing or reading a passage which made allusion to something that is perfectly obvious to the writer but not to the reader, but which would be meaningful, despite its brevity, to one who had shared the writer's experience. When we discover more about Chaucer's world and times and the several milieus in which he lived, vague phrases may gain a clearer interpretation by applying these skills. An instance of a former misconception due to insufficient knowledge of Chaucer's background is illustrated in the case of the Prioress. His comment that she sang divine service "Entuned in hir nose ful semely" (I (A) 123), was regarded as a playful condemnation of that gentlewoman. But studies by Sister Madeleva brought to light that a nasal intonation was traditional and proper.[29]

Much of the recent comment and criticism about the Pardoner is a result of these new techniques. Coghill declares, "No one has seen a pardoner for four hundred years."[30] But twentieth century scholars have delved into his profession and its background until it is no longer obscured by the opacity of five centuries. Since much of this work has been done after Professor Sedgewick's article, "The Progress of Chaucer's Pardoner, 1880-1940," it is time to make a new inspection of the material that has been written in the past quarter of a century. (Only critiques published later than 1940 will be examined here, with the exception of Curry's work.)

Curry's Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences, disregarding any evaluations given to his literary conclusions by later critics, is invaluable for its compilation of the common knowledge of that period as well as its uncommon knowledge of the psuedo-sciences, astrology, alchemy, etc. We are indebted for his research into "many a ... forgotten lore." Among those he has applied to the Pardoner is that of physiognomy, especially that part of Chaucer's description where he compared his physical appearance to likenesses found in the animal kingdom, the goat and the hare.[31] Here is a striking example of divergence between modern and late medieval thought. The hare's paramount attribute to us is timidity; to them it was incontinence.

Jusserand, whose extensive scholastic research is concealed by his entertaining style of writing, gives us a picture of the English countryside of that day, with portraits of the people who traveled through it, and why.[32] His chapter, "The Pardoners,"

explains how that official came into being--and disrepute. They were the equivalent of our modern promotion agencies who conduct non-profit association financial drives. He shows how accurately Chaucer drew his non-hero in the details where he is a pardoner and not an individual. As to the creation of this particular one, Jusserand proves that, far from exaggerating, the author's characterization was extremely mild in comparison with other concurrent literature about these creatures, fictional and factual, wherein they were savagely railed at and ridiculed.

Kellogg and Haselmayer extended Jusserand's work on "questors," the Church's name for pardoners.[33] After investigation of church registers, canon laws, journals and records of ecclesiastical courts and convocations, they made the following points which are most apropos to Chaucer's Pardoner. Questors were repeatedly forbidden to preach, by papal decree, canon law, and local episcopal directives. This fact heightens one's appreciation of the Pardoner's consummate ability as demonstrated in his "Tale." Furthermore, in that century Mother Church was intensifying her efforts to stamp out the belief in unauthorized "miraculous reliques," even going so far as to challenge many of those held by long established orders and cathedrals. This information contributes a higher comic tone to the Pardoner's bogus theatrical props. Whether the Pardoner of the Tales was, or was not, in orders probably never can be determined. The poor had to be fed and hospitals and roads had to be maintained by the monasteries so those institutions needing charity were more apt to appoint the most effective, rather than the most pious,

promoter, who often was not a priest. The study uncovered an interesting detail about a "Pardoner of Rouncival." By Chaucer's day England had pretty strict control over any questors operating under the auspices of her own churches through bishops, archdeacons, and local clergymen. But the Hospital of the Blessed Mary of Rouncivalle, though on English soil, was one of an international chain controlled by cardinals from Europe. Their questors were subject to no supervision except that of the archdeacon, whose control went only so far as to check on the authenticity of their "bulles." Chaucer's mention of "Rouncivale" was guaranteed to lend a fraudulent connotation to his scamp and bring to mind a stock comic character even before the poet put his own original stamp on him. His partnership with the Summoner needed no comment to his audience.

Kellogg has entered the field of theological philosophy, too.[34] He sets forth the supposition that Chaucer created his Pardoner to point the moral of St. Augustine's teaching that "... all sin is by the judgment of God punished, and if we look deeper, self-punished." He attributes the Pardoner's angry silence after the Host's harangue to an inward struggle with the Holy Ghost. At the same time he uses each step of the story to illustrate Gregory's theory of "progressive degeneration." His proof that Chaucer knew these doctrines may seem to belabor the obvious as any student of that period is aware of these church fathers' dominance on theological thought. The poet would not have told a story contrary to their universal tenets but it is not certain that he was consciously following them while writing.

This article inspired another in the same field, not a refutation, but a parallel sidelight. Robert P. Miller expounds the three orders of eunuchs as set forth in church doctrine: eunuchus ex nativitata, eunuchus Dei, and eunuchus non Dei.[35] Of course, the first had no choice. The second was represented by the voluntary celibate life, and the third by those who had vowed chastity and wilfully turned from it. Until we can know whether Chaucer had in mind the first or the third, or either, this will have to remain a sidelight. Baum does not worry about the point. He finds no innuendo in the line "I trow he were a geldyng or a mare." He says that the author wanted us to know "the fellow was somewhat sissified in appearance."[36] (It is a bit strange that our generation of writers has not produced an article suggesting that his womanish appearance implied that he was homosexual, the paramour of the bass-voiced Summoner; nor has there been any published research as to whether pederasty was rife in the Anglo-Norman culture of the late middle ages.)

In the field of psychological speculation and it's application to literary appreciation there has been the widest latitude of conjecture and judgment. Whereas the works just mentioned above have set out to prove the consistency of Chaucer's art the following group has tried to reconcile the inconsistencies, one of the major purposes of this science and literature. Since all of the sources to be cited are eminent scholars whose writings are well-known a brief summation with necessary over-simplification will be given for the purpose of comparison.

It is interesting, and inevitable, for a student to contrast the views of Professors G. H. Gerould and R. M. Lumiansky as they extract completely contrary interpretations from the Pardoner passages. In the former's short preface he states his dissatisfaction with many contemporary theories concerning the Canterbury Tales and exhorts the reader to disregard them, for he has discovered the truth. This page might well have been condensed into quotation of the final line of the Pardoner's Prologue: "Now hoold youre pees! My tale I wol begynne."[37]

Dr. Gerould accounts for every discrepancy in the "murky figure" by attributing it to the vagaries of an habitual drunkard.[38] Before going into detail, he attacks the "tavern heresy" on artistic grounds. His adroit argument is that the cake buckler and garland worn by the Summoner in the "General Prologue" were to no purpose in describing that official but obviously were put in as stage properties to be used later. There was no tavern. The Pardoner drank out of his own flask from which he had been "nipping" during the entire journey. His "cake" is a piece of his companion's bread shield which naturally was under the alestake garland that had adorned the Summoner's head on his entrance the previous day, with the assumption that he was still "wearing" the stale bun. Why else had Chaucer included them? That constant tippling was the cause of the gentle folks' alarm over what manner of "ribaudye" a sot would come up with. His confession is a piece of inebriated bravado, his boasts are foolishly exaggerated. No single questor would have bulls from a pope, cardinals, bishops and patriarchs. No holy Jew of

Scripture was ever known to have had a miraculous sheep. At this point of the Pardoner's "Prologue," Gerould maintains, he was intoxicated enough to imagine himself before a congregation, but still sufficiently astute to leave himself a defense against any complaint over the failure of his guaranteed miracles. The ranting against various transgressions was incoherent raving as one sin reminded him of another in rambling order. Lapsing into delirium tremens he even imagined that his companions were the riotous frequenters of that tavern in Flanders. The author's ingenious arranging of these lines to correspond with the waxing and waning of drunken aggressiveness are plausible until he assures us that Chaucer took over the story of the three rioters because it was too good to trust to an unsober man. (This brings to mind Kittredge's indignant parenthetical comment on one MS in which he pronounces: "though marked 'autor' by the officious stupidity of some scribe.")[39] At the end of the tale proper, Gerould gives the stage back to the Pardoner who has shown rare patience for a tipsy person. He then continues his previous tirade with "Thou blasphemour of Crist, etc.," but suddenly sobers up for the much disputed benediction. When he realizes what he has said he is ashamed of this honesty and immediately plunges into his wildest mockery by offering his wares and services to the Pilgrims, which leads to the quarrel.

In contrast to this picture of the Pardoner as a fuddled, ineffective toper, Professor R. M. Lumiansky depicts him as a cold sober, scheming misfit of society whose only defense and ambition in life is retaliation against the world by use of his

superior wits.[40] For him, any tangible profit he may gain, such as wine, wenches, or wealth, are gratifying only because they are symbols of his ascendency over normal people who, he likes to think, are all fools. Some students have assumed that the Knight went on pilgrimage in fulfillment of a promesa and the Wife of Bath in search of another husband; Dr. Lumiansky finds a purpose for the Pardoner's attendance, too. Heretofore he has played in the "minor leagues," the poor rural parishes with near-illiterate priests and "lewd" congregations. It has been small satisfaction to cheat these gullible rustics and he is now planning to move into higher circles and swindle those who consider themselves secure against the practices of a con-man. That the "take" will be greater is subordinate to the greater gratification he will get in making dupes of them. In preparation for this "graduation" to the "big time" he has made a trip to Rome for "hoot" pardons from the Pope's own hand and a new collection of relics. His extremely secular behavior and fashionableness are calculated since he realizes that the "big lie" is his proper pitch with these "sondry folk." This schemer would never dream of befuddling his senses with too much ale; he watches and listens to everything, searching for weaknesses he can play upon. After his eccentric arrival he takes no part in the proceedings because he is observing and probing for the most effective approach. His first hint comes from the reception given the Wife of Bath's "Prologue." She is shocking in her revelations but no one appears shocked. In a grand flash of intuition he grasps the one weakness common to them all: pseudo-sophistication. His

interruption, with its impudent reference to a proposed marriage, is a deliberate test; he can not get married legally nor physically--yet no one challenges him. How much will they "stand still for?" By the time his turn comes to take part he is ready with his technique carefully thought out. Lumiansky adheres to the "tavern heresy" for he believes the Pardoner deliberately forces his audience into an ale house so he will have a "captive audience" which he can more effectively influence. He first flatters the Pilgrims in pointing out the difference between them and the ignorant; he invites their worldly admiration by his insistence on the money he reaps, and he is laying a foundation for his future sale by subtly reminding them that though he is vicious they are intelligent enough to remember that his indulgences' worth does not depend on his virtue but comes from a Higher Power. The sweeping catalogue of sins is dragged in to remind the Pilgrims that they, as well as his usual congregation, are sinful and he shrewdly picks those that this company is most probably guilty of. The professor regards the three-line benediction as the preacher's reminder that only Christ's forgiveness has any validity and that he is His chosen agent. Thus far, he asserts, the whole performance is masterly; but it fails, he observes, because this is the Pardoner's maiden appearance on the "major circuit." He gets nervous and makes the mistake, first, of reverting to his small time methods in, "But, Sires, o word forgat I in my tale ..." In trying to cover up he makes another mistake in becoming jocular about the renewing of a pardon from mile to mile--an ill-timed joke when traveling was hazardous--

and his selection of the Host for the first victim was a poor judgment in psychology. (After musing on this essay the reader may feel that, given its estimate of the Pardoner's ability and disposition, he no doubt recognized his mistakes, contrived how to remedy them next time--and spent the rest of his life joining pilgrimages with attendant ever-increasing financial success.)

Leaving these two spirited briefs to turn to Raymond Preston's chapter on the Pardoner gives one the sensation of stepping out of slightly overheated and crowded, but interesting, rooms to enter a cool and austerely furnished corridor.[41] Preston does not see the Pardoner as a human being, but as an allegorical figure, borrowed from the Romaunt of the Rose: "the most vigorous son of False-seeming." Indeed, Preston sees echoes from this work in many of the Pilgrims. To him the Prioress is reminiscent of Ydelnesse and the Squire is an offspring of Mirth.[42] He appears to conceive of most of the characters allegorically but he offers no allegorical plot, unless we are to believe that the book is political satire. (He discerns criticism of the whole order of knighthood in those lines which are most complimentary to the Knight.) In proof of the Pardoner's literary origin and claim to be a metaphorical symbol he quotes Jean de Meum's couplet:

> For ofte good predicacioun
> Cometh of evel ententcioun.[43]

which is echoed in the Pardoner's "Prologue":

> For certes, many a predicacioun
> Comth ofte tyme of yvel entencioun (ll. 407-8).

As for the Pardoner's role in the plot, he concludes that Chaucer

uses him as a metaphysical comment on the struggle between good and evil. The great conflict takes place between the pardoner-preacher, Evil, and his potent story-sermon, Good. He marvels at the grimness of the contest and remarks that the preacher is like a dentist with bad teeth who successfully extracts those of his patients. His comment on the benediction is a Janus-headed question: is it a moment of attrition or is it superb salesmanship? His own Delphic answer is that there is great tension engendered by the struggle which causes the quarrel and is released by it. His discussion encompasses Original Sin and Predestination and is as impersonal as his conclusion with its nod to T. S. Eliot:

> It is all there; the offence, the moment of possible repentance, the impotence of evil, the Pardoner doing good in spite of himself. Sin is Behouverly. _It must needs by that offences come: but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh_.[44]

Though this is an admirable exercise in fourteenth century theological thought, few partisans, whether pro- or con- Pardoner will be contented with receiving it as a last judgment. (It is to be doubted that, once having sensed the abstract drift of his argument, many of them listen any farther.)

Kemp Malone beholds character and story as a perfect _tour de force_.[45] He sends his accolade winging back through the centuries to Chaucer's genius. He finds no difficulty in accounting for the self-exposure in the Pardoner's "Prologue" because he looks on it as a convention of the times, borrowed from the morality plays, which caused the actor, in his first important speech to state who and what he was so the audience

would be left in no doubt about the performer's role. Whereas many critics salute Chaucer as a forerunner of the Renaissance, Malone considers him completely medieval in outlook and artistry. Although he concedes that the poet was international-minded he writes, "Chaucer lived when the so-called Italian Renaissance was beginning, and he knew fourteenth-century Italy, but the Renaissance as a movement had little or no influence on him. He remained a full-fledged Medieval."[46] He thinks Chaucer did not strive for versimilitude in his characterizations; that he made every Pilgrim an extravagant caricature of his particular type: the Miller had a golden thumb at his profession, the Reeve could "buy and sell" his lord, the prioress was perfect at chanting divine service, etc. And so with this one, "He is the ideal Pardoner, if one may speak of ideals in such a connection."[47] Though the Pilgrim, Chaucer, has already described him in the "General Prologue," Kemp says that, again, in his own "Prologue," he makes him do a "very thorough job ... Chaucer is taking no chances lest some one may have skipped or forgotten the earlier passage concerning him." Since Malone insists that Chaucer's audience was the Court it may be objected that they were not the illiterate patrons of the street plays and therefore did not "need a card to know the players." But since we do not know whether the poem was written and read as he completed each part, or anything about its presentation, his observation may be a valid one. The critic pays the Pardoner's sermon the compliment of being "one of the most powerful in all the range of English literature"; but he has not a word to say concerning the aftermath

of the benediction, his tirade to the Pilgrims to buy, nor to the quarrel with the Host. He probably considers them self-explanatory for he contends that Chaucer sacrificed any attempt at realism to comic effect.[48]

Marchette Chute differs from Malone on practically every point he makes.[49] She does not see the Pilgrims as types, prototypes, caricatures, nor even as fourteenth-century individuals--but as her personal acquaintances. She declares that in the Canterbury Tales "Geoffrey Chaucer emerged at last as the first great English realist."[50] She denies that he used any of the medieval precepts. "Chaucer threw the whole book of rules overboard in his Prologue ... Chaucer's method was unmedieval and so was his purpose." She repeatedly stresses that the Tales are Renaissance and the very fact that he introduces characters like the Summoner and the Pardoner are proof of this. "He /Chaucer/ described the Pardoner merely because the man was like that, which was a Renaissance point of view and not a medieval one." Miss Chute is charmed by the Pardoner and his whole performance. She feels that he is a damned soul but has ceased to care. She believes that the contradictory statements are obviously his wry humor. He is making fun of himself when he tells the Pilgrims how he preaches, craning his neck at the audience and fixing them with his eye. She sees him grin as he states that his thin voice rings out like a bell. Above all, she claims that he is extremely intelligent. His invitation to purchase his fraudulent relics and pardons is a "bitter grin at all fools" but is not seriously made. It is his way of making the joke broader.

Harry Bailey, seeing how he has stolen the limelight from him and recognizing his intellectual superiority, smarts under it and in order to regain his ascendancy over the tour he strikes out at the Pardoner's obvious deficiencies with such uncalled for brutality that the poor devil is rendered speechless in angry amazement. Far from agreeing with Patch that Chaucer hated him she believes that he observed him with the same fascinated interest he had for the others. "If they were alive, that was enough for Chaucer."[51]

P. F. Baum explains away all the seeming contradictions in the Tales on the grounds that they are discrepant because they are unfinished.[52] His verdict, saddening to Chaucer lovers, is that in his last years he lost interest in writing, and in what he had written and did not bother to smooth out any inaccuracies in it. He derides any claim that the author of Canterbury Tales was a satirist. "He was not by nature a Juvenal, and by predicament he was excluded from the role of satirist."[53] He thinks of him as a reporter and sayd: "Such a man was Chaucer ... a mirror to the evil he saw so clearly, only a bright clean mirror." Rather pointedly he dubbed his chapter on the Pardoner: "Chaucer and the Scholars: The Pardoner."[54] In a witty introduction he briefly quotes some of the "far out" and the contradictory interpretations that have been applied to the poem. His essay derives its keenest humor from the juxtaposition of these opposing elements which makes any observation superfluous on the part of the writer, though he does dryly remark that no one as yet has written on the failure of Cresyde's marriage nor on Chaucer and

the Nicene Creed. This portion ends with "... a rather special case, that of the poor pardoner, will serve as a prime exhibit of the scholars' collaborating with the poet." Like Sedgewick, he discusses, but much more briefly and much less emotionally, some of the recently advanced critical theories. Then he snatches back the Pardoner from them all with a reminder that he is Chaucer's creation, not theirs. Without detracting from the genius of the poet he deplores the king-can-do-no-wrong attitude of Chaucerian researchers, especially towards an unfinished work. He urges that we admit there are seeming errors in the Pardoner's character but that the author would have reconciled or changed them had he completed the Tales. He makes no personal judgment of the findings of his fellow scholars and declares that Chaucer left the door open and we are at liberty to make our own interpretations. His final advice is: "The line between legitimate and illegitimate speculative supplemation may be hard to draw, but the futility of enlarging upon Chaucer's hints without proper reserve or caution is well illustrated by the scholars' toying with this Pardoner, some of it ingenious, some of it absurd, and very little of it necessary."[55]

Among the articles Baum referred to was one by Arthur Hoffman who finds among the Pilgrims, of all things, "togetherness."[56] A reader may well be taken aback at the need for pointing this out. The obvious is stressed further by Mr. Hoffman's pairing them off; the Knight and the Squire, on the basis of consanguinity; the parson and the ploughman through brotherly love; and, for our purpose, the Summoner and Pardoner, who,

together, are "an unconscious symbolic acknowledgement of the absence of and the need for love." Their offices represent justice and mercy which they fulfill because they are too impotent to prevent God's justice and mercy.

> Beyond their knowing, beyond their power or impotence, impotently both Pardoner and Summoner appeal for the natural love--melody of bird-song and meadows of flowers--and both pray for the celestial love, the ultimate pardon which in their desperate and imprisoned darkness is their only hope: 'Com hider, love, to me!'

The reader is somewhat amazed with this remarkable paraphrase of their song. Perhaps Chaucer would be, too.

It is doubtful whether Baum's counsel of temperance on Chaucerian criticism has, or ever will, restrain anyone who takes more than a casual interest in the Pardoner. Certainly it did not deter Edmund Reiss in a recent critique, "The Final Irony of the Pardoner's Tale."[57] Like Preston, he believes that the Pardoner's "Prologue" and "Tale" are an allegory of the fight between good and evil. However, after this premise, there is no further resemblance to the former's cool comment. Curiously enough, perhaps perversely, to Reiss, the Pardoner represents innocence. Since he is a eunuch he is sexually innocent. Because of this one involuntary virtue he sees in him, and assumes that Chaucer did, a similarity to Christ. Christ was persecuted, ergo, Chaucer has the other Pilgrims persecute the Pardoner in emulation of His tormenters. Christ died for the sins of the world. In some manner--Reiss states but does not explain--"Chaucer has put on the shoulders of the Pardoner the sins of the world in general and of the other Pilgrims in

particular and has then had the man show these sins in, as it were, a glaring light." Though he is the repository of so much evil, his works, through his office of pardoner, negate it because they are good. The "final Irony" of the title is the deviousness in which Chaucer contrived to make the only unpardoned man going to Canterbury to be the Pardoner because the other Pilgrims will not grant him absolution. (This may very well be the final word on Chaucer's satire and the Pardoner.)

Coghill and Tolkien have published a text containing the Pardoner's part in the General Prologue, the linkpiece following the Physician's Tale, the Pardoner's "Prologue" and his "Tale."[58] It is designed for an introduction to the beginner in Chaucer and contains a detailed explanation of the historical background with a character sketch of Chaucer's Pardoner. They paint him in villainous colors but do not put forth any views that have not been stated before. They express a reluctant fascination:

> We have a kind of amused loathing for the man, a despairing joy in him, a smooth anger; above all a sense of superiority over him, such as we never feel for the Parson or his brother, the Plowman, his fellow-pilgrims, poor as they are. If he were going to Hell, we would open the door for him.[59]

They instruct the student that Chaucer's irony "glitters like frozen anger in a shaft of mockery." After pointing out the obvious irony of the Pardoner's impotency and sexual boasts, the worthlessness of his "reliques" and pardons, they declare that the "inner irony" is that the Pardoner does not see that his sermon applies to himself, and he, too, seeking Gold, will find Death.

In writing for the high school English teacher, Russel Duino foresees no redemption for the Pardoner.[60] He rejects completely Kittredge's theory of short-lived repentance for he contends that the fellow has told the story so often he knows it by heart. The benediction is part of his sermon and his tongue runs on, as his mind notes the effectiveness of the performance. He believes that Chaucer wanted to include, in his panoramic study of human nature, a man who had found hell in contrast to the Parson who knew heaven. The Pardoner was a misfit but his intelligence was superior. As compensation for his deformity he gloried in victimizing normal people. "To make his rebellion complete he entered the church and there proceeded to make a mockery of the ideals and beliefs which sustain the lives of men." He was like Satan--why serve in Heaven when he could rule in Hell? He sums up the Pardoner's attitude toward the rest of mankind as that of Lucifer when he sees Adam and Eve embracing in perfect, innocent ecstacy in the Garden of Eden.[61] This is representative of his venomous hatred of those who have what he can never gain.

This sampling of Chaucerian criticism gives a distorted view to the work of the last two and a half decades, for it has given equal hearing to each divergent opinion and quotes only the writer who first championed it most fully. For instance, many Chaucerian authorities for the past hundred years have noted the reflection of False-seeming in the Pardoner. Many still adhere to Kittredge's theory of a wistful, but brief, change of heart. The allegorical convention of introducing one's self in his true colors has its adherents. On the other hand, research for this

paper has unearthed no one, except Weiss, who saw the Pardoner as a Christ substitute, nor no other who felt, with Miss Chute, that Chaucer cherished all the Pilgrims. Opinion as to the medieval or renaissance outlook in the _Tales_ was about equally divided. These examples cited only propose to give an idea of the varied wealth of meaning that has been mined from Chaucer's Pardoner.

In 1965, even a Sedgewick might be hard pressed to build up a "subject interpretation" of a stupified drunk, a sober schemer, an allegorical figure, a medieval convention, a character Chaucer despised, one he gently pitied, an unfinished product, and a symbol of man's inhumanity. Some of these analyses have uncovered dark wells of despair, or pollution, or menace, in the heart of the Pardoner--and by analogy, Chaucer. The word _irony_, a term coined long after the author's death, seems to have become the dominant theme and a touchstone to many of the critics of his works. Furthermore, they have wrenched the term until it has become a literal synonym of _doubletalk_. As some contended that the author repeatedly meant the opposite from that which he penned, the atmosphere took on an aura as though the Mass were being said backwards. Not content with the burden that medieval theology imposed on fourteenth-century man they have added the twentieth-century hangovers from Calvinism and Puritanism. Can they have been talking about the book that has enchanted so many for so many centuries, or about Chaucer?

This is a far cry from the beginning of the Pilgrimage on that fresh April morning when the day, the year, even the English

race, seemed young and no wonderful event could exceed its promise. After reading some of these murky investigations, the author of this paper felt the same momentary dismay, followed by immediate outrage, as she did on hearing that introducing her young pupils to Little Black Sambo and Uncle Remus was an act of racial bigotry. Staggering under the blow she attempted to recapture her first impression on meeting the rascally Pardoner before learning that he was a lost soul.

On rereading Chaucer, forgetting the critics, the old magic works again. The Pardoner is scandalous, outrageous, and fun from his first appearance as he rides to the inn, weaving in the saddle, as much intoxicated by sheer exuberance as by wine, and straining his voice in drunken harmony with his crony. The disreputable pair add to the conviviality of the proposed journey and enrich the unique mixture of the band. Though there has been no doubt before, their entrance doubly assures us that we are in for a holiday. This is not Pilgrim's Progress. We are going on a short journey at a convenient and pleasant time of the year, and the piety of it is by way of being an extra bonus. The Pilgrims, Chaucer, and his audience, all know what Pardoners are like--villainous, but a part of society. This one is amusing because, whether a castrate, born without "cullions," or just a sissy, his voice, his manners, and affected dress are entertaining.

He is the only one brash enough to interrupt the Wife of Bath. He does it to "get a rise out of her," and she does not disappoint him--or us.

When it is his turn to perform he is ready and since this type of exploit is his forte he is delighted to take the limelight. "Ribaudye" or "moral thyng" makes no difference to him, but he won't be done out of his drink, which he gulps down in a matter of seconds. He talks at a rapid tempo, waving his hands, nodding his head, and grimacing. There is a twinkle in his eye and he gives a broad wink as he gleefully explains how he forces his victims to purchase his pardon lest their neighbors think them guilty of some secret sin and he gives a triumphant rise of an eyebrow as he explains how he provides himself with an "out" to prevent any subsequent complaint. Surely the Pilgrims laugh wryly, just as the reader does. There is mock demagoguery in his voice when he rants at "glotonye," "dronkenesse," and "hasardrye." He smacks his lips as he dwells on all the work that goes into a good meal. Was there ever a more felicitous onomatopeoia than "Sampsoun, Sampsoun" for a drunken snore, with its origin taken from that famous teetotaler? That it brought forth prolonged laughter and applause can be assured by the next line where, for just a moment he drops his theatrical pose and addresses them as Pilgrims and says, "But kerkeneth, lordynges, O word, I yow preye." (l. 572) Getting "back into the act" he joshes them not to confuse Lamuel with Samuel, and goes on to show off his knowledge of history, Scripture, and the Church Fathers. The oaths that he uses as examples of the young bloods' swearing are high burlesque. "'By Goddes precious herte,'" and "'By his nayles, and 'By the blood of Crist that is in Hayles'" ... and "'By Goddes armes.'"

Like all good story tellers, he dons an attitude of the-wonder-of-it-all as he relates his enthralling tale. At the end he, the artist, has enjoyed it as much as they and is professionally proud and gratified at its effect. Knowing he has told the best story and must surely win the dinner, to ram the fact home and to prolong the fun he offers his relics as a spoof. As he continues to improvise he rises to greater and greater heights of the ridiculous until--what can be more absurd than that they pay him by the mile! The host has officiously had his say after each story and the Pardoner's playful declaration that Harry Bailey is the most sinful is really a cue tossed to him by way of an opening for an expected compliment. The tavern keeper's attack, in such poor taste, is a shock and the Pardoner naturally gets angry when the other one will not enter into the spirit of the "jape." The Knight restores peace and the climax of the humor is saved till the last in the ludicrous picture of the mincing Pardoner and the brawny bully kissing. This is prime comedy.

Does this happy scoundrel exist only in the mind of one who deliberately ignores the four levels of medieval symbolism, the possibility of "violent satire," or the "final irony," and stubbornly maintains an insensitivity towards the dark depths of human nature displayed on a festive journey? Of course Chaucer was poking fun at the known avarice and chicanery of pardoners. But without folly there is no humor.

With all respect to Kittredge, why "lost soul" and why has the professor's sentence been so universally and unquestioningly

accepted? The Summoner is far more odious in appearance and action. The host surpasses this self-confessed "vicious man" in that trait. Hypocrisy is not a deadly sin. Is it because the Pardoner's skulduddery takes place in the shadow of the church? It is true that man knows what is good and rejects it, but with the exception of the "person" and the clerk, all the clerics are hypocrites in varying degrees. Perhaps judgment of final damnation rests on the fact that his wares, which should mean so much and are worthless, have cheated gullible and innocent folk of something precious. The very fact that a sinner would purchase God's forgiveness from a questor instead of his own priest argues the probability that he has not done his own part in the transaction, which consists of penitence and contrition, without which, even the Pope's pardon remains valueless. The con-man has always been able to profit only from the worst side of man's nature.

Perhaps the peasants' "monie, wolle, chese, and whete" were well spent. Kemp Malone describes the average church service of the time.[62] The Mass was in Latin and largely unintelligible to the illiterate congregation and usually uttered incorrectly and inaudibly by the local priest. He was generally incapable of composing a sermon. Understandably, the parishioners were bored. There were exceptions, of course, like the Parson. But a rereading of his sermon with its "fourthe thyng" of "Accidie," the "Fyve Fyngres of Glotonie" and so on, interminably (which, if begun at the setting of the sun, must have kept the travelers until midnight), discloses the vast difference between a proper

sermon and the Pardoner's "perfect story," delivered in a spell-binding fashion. The rustics got their money's worth.

So many critics have assuredly stated, as though it were Holy Script, Chaucer's aversion towards his character. But De Quincey called the author "a gentle pardoner," and there is no direct proof that he made an exception in this one case. Since those officers were already in such ill favor in the last seventy-five years of their existence, to signal them out for special condemnation would be flogging a dead horse.

Unfortunately, Chaucer provided no stage direction, neither grin nor sigh. He never steps out of his role of the rather sim-witted observer who indiscriminately admires, and agrees with everyone. This picture contains satire and humor. The partisan on either side unconsciously and inevitably puts his thumb on the side of the scale he is advocating.

For the present, the Chaucerian scholar may (and will) clutch his own image of the Pardoner; the instructor can only offer the student the known facts and opinions and the freedom to form his own conception, which he will do; for no matter how diverse the estimates are, no one remains indifferent. So far there is still a hung jury.

NOTES

[1]Essays on Chaucer, Chaucer Society, 2nd series (London, 1884), pp. 23-46.

[2]George Lyman Kittredge, "Chaucer's Pardoner," The Atlantic Monthly, LXXII (1893), pp. 829-833.

[3]W. C. Curry, Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences (New York, 1926), p. 59.

[4]Frederick N. Tupper, "The Pardoner's Tavern," Journal of English and German Philology, XIII (1914), pp. 553-556.

[5]Russel Duino, "The Tortured Pardoner," English Journal, vol. XLVI (1957), pp. 320-326.

[6]Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357-1900, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1925), passim.

[7]Spurgeon, "Introduction," vol. 1, p. lxxvi.

[8]Quoted in Spurgeon, p. 85.

[9]Citations from Chaucer in my paper are to The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd edition (Boston, 1957).

[10]Quoted in Spurgeon, vol. 1, p. 115.

[11]Ibid., p. 124.

[12]Quoted in Spurgeon, "Introduction," p. xxi.

[13]Ibid., p. xxxvii.

[14]John Dryden, Fables (London, 1700).

[15]These were: "Palomon and Arcite" (in 3 books), "The Cock and and the Fox," "The Wife of Bath Her Tale," and "The Character of a Good Parson."

[16]William Hazlitt, Lectures on English Poets, chap. 2, "Chaucer and Spenser" (first published London, 1818), 2nd reprint (Oxford, 1952), p. 50.

[17]James Henry Leigh Hunt, "Death and the Ruffians," The New Monthly Magazine (August, 1845).

[18]Quoted in Spurgeon, p. lxvi.

[19]James Lowell, Conversations on Some of the Old Poets (Boston, 1954), p. 108.

[20]Quoted in Margaret Smith's Journal, vol. 1 (Boston, 1859), p. 51.

[21]Henry Hart Newman, History of Latin Christianity, vol. VI (London, 1855), pp. 247-8.

[22]William Blake, Sir Jeffrey Chaucer and the Nine and Twenty Pilgrims on their Journey to Canterbury, a Descriptive Catalogue of Pictures, Poetical and Historical Inventions Painted by William Blake in Water Colours (London, 1809), p. 23.

[23]G. G. Sedgewick, "The Progress of Chaucer's Pardoner, 1880-1940," Modern Language Quarterly, I (1940), pp. 431-458.

[24]Kittredge, pp. 829-833.

[25]Frederick N. Tupper, "The Pardoner's Tavern," Journal of English and German Philology, XIII (1914), pp. 553-65.

[26]H. R. Patch, On Rereading Chaucer (Harvard University Press, 1939).

[27]Curry, pp. 54-70.

[28]Spurgeon, pp. cxxix.

[29]Sister M. Madele a, A Lost Language and Other Essays on Chaucer (New York, 1951), pp. 36-38.

[30]Nevill Coghill and Christopher Tolkien, Chaucer and the Pardoner's Tale (London, 1960), p. 7.

[31]Curry, p. 57.

[32]J. J. Jusserand, English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages (London, 1890), revised (New York, 1950), passim.

[33]Alfred L. Kellogg and Louis A. Haselmayer, "Chaucer's Satire of the Pardoner," PMLA, vol. 66 (1951), pp. 251-277.

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[41] Raymond Preston, Chaucer (London, 1952), pp. 229-237.

[42] Preston, pp. 229-230.

[43] Roumant of the Rose, ll. 5763-4, quoted in Preston, p. 229.

[44] Preston, p. 237.

[45] Kemp Malone, Chapters on Chaucer (Baltimore, 1951), pp. 173-180.

[46] Malone, p. 6.

[47] Malone, p. 177.

[48] Malone, p. 173.

[49] Marchette Chute, Geoffrey Chaucer of England (New York, 1946), pp. 291-294.

[50] Chute, p. 240.

[51] Chute, p. 256.

[52] Baum, passim.

[53] Baum, p. 18.

[54] Baum, pp. 44-59.

[55] Baum, pp. 58-59.

[56] Arthur Hoffman, "Chaucer's Prologue to Pilgrimage: the Two Voices," ELH, XXI, pp. 1-16.

[57] Edmund Reiss, "Final Irony of the Pardoner's Tale," College English, 25 (1964), pp. 260-266.

[58] Coghill and Tolkien, passim.

[59] Coghill and Tolkien, p. 21.

[60] Duino, pp. 320-326.

[61] Sight Hateful, sight tormenting! thus these two
Imparadis't in one another's arms
The Happier Eden, shall enjoy their fill
Of Bliss on bliss, while I to Hell am thrust,
Where neither joy nor love, but fierce desire,
Among our other tortures--not the least
Still unfulfill'd with pain of longing pines
(_Paradise Lost_, 11. 505-10).

[62] Malone, pp. 14-15.

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THE PARDONER, NO FINAL VERDICT

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

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In 1940 Professor G. G. Sedgewick pointed out in an article, "The Progress of the Pardoner, 1880-1940," the wide discrepancy among many critical analyses of that character in Canterbury Tales, made by eminent Chaucerian scholars, during those past sixty years. At that time the sharpest controversies were concerned with whether the Pardoner was impotent, or not; whether he was a villainous hypocrite, or a temporarily repentant sinner; whether he was a madman, or a damned soul; and whether his author was humorously satirical, or deadly ironic towards him. The professor commented on the validity of each critique, accepting or rejecting various viewpoints, and concluded with his own learned explication. So psychologically feasible in accounting for each ambiguity in the poet's delineation of the rogue, and so comprehensive of every nuance in the text, this "subjective interpretation" would have seemed to have settled the question of the Pardoner and to have precluded future debate. However, this was not the case and in the past quarter of a century more theories about this fictional personality have been written than in the previous six decades. Furthermore, the extent of their divergent conclusions ranges over a greater span than former works have done.

This paper deals with a brief review of the Pardoner's fame from the time of his creation until 1940, and an examination of criticism pertaining to him, published after Sedgewick's treatise.

A survey of nearly the first five hundred years of the Pardoner's history shows that he was, for the most part,

overlooked as an individual while attention was focused on his Tale. After the foundation of the Chaucerian Society a systematic study of his character revealed those contradictory elements which began the intensive studies and contrary conjectures as to the author's purpose in his conception of him.

In the past twenty-five years research into the history, theology, and philosophy of the fourteenth century has given us a much clearer picture of the background of a questor, the church's term for this bureaucrat, whose office was abolished four hundred years ago. The same fields of study have thrown new light on the mores of Chaucer's day which adds to a more nearly accurate conjecture concerning this one. At the same time modern criticism has applied new concepts and techniques of psychology to exegetics of the Pardoner. It is in these that we find the greatest variance of ideas. He has been represented as a senseless drunk, a sober schemer, an allegorical figure, a medieval dramatic convention, a character Chaucer despised, one he gently pitied, a Christ figure, a Lucifer, an unfinished product, and a Freudian case study in search of a father-image.

Despite grave warnings by renowned Chaucerian savants the writer of this paper essays her own interpretation of the questor as a product of Chaucer's comic spirit. This, too, will be ignored by partisans and each student will create his own image of the Pardoner. A unanimous verdict is not yet in sight.