THE RIVERSIDE
CHAUCER

THIRD EDITION

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Larry D. Benson, Harvard University

BASED ON
The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer

Edited by
F. N. Robinson
The cover shows representatives of the three estates of medieval society—the priest, the knight, and the laborer—from an illuminated letter in Sloane MS 2435, f. 85, The British Library.

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Swiche glarynge eyen hadde he as an hare.
A vernycle hadde he sowed upon his cappe;
His walet, biforn hym in his lappe,
Breufull of pardoun come from Rome al hoo:
A voys he hadde as smal as hath a goot.
No berr hadde he, ne nevere sholde have;
As smothe it was as it were late shave.
I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare.
But of his craft, fro Berwyk into Ware
Ne was ther swich another pardoner.
For in his male he hadde a pilwe-beer,
Which that he syde was Oure Lady yeul;
He syde he hadde a gobet of the sey
That Seint Peter hadde, whan that he wente
Upon the see, til Jhesu Crist hym hente.
He hadde a croys of latoun ful of stones,
And in a glas he hadde piggges bones.
But with this relikes, whan that he fond
A povre person delliwyng uppon lond,
Upon a day he gat hym moore moneye
Than that the person gat in monthes tweye.
And thus, with fyned flaterye and japes,
He made the person and the peple his apes.
But trewevly to telyen atte laste,
He was in chichre a noble ecclesiaste.
Wel koude he rede a lessoun or a storie,
But alderbest he song an offertorie;
For wel he wise, whan that song was songe.
He moste preche and wel affile his tonge
To wyne silver, as he ful wel koude;
Therefore he song the murierly and loude.
Now have I toold you soothly, in a clane
Th'estaar, th'arrayer, the nombre, and eek the

ductus

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Th'estaar, th'arrayer, the nombre, and eek the
Why that assembled was this company
In Southwerk at this gentle hostelry
That highthe the Tabard, faste by the Belle.
But now is tyne to yow for to telle
How that we baren us that ilke nyght,
When we were in that hostelry alhyt;
And after wol I telle of our viage
And al the remenaut of oure pilgrimage.
But first I pray yow, of youre curteisye,
That ye n’arette it nat my vilayne,
Thogh that I pleynly speke in this mateere,
To telle yow hir wordes and hir cheere,
Ne thogh I speke hir wordes properly.
For this ye knowen al so well as I:
Whoso shal telle a tale after a man,
He moot reheere as ny as evere he kan
Everich a word, if it be in his charge,
Al speke he never so rudeliche and large,
Or ellis he moot telle his tale untrewy,
Or feyne thynge, or fynde wordes newe.
He may nat spare, althogh he were his brother;
He moot as wel seye o word as another.
Crist spak hymself ful brode in hooly writ,
And wel ye woot no vilayne is it.
Eek Plato seith, whoso kan hym rede,
The wordes moore be cosyn to the dede.
Also I prey yow to forgyeve it me,
Al have I nat set folk in hir degree
Heere in this tale, as that they sholde stonde.
My wit is short, ye may wel understonde.
Greet chiere made oure Boost us everichon,
And to the soper sette he us anon.
He served us with vitaille at the beste;
Strong was the wyn, and wel to drynke us leste.
A semely man OURE HOOSTE was withalle
For to been a marchal in an halle.

A large man he was with eyen stepe—
A fairer burges was ther noon in Chepe—
Boold of his speche, and wys, and wel ytaught,
And of manhod hym lakkeide right naught.
Eek therto he was right a myrie man;
And after soper pleyen he bigan,
And spak of myrthe amonges othere thynge,
Whan that we hadde maad oure rekenynge.
And seyde thus: “Now, lordynges, trewelv
Ye been to me right welcome, hertely;
For by my troure, if that I shal nat lye,
I saugh nat this yeer so myrie a compaignye
Atones in this herberwe is as now.
Fayn wolde I doon yow myrthe, wiste I how.
And of a myrthe I am right now bythogh,
To doon yow ese, and it shal coste noght.
“Ye goon to Caunterbury—God yow speede,
The blisfull marit quite yow youre meede!
And wel I woot, as ye goon by the weye,
Ye shapen yow to talen and to pleye;
For trewelv, confort ne myrthe is noon
To ride by the weye doumb as a stoon;
And therfore wol I maken yow disport,
As I seyde erst, and doon yow som confort.
And if yow liketh alle by oon assent
For to stonden at my judgement,
And for to werken as I shal yow seye,
Tomorwe, when ye riden by the weye,
Now, by my fader soule that is deed,
But ye be myrtie, I wol yeve yow myn heed!
Hoold up oure hondes, withouten moore speche.”

Oure conseil was nat longe for to seche.
Us thoughte it was noght worth to make it wys,
And graunting hym withouten moore avys,
This is a pitous tale for to heere.
But nathelesse, passe over; is no fors.
I pray to God so save thy gentil cors,
And eek thyn urynals and thyn jurdones, 305
Thyn ypocras, and eek thyn galiones,
And every boyste ful of thy letarrie;
God blesse hem, and oure lady Seinte Marie!
So moort I theen, thou art a propre man,
And lyk a prelat, by Seint Ronyan! 310
Seyde I nat wel? I kan nat speke in terme;
But wel I woote thou dost myn herte to erme,
That I almoost have caught a cardynacle.
By corpus bones! but I have triacle,
Or elles a draughte of moyste and corny ale,
Or but I heere anony a myrrle tale, 316

Myn herte is lost for pitee of this mayde.
Thou beel amy, thou Pardoner," he sayde,
"Telle us som myrthe or japes right anon."
"It shal be doon," quod he, "by Seint Ronyon!
But first," quod he, "heere at this alesake
I wol bothe drynke eten of a cake."
But right anon thise gentils gon to crye,
"Nay, lat hym telle us of no ribaudye!
Telle us som moral thyng, that we may leere
Som wit, and thanne wol we gladly heere."
"I graunte, ywis," quod he, "but I moort
thyngke
Upon som honest thyng while that I drynke."

THE PARDONER'S PROLOGUE

Heere folaweth the Prologe of the Pardoners Tale.
Radix malorum est Cupiditatis. Ad
Thimotheum, 6.

"Lordynges," quod he, "in chirches when I
preche,
I peyne me to han an hauteyn speche, 300
And ryngte it out as round as gooth a belle,
For I kan al by rote that I tellye.
My thyme is alwey oon, and eever was —
Radix malorum est Cupiditatis.
"First I pronouncye whennes that I come, 335
And thanne my bulles shewe I, alle and some.
Oure lige lorde seel on my patente,

303 passe over: let it be  is no fors: it does not matter
305 urynals: vessels for analysing urine  jurdones: glass vessels
used by physicians
306 ypocras, galiones: medicinal drinks named after Hippocrates
and Galen, ancient medical authorities
307 boyste: container  letarrie: medicine
309 theen: prosper
310 Seint Ronyan: probably St. Ronan, a Scottish saint
311 in terme: in technical language
312 erme: grieve
313 cardynacle: probably the Horr's eorl for cardaile, heart
attack
314 By corpus bones: by God's bones! triacle: medicine
315 moyster fresh, new  corny: malty, strong
Radix malorum, etc.: Greed is the root of all evils, 1 Timothy
6.10
320 hauteyn: impressive, loud
321 by rote: by heart
333 theme: biblical text for a sermon
335 bulles: papal bulls (here indulgences)
337 lige lorde: seel: seal of our liege lord (the bishop)
patente: letter patent (authorizing his sale of pardons)

That shewe I first, my body to warente,
That no man be so boold, ne preest ne clerk,
Me to destourbe of Cristes hoole werk. 340
And after that thanne telle I forth my tales;
Bulles of popes and of cardynales,
Of piarkers and bishipes I shewe,
And in Layn I speke a wordesfewe,
To saffron with my predicacion, 345
And for to stire hem to devocioun.
Thanne shewe I forth my longe cristal stones,
Ycrammed ful of cloutes and of bones —
Relikes been they, as wener they echoon.
Thanne have I in latoun a sholder-boon
Which that was of an hoole Jewes sheep.
'Goode men,' I seye, 'taak of my wordes keep:
If that this boon be washte in any welle,
If cow, or calf, or sheep, or oxe swelle
That anyworm hath ete, or worm ystonge, 350

318 heel amy: fair friend (perhaps used derisively)
321 alesake: pole hung with a garland, the sign of an alehouse
322 cake: loaf of bread
324 ribaudye: ribaldry, coarse jesting
328 warente: protect
343 saffron: flavor with saffron, sermon predication: sermon
347 cristal stones: glass cases; cf. GP 1.700.
348 cloutes: rags
350 in latoun: mounted in latten, a brass-like alloy
355 worm: snake
Taak water of that welle and wassh his tonge, And it is hool anon; and forthermoore, Of pokkes and of scabbe, and every soore Shal every sheeple be hool of that of this welle 359 Drynketh a draughte. Taak kep eek what I telle: If that the good-man that the beeestes oweth Wol every wyke, er that the cok hym croweth, Fastynge, drykynen of this welle a draughte, As thilke hooly Jew oure eldres taughte, His beeestes and his stoor shal multiplie. 365 'And, sire, also it heeleth jalousie; For though a man be falle in jalous rage, Lat maken with this water his potage, And nevere shall he moore his wyf mysterise, Though he the soothe of hir defauete wiste, 370 Al had she taken prestes two or thee.

'Heere is a miteyn eek, that ye may se. He that his hand wol putte in this miteyn, He shal have multiplieyng of his grayn, Whan he hath sowen, be it wheere or otes, 375 So that he offre pens, or elles grotes. 'Goode men and wommen, o thynge warne I yow:

If any wight be in this chicher now That hath doon synne horriblie, that he Dar nat, for shame, of it yshryven be, 380 Or any womman, be she yong or olde, That hathymaked hir housbonde cokewold, Swich folk shal not have no power ne no grace To offen to my relike in this place. 384 And whosso fyndeth hym out of swich blame, He wol come up and ofre a Goddes name, And I asoillie him by the auctorite Which that by bulle ygrauntet was to me, 'By this gaude have I wonne, yeer by yeer, An hundred mark sithe I was pardoner. 390 I stonde lyk a clerk in my pulpet, And whan the lewde peple is doun yset, I preche so as ye han herd bifore And telle an hundred false japes moore. 394 Thanne peyne I me to stroche forth the nekke, And est and west upon the peple I bekke, As dooth a dowve sitynge on a berne.

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VI (C 356-441)

**THE PARDONER'S PROLOGUE**

Myne handles and my tonge goon so yerne That it is joye to se my bisynesse.

Of avarice and of swich cursednesse 400 Is al my prechynge, for to make hem free To yeven hir pens, and namely unto me. For myn entente is nat but for to wynne, And nothynge for correczioun of synne. 404 I rekke nevere, whan that they been beryed, Though that hir soules goon a-blakeberyed! For certes, many a predicacioun Comth ofte tyme of yvel entencion; Som for plesance of folk and flaterye, To been avunced by ypocrisyse, 410 And som for veyne glorie, and som for hate. For when I dar noon oother weyes debate, Thanne wol I styngen hym with my tonge smerte In prechynge, so that he shal nat asterne To been defamed falsly, if that he Hath trespased to my brethren or to me. For though I telle noght his propre name, Men shal wel knewe that it is the same, By signes, and by othere circumstances. 419 Thus quyte I folk that doon us displesances; Thus spitte I out my venym under hewe Of hoolynes, to semen hooly and trewe.

"But shortly myn entente I wol devyse: I preche of no thynge but for covetisse.

Therfore my theme is yet, and eveere was, 425 Radix malorum est Capiditas.

Thus kan I preche agayn that same vice Which that I use, and that is avarice. But though myselfe be gilte in that synne, Yet kan I maken oother folk to twynne From avarice and soore to repente. But nat is my napecul entente; I preche nothynge but for covetisse.

Of this mateere it oghte ynoch suffise. 430 "Thanne telle I hem ensamples many oon Of olde stories longe tyme agoon.

For lewde peple loven tales olde; Swiche thynges kan they wel reporte and holde. What, trowe ye, that whiles I may preche, And wynne gold and silver for I teche, 440 That I wol lyve in poverte wilfully?

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358 pokkes: pockets, purses
361 good-man: goodman, head of the household, oweth: owes
365 stoor: stock, possessions
368 potage: soup
370 defauete: misled
372 miteyn: mixture
375 otes: oats
394 pens: pence, pennies grotes: groats, silver coins worth four pence
399 yshryven: confessed and forgiven
420 quyte: pay back (revenge) doon us displesances: make trouble for us (pardoners)
423 hewe: pretense
424 covetisse: greed
427 agayn: against
430 twynne: depart, turn away from
435 ensamples: exempla, illustrative anecdotes
437 lewde: ignorant, unlearned
441 in poverte: wilfully: in voluntary poverty (like a monk)
Nay, nay, I thought it never, trewely! For I wol preche and begge in sondry landes; I wol nat do no labour with myne handes, Ne make baskets and lyve therby, 445 By cause I wol nat begge ydelly. I wol noon of the apostles countrefete; I wol have monie, wolle, chese, and whete, Al were it yeven of the poveryeste page, Or of the poveryeste wydde in a vayllage, 450 Al sholdhe hir children serve for famyne. Nay, I wol drynke licour of the wyne And have a joly wenche in every toun. But herkneth, lordynes, in conclusioune: Youre likynge is that I shal telle a tale. Now have I dronke a draughte of cornty ale, By God, I hope I shal yow telle a thyng That shal by reson beyn at youre likynge. For though myself be a ful vicious man, A mortal tule yet I yow telle kan, 460 Which I am wont to preche for to wynne. Now hoolde youre pees! My tale I wol bigynne."

THE PARDONER’S TALE

Heere bigynneth the Pardoner’s Tale.

In Flauandres whilom was a compaignye Of yonge folk that haunreden folye, 465 As riote, hasard, styves, and tavernes, Where as where with harpes, lutes, and gyternes, Thay daunce and pleyen at dees bothe day and nyght, And eten also and drynken over hir myght, Thourgh which they doon the deel sacrifise Withinne that deelues temple in cursed wise By superfuytee abymynable. 471 Hir othes been so grete and so dampingble That it is graily for to beere hem swere. Oure blessed Lordes body they totere — Hem thoughte that Jewes rente hym noght ynoogh And ech of hem at othere synne lough. And right ancon thanne comen tombesteres Fetys and smale, and yonge fruterestes, Synygers with harpes, baudes, wafereres, Whiche been the verry deelues officeres To kynde and blowe the fyr of lychere, That is annexe unto glotonye.
Adamoure fader, and his wyf also,
Pro Paradys to labour and to wo
Were byren for that vice, it is no drede.
For whil that Adam fasted, as I rede,
He was in Paradys, and whan that he
Set of the fruyt defyended on the tree,
Anon he was out cast to wo and peyne.
O glotonye, on thee wel oughte us pleyne!
O, wise a man how manye maladyes
Folwen of excesse and of glotonyes,
He wolde been the moore mesureable
Of his diet, sitynge at his table.
Alas, the shorte throte, the tender mouth,
Maketh that est and west and north and south,
In erthe, in eir, in water, men to swyne
To gete a glotonous deynetye mete and drynyke!
Of this matte, O Paul, wel kanstow tretre:
"Mete unto wombe, and wombe eek unto mete,
Shal God destroye bothe," as Paulus seith.
Alas, a foul thynge it is, by my feith,
To seye this word, and fouler is the deede,
Whan man so drynyketh of the white and rede
That of his throte he maketh his pryvee
Thurgh thilke cursed superfuite.
The apostel wopyn seith ful pitously,
"Ther walken manye of whiche yow toold
have I —
I seye it now wopyn, with pitous voyes —
They been enemys of Cristes croyes,
Of whiche the ende is deeth; wombe is hir
god!"
O wombe! O bely! O styknyng cod,
Fulfille of dong and of corrupcione!
At either ende of thee the soule is the soule.
How greete labour and cost is thee to fynde!
Thise cooks, how they stampe, and streyne,
And grynde,
And turuen substaunce into accident
To fulfile al thy likerous talent!
Out of the harde bones knokke they
The mary, for they caste noght away
That may go thrugh the golet softe and swoote.

THE PARDONER'S TALE 197

Of spicerie of leef, and bark, and roote
Shal been his sauce ymaked by delit,
To make hym yet a newer appetit.
But, ceres, he that haunteth swiche delices
Is deed, whil that he lyveth in the vices.
A lecherous thyng is wyn, and dronkenesse
Is ful of stryving and of wrecchednesse.
O dronke man, disfigured is thy face,
Sour is thy breech, foul arrow to embrace,
And thurf the dronke nose semeth the soun
As though thou seyst "Sampsoun, Samp-soun!"
And yet, God woot, Sampsoun drank neuer no wyn.
Theu fallest as it were a stykyned swyn;
Thy tongue is lost, and al thyne honeste cure,
For dronkenesse is verray sepulture
Of mennes wit and his discracion.
In whom that drynke hath dominacion
He kan no conseil kepe; it is no drede.
Now kepe yow fro the white and fro the rede,
And namelie fro the white wyn of Lepe
That is to selle in Fyschstrete or in Chepe.
This wyn of Spaigne crepeth subtilly
In othere wynes, growynge feste by,
Of which ther ryseth swich fumositee
That when a man hath dronken draughtes thre,
And wene that he be at hoom in Chepe,
He is in Spaigne, right at the toune of Lepe —
Nat at the Rochele, ne at Burdeux tooun —
And thanne wol he seye "Sampsoun, Sampsoun!"
But herkneth, lordynge, o word, I yow preye,
That alle the sovereign actes, dar I seye,
Of victories in the Olde Testament,
Thurgh verray God, that is omnipotent,
Were doon in abstynence and in preyere.
Looketh the Bible, and ther ye may it leere.
Looke, Attilia, the grete conquerour,
Deyde in his sleep, with shame and dishonour,
Bledynge ay at his nose in dronkenesse.
A capitayn sholde lyve in sobrenesse.
And over al this, avyseth yow right wel

505 by; for
545 delities: delicacies
546 stryving: strife, quarrelling
547 Sampsoun: Samson (cf. VII.205)
550 styked swyn: suck pig
554 Fyschstrete: Chepe: street in London
556 fumositee: vapors (rising from the stomach to the head)
571 Rochele: Burdeux; La Rochelle, Bordeaux, wine-growing districts in France
579 Attilia: king of the Huns
582 sobrenesse: sobriety
What was comanded unto Lamuel —
Nat Samuel, but Lamuel, seye I; 585
Redeth the Bible, and fynde it expressly
Of wyn-yevynge to hem that han justise.
Namoore of this, for it may wel suffice.
— And now that I have spoken of glotonye,
Now wol I yow defenden hasardrye. 590
Hasard is verray mooer of lesynges,
And of deceite, and cursed forserynges,
Blaspheme of Crist, manslaughtere, and vast
also
Of care and of tyme; and forthermo,
It is repreeue and contrarie of honoure.
For to ben holde a commune hasardour.
And ever the hyer he is of estaa.
The moore is he yholden desolaa.
If that a prynce useth hasardrye,
In alle governaunce and polici.
He is, as by commune opinione,
Yholde the lasse in reputation.

Silboun, that was a wys embassadour,
Was sente to Corynthe in ful greet honour
Pro Laciodyme to make hire alliaunce. 605
And whan he came, hym hapsede, par chaunce,
That alle the gretteste that were of that lond,
Pleyynge athe hasard he hem fond.
For which, as soone as it myghte be,
He staly hym boom agayn to his contree.
And seyde, "Ther wol I nat lese my name,
Ne I wol nat take on me so greet defame,
Yow for to alle unto none hasardours.
Sende otherwise wise embassadours;
For, by my trothe, me were levere dye
Than I yow sholde to hasardours allye.
For ye, that been so glorious in honoures,
Shul nat aliyen yow with hasardours
As by my wyly, ne as by my treetee."
This wise philosophre, thus seyde hee. 620
Looke eek that to the kyng Demetrius
The kyng of Parthia, as the book seith us,
Sente him a paire of dees of gold in scorn,
For he hadde used hasard ther-biforn;
For which he heeld his glorie or his renoun.
At no value or reputacion.

Lordes may fynden oother maner pley
Honest enouyh to drye the day awye. 630
Now wol I spokke of othe false and grete
A word or two, as olde bookes trete.
Gret sweryng is a thynge abominable,
And fals sweryng is yet moore reprensible.
The heigne God forbad sweryng at al,
Witnesse on Mathew; but in special
Of sweryng seith the hooly Jeremye, 635
"Thou shalt swere sooth thyne othes, and nat
lye,
And were in doome and eek in rightwisnesse";
But ydel sweryng is a cursednesse.
Bihooold and se that in the firste table
Of heigne Goddes heeste hezore honorable.
Hou that the seconde heeste of hym is this:
"Take nat my name in ydel or amys."
Lo, rather he forbedeth swich sweryng
Than homicyde or many a cursed thynge;
I seye that, as by ordre, thus it stondeoth; 645
This knoweth, that his heestes understandeth,
How that the seconde heeste of God is that.
And further as ever, I wol thee teile al plat
That vengeance shal nat partes from his houss
That of his othes is to outrageous.
"By Goddes precious herte," and "By his
nayles,"
And "By the blood of Crist that is in Hayles,
Sevene is my chaunce, and thyn is cynk and
treyle!"
"By Goddes armes, if thou falsly pleye,
This daggershalle thurghout thyne herte go!" —
This fruyt cometh of the biched bones two,
Forseryng, ire, falsenesse, homicyde.
Now, for the love of Crist, that for us dyde,
Lete youre othes, bothe grete and smale.
But sires, now wol I telle forth my tale. 660

Thise rioutoures thre of whiche I telle,
Longe erst er prime rong of any belle,
Were set hem in a tavern to drynke,
And as they sat, they herde a belle clynke
Biforn a cors, was caried to his grave. 665
That oon of hem gan callen to his knave:
"Go bet," quod he, "and axe redily
What cors is this that passeth heer forby;
And looke that thou reporte his name weel."
"Sire," quod this boy, "it nedeth never-a-deel;
It was me toold er ye cam heer two hours.
He was, pardee, an old felawe of youres,
And sodeynly he was yslayn to-nyght,
Ffordrone, as he sat on his bench upright.
Ther cam a privee thiefs men clepeth Deeth,
That in this contree al the pele sleeth, 676
And with his spere he smoot his herte atwo,
And wente his wey withouten wordes mo.
He hath a thousand slayn this pestilence.
And, maister, er ye come in his presence,
Me thynketh that it were necessarie
For to be war of swich an adversarie.
Beth redy for to meete hym everemoore;
Thus taughte me my dame; I sey namooore."
"By Seinte Marie!" seyde this taverner, 685
"The child seith sooth, for he hath slayn this yeer,
Henne over a mile, withinne a greet village,
Bothe man and womman, child, and hyne, and page;
I trowe his habitacioun be there.
To been avysed greet wysdom it were, 690
Er that he dide a man a dishonoure."
"Ye, Goddes armes!" quod this rioutour,
"Is it swich peril with hym for to meete?
I shal hym seke by wey and eek by strete,
I make avow to Goddes dignes bones! 695
Herkeneth, felawes, we thre been al ones;
Lat ech of us holde up his hand til oother,
And ech of us biacomn othere brother,
And we wole sneak this false traytour Deeth.
He shal be slayn, he that so manye sleeth, 700
By Goddes dignitee, er it be nyght!"
Togidres han thise thre hir trouthes plight
To lyve and dyen ech of hem for oother,
As though he were his owene ybore brother.
And up they styrre, al drunken in this rage, 705
And forth they goon towards that village
Of which the taverner hadde spoke biforn.
And many a grisly ooth thanne han they sworn,
And Cristes blessed body they torenote — 709
Deeth shall be deede, if that they may hym hente!
Whan they han goon nat fully half a mile,
Right as they wolde han troden over a stile,
An oold man and a poyre with hem mete.
This olde man ful mekeley hem grete,
And seyde thus, "Now, lordes, God ye wude see!"
The proudeste of these rioutoore three 716
Answerde agayn, "What, carl, with sory grace!
Why artow al forwrapped save thy face?
Why lyvestow so longe in so greet aye?"
This olde man gan looke in his visage, 720
And seyde thus: "For I ne kan nat fynde
A man, though that I walked into Ynde,
Neither in citee ne in no village,
That wolde change his youth for myn age;
And therfore moor I han myn age stille, 725
As longe tym in as Goddes wille.
Ne Deeth, allas, ne wol nat han my lyf.
Thus walke I, lyk a restesles kairf,
And on the ground, which is my moodres gate,
I knokke with my ast, bothe erly and late, 730
And seye, 'Leeve moorer, leet me in!
Lo how I vanyshe, flessh, and blood, and skyn!
Allas, whan shul my bones been at reste?
Moorer, with yow wolde I chaunge my cheste
That in my chambre longe tym hath be, 735
Ye, for an heyre clowt to wrappe me!
But yet to me she wol nat do that grace,
For which ful pale and welked is my face.
"But, sires, to yow it is no curteisye
To spaken to an oold man vileynye,
But he trespasse in word or elles in dede.
In Hooly Writ ye may yourself wel rede: 740
'Agayns an oold man, hoor upon his heed,
Ye sholde arise; wherfore I yeve yow reed,
Ne dooth into an oold man noon harm
now,
Namoore than that ye wolde men did to yow
In age, if that ye so longe abide.
And God be with yow, where ye go or ryde!
I moot go thider as I have to go."

"Nay, olde cherl, by God, thou shalt nat so,"
Seyde this oother hasardour anon; 751
"Thou partest nat so lighty, by Seint John!
Thou spak right now of thilke tryautor Deeth,
That in this contree alle oure freendes seeeth.
Have heer my trouthe, as thou art his espay,
Telle where he is or thou shalt it seye, 756
By God and by the holy sacrament!
For soothe thou oon of his assent
To sleen us yonge folk, thou false theeif?" 759
"Now, sires," quod he, "if that yow be so leef
To fynde Deeth, turne up this croked wey,
For in that grove I lathe hym, by my fey,
Under a tree, and there he wole abyde;
Noght for youre boost he wole him no thyng
hyde.
Se ye that ook? Right there ye shal hym
fynde. 765
God save yow, that boghte agayn mankynde,
And yow amende!" Thus seyde this olde man;
And everich of thise rioures ran
Til he cam to that tree, and ther they founde
Of florynis fyne of gold ycowynd rounde 770
Wel ny an eightye bussheles, as hem thoughte.
No longuer thanne after Deeth they soughthe,
But ech of hem so glad was of that sighte,
For that the floryns been so saire and brighte,
That doun they sette hem by this precious
hoord. 775
The worseste of hem, he spak the firste word.
"Bretheren," quod he, "taak kep what that I
seye;
My wit is gree, though that I bourde and
pleye.
This tresor hath Fortune unto us yiven
In myrthe and jolifeye oure lyf to lyven, 780
And lightli as it cometh, so wol we spende.
Ey, Goddess precious dignite! Who wende
To-day that we solde han so faire a grace?
But myghte this gold be carted fro this place
Hoom to myn hous, or elles unto yourys — 785
For wel ye woot that al this gold is oures —
Thanne were we in heigh felicite.
But trewely, by daye it may nat bee.

747 abyde: remain (alive)
750 oon of his assen in league with him
751 ook: oak
754 boghte agayn: redeemed
755 bourdet: jest
759 tresor: treasure
760 chere: strong
769 doon us honger: have us hanged
770 set... are drawn
779 full swithee: very quickly
800 Freendes torn: friend's turn, friendly act
802 biwyere: berry
803 ryve: snub
And thanne shal al this gold departed be,
My decre frend, bitwixen me and chee.
Thanne maye we bothe oure lustes fulfullie,
And pleye at dees right at oure owene wille.
And thus acorded been thise shrewes tweye
To sleen the thridde, as ye han herd me seye. 836
This yongeste, which that wenete to the toun,
Ful ofte in herte he rolleth up and doun
The beautee of thise floryns newe and brighte.
“O Lord!” quod he, “if so were that I myghte
Have al this tresor to myself alone,
Ther is no man that lyveth under the trone
Of God that sholde lyve so murye as I!”
And atte laste the feend,oure enemy,
Putte in his thought that he sholde posyon beye,
With which he myghte sleen his felawes tweye;
For-why the feend foond hym in swich lyvynge
That he hadde leve him to sorwe brynge.
For this was ourelye his fulle entente,
To sleen hem bothe and nevere to repente. 830
And forth he gooth, no lenger wolde he tarie,
Into the toun, unto a pothecarie,
And preyde hym that he hym wolde selle
Som posyon, that he myghte his ratess quelle;
And eek ther was a polet in his hawe. 835
That, as he seyde, his capouns hadde yslawe,
And fayn he wolde wreke hym, if he myghte,
On vermyon that destroyed hym by nyghte.

The pothecarie answere, “And thou shalt have
A thyng that, also God my soule save,
In al this world ther is no creature
That eten or dronken hath of this confiture
Noght but the montance of a corn of whete,
That he ne shal his lif anon forleete;
Ye, serve he shal, and that in lasse while
Than thou wolt goon a paas nat but a mile,
This posyon is so strong and violent.”

This cursed man hath in his hond yhent
This posyon in a box, and sith he ran
Into the neste strete unto a man,
And bowerd [of] hym large botelles thre,
And in the two this poysyon pourde he;

The thridde he kepeth cleene for his drynke.
For al the nght he shoop hym for to swynke
In cariynge of the gold out of that place. 875
And whan this rioutour, with sory grace,
Haddes filled with wyn his grete hotels thre,
To his felawes agayn repaireth he.

What nedeth it to sermonse of it moore? 879
For right as they hadde cast his deeth bifoore,
Right so they han hym slayn, and that anon.
And whan that this was doon, thus spak that oon:
“Now lat us sette and drynke, and make us merie,
And afterward we wol his body berie.” 884
And with that word it happed hym, par cas,
To take the botel ther the posyon was,
And drank, and yaf his felawe drynke also,
For which anon they storven bothe two.

But certes, I suppose that Ayven
Wroot never in no canon, ne in no fen.
Mo wonder sines of empooisonynge
Than hadde thise wrecches two, er hir endyng.
Thus ended thine homycedes two,
And eek the false empooisonere also.

O cursed synne of alle cursednesse!
O traytours homyicide, O wikkednesse!
O glotonye, luxurie, and haardrye!
Thou blasphemour of Crist with vileynye
And othes grete, of usage and of pride!
Alas, mankynde, how may it bitide?
That to thy creatour, which that the wroghte
And with his precious herte-blood thee boghte,
Thou art so fals and so unkynde, alas?

Now, good men, God foryeve youre trespas,
And ware yow fro the synne of avarice!
Myn hooly pardoun may yow alle warice,
So that ye offre nobles or sterlynges,
Or elles silver broches, spoones, rynges.
Boweth youre heed under this hooly bulle!
Cometh up, ye wyves, ofreth of youre wolfe!
Youre names I entre heer in my rolle anon;
Into the blisse of hevene shul ye gon.

838 rolleth up and doun: meditates on
842 trones: throne
846 leve: permission
852 pothecaries: apothecary
854 queller: kill
855 polet: weasel, hawer yard
857 wreke hym: revenge himself
858 vermyon: animal pests; destroyed: were ruining
862 confiture: concoction
863 montance: amount, size corn: grain
864 forleete: lose
865 servet: die; while: time
866 a paas: at a walk
874 shoop hym: intended
885 par cas: by chance
889 Ayven: Aviceena, Arabic author of a medical treatise
890 canon: set of rules; fen: a division of Aviceena’s book
891 empooisonynge: poisoning
894 empooisonere: poisoner
897 luxurie: lechery
899 usage: habit
901 unkynder: unnatural
905 warice: care, save
907 nobles: gold coins sterlynges: silver pennies
910 wolfe: wool
I yow assoule, by myn heigh power, 913
Yow that wol offre, as clene and eek as clere
As ye were born. — And lo, sires, thus I preche.
And Jhesu Crist, that is oure soules leche, 916
So graunte yow his pardoun to receyve,
For that is best; I wol yow nat deceyve.

But, sires, o word forgot I in my tale:
I have relikes and pardoun in my male, 920
As faire as any man in Englond,
Whiche were me-yeven by the popes hond.
If any of yow wole, of devocion,
Offren and han myn absolution,
Com forth anon, and kneleth heere adown, 925
And mekely receyveth my pardoun;
Or elles taketh pardoun as ye wende,
Al newe and freshe at every miles ende,
So that ye offren, alwey newe and newe,
Nobles or pens, whiche be good and trewe. 930

It is an honour to everich that is heer
That ye mowe have a suffisant pardoneer
T'assoile yow in contree as ye ryde,
For adventures whiche may bityte.
Paraventure ther may fallen oon or two 925
Doun of his hors and breke his nekke atwo.
Looke which a seuretee is to yow alle
That I am in youre felaweship yfaile,
That may assoule yow, bothe moore and lasse,
Whan that the soule shal fro the body passe.
I rede that oure Hoost heere shal bigynne, 941

Heere is ended the Pardoner's Tale.

For he is moost envoluped in synne.
Com forth, sirest Hoost, and offre first anon,
And thow shalt kisse the relikes everychon,
Ye, for a grote! Unbokele anoth thy purs. 943
"Nay, nay!" quod he, "thanke have I Cristes curs!
Lat be," quod he, "it shal nat be, so theeche!
Thou woldest make me kisse thy old eek breech,
And swere it were a relike of a seint, 949
Though it were with thy fundement depeint!
But, by the croyes which that Seint Eleyne fond,
I wolde I hadde thy coillons in myn hond
In stide of relikes or of seintuarie.
Lat kuttur hem of, I wol thee helpe hem carte;
They shal be shrynèd in an hoggis toord!" 955

This Pardoner anwerde nat a word;
So wrooth he was, no word ne wolde he seye.
"Now," quod oure Hoost, "I wol no lenger pleye
With thee, ne with noon oother angery man."
But right anon the worthy Knyght bigan,
Whan that he saugh that al the peple lough,
"Namoore of this, for it is right ynothur!
Sire Pardoner, be glad and myrie of cheere;
And ye, sire Hoost, that been to me so deere,
I prey yow that ye kisse the Pardoner. 965
And Pardoner, I prey thee, drawe thee neer,
And, as we diden, lat us laughe and pleye."
Anon they kiste, and ryden forth hir weye.

913 assouile: absolve
916 leche: physician
917 graunet: allow
920 pardoun: pardons, papal indulgences male: pouch, bag
927 which as what a seuretee: safeguard
942 envoluped: enveloped
945 grote: grost, a silver coin worth four pence
946 Cristes curs: damnation
947 so theeche = fo thee ich, as I may proper (I swear)
948 breech: underpant
950 fundement: stitus depeint: stained
951 croyes: cross
955 dis: St. Helen, discoverer of the true cross
953 coillons: sacristies
952 seintuarie: sanctuary, box for relics
955 shrynèd: shrined toord: tard
966 ryden: rode
Ruggiers, Art of CT, 124; Sparsing, ed., 22; Faulkner, in Twentieth Century Interpretations, 11), but it has been attacked by Eliot, Rev. of Eng. Lit. 6:63-64, and Halverson, Ch 4, 1970, 185-86, who point out that the text offers no support for the idea that the Pardoner is drunk. Some have seen the Pardoner’s confession as too excessive to be believed and have argued that the Pardoner is indulging in self-parody (Caldenwood, ES 45:302-9) or an elaborate “put on” (Halverson, Ch 4:196-97). Beichner argues instead that the Pardoner is simply trying to entertain his hearers (MS 25, 1963, 160-72). Yet others believe that he is motivated by a need for approval (Condren, Viator 4, 1973, 177-205), acceptance (McNamar, PMASAL 46:603-4), or compassion (David, Strumpet Muse, 201).

Such psychological explanations of the Pardoner have dominated criticism since the time of Kittredge, and he has been generally regarded as “the ultimate example of Chaucer’s subtle handling of human psychology” (Ruggiers, Art of CT, 123); Howard’s study (Idea of CT, 339-70) is the most important recent example of this approach. Objections to the excesses of the psychological approach have been raised, most recently by Pearsall (Ch 17, 1983, 359-65; see also Bronson, In Search of Ch, 79-87), and the idea that medieval literature has characters in the modern sense has been vigorously attacked (Robertson, Pref, to Chaucer, 34-37; cf. Morgan, MQR 71, 1976, 241-55). In an important essay, Kellogg (Spec 26, 1951, 465-85; rpt. in Ch, Langland, 245-68) studies the Pardoner as an exemplification of the Augustinian theory of sin, and Miller’s exegetical study of the implications of the presentation of the Pardoner as a eunuch (Spec 30:180-99; see also Curry, Ch. and Science, 54-70) has been widely influential (see also Leicester, in Acts of Interpretation, 25-30).

The idea that the Pardoner is evil—the “one lost soul” on the Pilgrimage (Kittredge, Ch. and His Poetry, 180)—is widely accepted (e.g., Huppe, Reading of CT, 209-20); to some he has seemed a personification of vice (Peterson, Ch 10, 1976, 328-36; Scheps, Acta IV, 1977, 107-23). Recent critics, such as Howard, have been more sympathetic toward him (see also McAlpine, PMLA 95, 1980, 8-22). Reiss (CE 25, 1964, 260-66) argues that he is misunderstood by the pilgrims, and Michell that, because of his lack of hypocrisy, he is their moral superior (CE 27, 1966, 437-44; see also Rhodes, Ch 17, 1982, 40-61).

The question of the Pardoner’s motivation comes to focus on his attempt to sell his admitted false relics to the Host. Kittredge’s explanation that the Pardoner suffers from a “paroxysm of agonized sincerity” is still widely quoted, but a great many other explanations have been offered (for summaries of opinions see Halverson, Ch 4:189-90; Reiss, CE 25:260-66). Limanowsky (Of Sondry Folk, 220) argues rather that the Pardoner has foolishly reverted to his usual sales pitch, and this has been taken as a gross insult to the pilgrims (Bronson, In Search of Ch, 86), an elaborate joke (Beichner, MS 25:170-72), mere forgetfulness (Stockton, TSL 6, 1961, 56), and as a cynical attempt to reduce the pilgrim to nonsense (Curtis, Crit. Rev. 11, 1968, 15-31). Howard (Idea of CT, 353) regards the Pardoner’s offer of his relics as an extravagant gambit motivated perhaps by an unconscious will to lose. The Host’s reaction has likewise been explained in a variety of ways—as disgust at the Pardoner’s effrontery (Gerould, Essays, 71), an expression of the reader’s feelings toward the Pardoner (Brewer, Chaucer, 159), and as an angry reaction to a personal attack (Kean, Ch and Poetry 2:104).

As the above shows, the critical bibliography is formidable and the range of disagreement broad indeed. The reviews by Sedgwick (MLQ 1:31-58) and Halverson (Ch 4:184-202), both of whom make valuable contributions of their own, are good starting points for the reader intent on studying this criticism. Twentieth Century Interpretations of the Pardoner’s Tale, ed. Dewey Faulkner, 1973, contains excerpts from older criticism as well as some significant original essays.

The Pardoner’s Prologue

331 For the phrasing, cf. Tr 2.1615 and Whiting B234.
333 theme: The biblical text for a sermon, often subdivided into three (as here: gluttony, gambling, swearing). See header.
334 Radix malorum est Cupitatis: 1 Tim. 6:10; cf. Mel VII.130. Morton W. Bloomfield (The Seven Deadly Sins, 1952, 74 and 93) notes that greed was increasingly seen as the root of evil in the later Middle Ages. Friend (MLQ 18, 1957, 305-8) agrees that this is a dangerous text to choose: a secular clerk, Robert Lyndlake, was arrested in 1395 by Richard II for using this text as a sermon against churchmen who preached for money. On the relation of this theme to gluttony, gambling, and swearing, see Robertson, Pref. to Ch, 352-34.
336 bullies: Bulls, papal letters (here indulgences) bearing the round leaden seal, or bulla, stamped with the figures of Sts. Peter and Paul on the obverse and the name of the pope who gave it on the reverse. Cf Rom 5847.
337 Cf. PP B Pro 68-69: “Ther preched a Pardoner, as he a prest was/Begotthe forthe a bull with bishops seles.” Ours lige lorde may also be the bishop, though Hamilton (JEGP 40, 1941, 70), agreeing with Brown (ed., 27), regards this as a royal seal. patentee: litter parent (“open,” to be shown publicly; cf. GP I.315 n.), containing the Pardoner’s authorization. 343 Popes, cardinals, patriarchs, and bishops could all grant indulgences (Kellogg and Haselmeyer, PMLA 66, 1951, 251-77). Patriarchs here are metropolitans such as those of Venice and Lisbon.
347-49 Owst (Preaching in Med. Engl., 109-10) quotes a contemporary sermon attacking “thieves” who “with fals liese eterthe folk, with crosses and reliquies that theye betwen them, . . . se that thei be seyntes bones or of holy mens clothinge, and biethet myche mede that ouffre to hem.” On the display of relics in sermons, see Owst, 349-51.
347 crinal stones: Cf. GP I.700. See, on the relation of crinal stones to lapidary lore, Henkin, Bull. of the Hist. of Medicine 10, 1941, 504-12.
351 hooy Jewes: The epithet bodey has led to attempts to identify this Jew with one who lived before the incar- nation; Skeat (5:271) suggests Jacob (Gen. 30:31-43), noting this would add force to VJ.365; others (Rutter,
land's seem to confuse St. Paul the Apostle, a tentmaker, with St. Paul the Hermit, who appears in medieval art clad in a mat of palm-leaves (see Jerome, Vita S. Pauli, PL 23:27). However, these passages very likely derive from Jerome, *Ad raticum*, advising him to "weave a little basket from rushes, or weave a basket from apple osiers" by way of providing for himself (CSEL 56:150). See Hemingway, MLN 52, 1947, 57-58; Pratt, Expl 21, 1962, Item 14; and Fleming, Christianity and Lit. 28, 1979, 21-22, who argues there is no confusion here.

447-48 See Mark 6.7-10.

The Pardoner's Tale

463-84 For the Flemish setting cf. S&A, 437. Manly (CT, 619) suggests that Chaucer set the tale in Flanders because of the Flemings' reputation for drunkenness; for English attitudes toward Flanders, see Norris, PMLA 48, 1933, 536-41. Morgan (MLR 71:241-55) finds the company of young folk given to excess reminiscent of Rom 4925-28, but the resemblance is slight.

468-71 For the conception of gluttony in the Middle Ages and its links with blasphemy and heresy, esp. in Chaucer and Gower, see Yeager, SP 81, 1984, 42-55. Lewis, ed. 1978, 8, notes possible parallels in lines 467-69 and 481-82 to Innocent III, *De miseria condicionis humanae* 2.18.11-1246 and 12 47.

476 deolves temple: Cf. The *Ayens of Innuif* (S&A, 438): "The tavern ye the scote of the dyveule... and his ochene chapel... theuer he maketh his miracles... vor huanne the glorius gesh in the taverne he gath opight, huanne he comth a yen, he ne heth uot ther him moghe sostyeni ne bere." Cf. Jacob's *Will* (S&A, 438); the *Menagier de Paris*, 1.48; Tupper JEGP 13: 553-65.

474-75 Cf. ParcT X.591; EpimELT II.1171 and n.

479 waferes: Cf. Miit 1.3379 and n. According to OED (s.v. waferer), *waferers* were apparently employed as go-betweenes and bawdys.

481-82 Association of lechery and gluttony, and of wine and lust, is commonplace; cf. PF 275-76n. and 468-71 above.

483 holy writ: Lat. gloss: "And do not become drunk with wine, in which is lecherie" (Eph. 5.18), quoted from Innocent III, *De miserie* 2.12-13, which work Chaucer probably translated as the lost O of The Wretched Engendering of Mankind (cf. LGW G 414-15 and Lewis, ed., 1978, 20-30). Skeat (3:444-45) notes parallels between Innocent's *work* and VI.485-87 (2.20.148; 505-7 (2.18.5-74); 513-16 and 521-23 (2.17.21-2664); 517-20 (2.17.2-3, 143); 534-36 (2.18.2-5); 537-46 (2.17.5-143); 547-48 (2.17.9-119); 549-50 (2.19.144); 551-52 and 560-61 (2.19.1-419). See also Skeat 3:444-45.


488 Herodes: Herod and Lot are listed together as examples of drunkenness in Piers Plowman, ed. Skeat, C 11.176-79. Stories may refer to the *Historia ecclesiastica* part of the *Historia scholastica* of Peter Comestor (Skeat 3.278; Taitt, NQ 216, 1971, 284-85). Robinson doubted this, since Peter's account of Herod does not mention his drunkenness (PL 198:1574-75). Brown
(ed., 32) believes the reference is to the expanded version in Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum historiale* 7.22, where it is specified that Herod "dies natalis sui super bibiendo celebravat." *Stori* could also refer to the biblical account (Matt. 14.3–12, Mark 6.17–29), though the drunkenness of Herod is not mentioned. Cf. GP I 709.

492 Senec: Identified in the gloss as Seneca, from whose epistle 85.18 lines 493–97 are roughly translated. Ayers (RomR 10, 1919, 3–7) finds further reminiscences of Seneca (esp. from Epist. 95.19–25) in VI.513–548. Skeat finds parallels instead in Innocent’s *De contemptu mundi* (esp. 2.17, 18), which he believes reflect Chaucer’s prose translation (see PL 218:723 and Skeat 3:445, where the relevant passages are printed).

498 For gluttony associated with taverns, see PP B 5.296–305 and 470 above.


512–16 Cf. Ecles. 37.29–31: "Do not be greedy for every delicacy or eat without restraint. For illness is a sure result of overeating, and gluttony is next door to colic. Gluttony has been the death of many; be on your guard and prolong your life." Brown (ed., 32) compares VI.513–14 to Seneca, Epist. 95.19: "Many courses make for many diseases."


522–23 Lat. gloss: "Meat for the belly, and the belly for meat, but God shall destroy both the one and the other" (1 Cor. 6.13). See 483 above.


539–35 Lat. gloss: "Ad Philpenses capitulo 3°" (Phil. 3.18–19; cf. Paris T X.820). See also 483 above.

538–39 Cf. Innocent III, *De miseria* 2.17.5–149: "Alius contundit et colat, alius confundit et conficit, substantiam verit in accidentis, nanrum mutat in artem." The 'substance into accident' figure (the essential nature and the outward quality by which a thing is identified and apprehended) as applied to cookery appears also in Latin Poems Commonly Attributed to Walter Map, page liii: "fast per accidentas quod esse non potest per substantiam." Robinson notes that Chaucer could hardly have failed to relate this to the controversy over transubstantiation, a lively topic in Chaucer’s time (Manly, CT, 619), and to have been reminded of Wyclif’s facetious remark that the faithful should forbid friars to enter their cells lest the wine be transubstantiated into nothing (Wyclif, Sermons, ed. Johann Loserth, Wyclif Soc., 1887–90, 194). On allusions to the Eucharist in the work, see Nichols, PMLA 82: 501–2. Cf. Tr 4.1503 n.

547–48 Lat. gloss: "[She] who lives in pleasure is dead while living" (1 Tim. 5.6). Quoted in Jerome (Brown, ed., 34).

549–50 Lat. gloss: "Luxuriosus res vinum et contumeli osa ebrietatis" (Prov. 20.1, with "contumeliosa" for Vulgate "cumulotus," as in Jerome, Adv. Jov. 2.10 (PL 23: 299)). Lewis notes it is also quoted by Innocent. See 483 above.

554–55 Sampson: Sampson, as a Nazarite, abstained from wine (Judges 13.7 and Num. 6.3). Skeat suggests the name was chosen for its sound and that it should be pronounced with a nasal intonation.


560–61 Proverbial; cf. Mel V.1194n. See 483 above.

564–66 Fyssshstrete: Fish Hill Street, off Thames Street, just below London Bridge. Chepe: probably Cheapside, one of the principal shopping streets in the London of Chaucer’s day (cf. 1.754 and n.), though here perhaps Easchseap; see Magoun, Ch Gazetteer, 105–6.

565–71 That the wine of Spain could creep subtly into other wines produced nearby is a reference to the illegal diluting of better wines with cheaper varieties, a practice common enough that in the Liber albus, 615–18, there are regulations specifying that different kinds of wine are to be kept in different cells. Manly (CT, 619) quotes Lener Book H. 145 on the price of wines from Bordeaux (Bardeus) and La Rochelle (Rochele) set at ten pence, and wines from Spain, such as those produced at Lepe (northwest of Cadiz), set at eight pence. See further Hench, MLN 52, 1937, 27–28. Bronson (In Search of Ch, 82) takes the reference to adulterating wines as a dig at the Host.

577 Attila, king of the Huns, died (453) of a nose-bleed brought on by excessive drinking on a night when he had just wed a new wife; see Jordanes, *De getarum gestis*, 49, and Paul the Deacon, *De Getis Romanorum*, 15.

584 Lamuel: Lat. gloss: "Noli vinum dare," from Prov. 31.4: "Do not give wine, O Lamuel, do not to kings give wine, for there is no secret where drunkenness reigns." For the rhetorical device used here, see Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Pestis nova*, 668–86.

591 Lat. gloss: "Policraticus, Book I: 'Dicing is the mother of lies and perjuries' " (John of Salisbury, *Policraticus* 1.5).

603 Stillbou: Chaucer draws the story in VI.603–20 from John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus* 1.5.1 (S&A, 438) but substitutes Stillbou for Chilon. Some MSS (not in the Ellesmere or Hengwrt traditions of glossing) gloss the name with "i.e., Mercurius," since this is the Greek name (Πηγήμορος) for that planet. But Chaucer may have been thinking of the philosopher Stibou, mentioned in Seneca Epist. 9, 18–19, 10.1 (Ayers, RomR 10.5) or in Seneca’s Dialogues 2.5.6 (Hinckley, Notes on Ch, 175–76).

621 Demetrius: His story appears in John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus* 1.1.5 (S&A, 438), immediately following that of Chilon (Chaucer’s *Stillbou*).

622 Parthes: See Magoun, Ch Gazetteer, 123.


633–34 Mathew: Lat. gloss: "Do not swear at all" (Matt. 5.34).

635 Lat. gloss: "Jeremiah 4: You shall swear in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness" "(Jer. 4.2, omitting "that the Lord lives" after "swear"). The same text is quoted in Paris T X.592 (Brown, ed., 36).

639 the firste table: The first three commandments, setting forth the duties owed to God, the other seven being those owed to mankind; see Dives and Pauper, EETS 275, 1:304.

641 seconde heester: "Thou shalt not take the Lord’s
name in vain" (reckoned as the third commandment in most Protestant usages).

649–50 Ecclus. 23.11 has “A man given to swearing is lawless to the core; the scourgé will never be far from his house... his house will be filled with trouble.”

651 nayles: Either Christ’s fingernails or the nails of the cross. The former seems most likely in the light of Wyclif (Select Engl. Works 3.483): “It is not leeful to swear... by God’s bonys, sydus, naylus, ne arms, or by any membre of Cristis body, as tho mostr dele of men use....” As Skeat notes (5:284), however, the rioters were probably not concerned with the distinction.

652 Hayles: Hayles Abbey in Gloucestershire, founded in 1246, where there was a vial containing what was said to be the blood of Christ; the blood was visible only to those with pure consciences; see Horstmann, Alteutsche Legenden, 275–81.

653 chaunce: In the game of hazard (hazard, VI.465), which is played with two dice, the thrower calls a number (his “main”*) and throws the dice; if his main appears, he wins; if two aces (amens a), ace-deuce, or (if seven is the main) twelve appears, he loses; if seven is the main an eleven will also win, as will a twelve if six is the main. If any other number appears on the first roll, this is the thrower’s chaunce, and the thrower casts the dice until either his chaunce appears and he wins, or his main reappears and he loses (see Charles Cotton, The Compleat Gamester, 1674, ed. in Games and Gamessters of the Restoration by Cyril H. Hartman, 1930, 82–84). Obviously modern “craps” is “hazard” with seven always the main. In this case the speaker’s main was eight (cink and trey*); on his first throw he casts a seven, which is now his winning number, his chaunce, while an eight will win for his opponent. For accounts of medieval dice see Deschamps (Oeuvres 7.253–65 and 4.286–87) and Franz Semrau (Würfel und Würfelspiel im alien Frankenreich, Beih. zur ZRP, 23, 1910).

666 bisched bones: “Cursed dice” (MED s.v. bisched pppl). Brown (MLN 23, 1908, 126) compares “ossibus caninis” (dog’s bones), used for “dice” by Vincent of Beauvais in Speculum morale 3.8.4, though it is not clear whether this refers to the material of which the dice were made or is also an opprobrious epithet.

667 Sometimes taken as a clumsy transition back to the tale of the rioters; for a refutation see Osselin, ES 49, 1968, 37–38.

669 prime: The first of the canonical hours (cf. GP 1.122n.); the bell is rung at 6 A.M. for the singing of the office of prime.

664–65 Skeat (5:286) notes the custom of ringing a handbell before a corpse on its way to burial and cites Mirk’s Instructions for Parish Priests, EETS 31, line 1964.

670 pestilence: Possible reference to the plagues of 1348–50, 1361–62, 1376, and 1379, though there were minor outbreaks throughout the century. For contemporary accounts of riotous behavior in plague times, see Philip Ziegler, The Black Death, 1969, 160, 164, and 270–71; for the decline of morals after the plague, see Elisabeth Carpinter, Une ville devant la peste: Orvieto et la Peste Noir de 1348, 1962, 195–96; both are cited in Beider’s discussion of the plague background to The Pardoner’s Tale, Chr 16, 1982, 257–69. For a contemporary description of the plague, see Boccaccio, Decameron, 1, intro., and PP B 20.52–82. The hospital at Charing Cross (see GP I.670 and n.) was particularly hard hit.

710 Cf. Hosea 13.4 and PP B 18.35.

713 oold man: On the literary definition of old age in Chaucer’s day, see Lowes, PMLA 20, 1905, 782–85; Coffman, MLN 52, 1937, 25–26; and Philip, MLN 53, 1938, 181–2. See also 727–36 below.

717–20 Morgan (MLR 71.241–55) finds a source for the hostility of the rioters toward the old man in Rom 2923–28, 4955–58, 4961; Harris (SPQ 33, 1969, 24–38) cites Old Norse analogues; but this may have been part of the story as Chaucer received it (cf. the contempt for the old man shown by Tagliagambe in the Rappresentazione di Sant’ Antonio, S&A, 423–24).

719 The contemporary Geoffrey le Baker writes “The pestilence seized especially the young and strong, commonly sparing the elderly and feeble.” Other chroniclers say the same (Beider, Chr 16:260).


722 Ynde: Cf. WBPro III.824n.

727–36 The Old Man’s desire for death is not found in any of the analogues; it is based on the first elegy of Maximian, in which the aged man knocks on the ground and pleads, “Receive me, mother, take pity on the hardships of age; I seek to warm my tired bones in your bosom” (vv. 227–28, S&A, 437). Chaucer may have read Maximian in school (Collin, Spec 9, 1934, 269–71). Nitecki (Chr 16, 1981, 76–84) shows that the lament of an old man, based on Maximian’s elegy, was the subject of a number of Middle English poems; she notes the closest analogue is “Le regret de Maximian,” in Carleton Brown, Rel. Lyrics of XIII Cent., 1932, 92–100.

730 Steadman (N&Q 5, 1958, 323) derives the knocking on the gate, not in Maximian, from a Spanish proverb.

743–44 Lat. gloss: “Stand up in the presence of a gray beard” (and honor the face of an old man) (Lev. 19.32).

745 Cf. Ecclus. 8.7: “Despire no man for being old.”

746 oak: The oak does not appear in the analogues. Candelaria (MLN 71, 1956, 321–22) connects this with the ancient folk custom of burying an image of death under an oak tree. Chaucer was robbed in 1390 at a place called “owele ok” in Kent, an execution site (Kuhl, MLN 36, 1921, 157–59, and Ch Life Records, 477–89). Collette (Chr 19, 1984, 39–45) argues that the oak is a complex exegetical symbol of death and idolatry.

770 Boryns: Either coins in general or German or Flemish florins, worth three shillings and struck in imitation of the Florentine florin, the standard gold coin of the later Middle Ages. An English florin was minted briefly in 1344 but then recalled and replaced by the “noble” (Baker, Spec 36, 1961, 282–86).

779 “Treasure is believed to be a gift of Fortune... of ancient time it was by natural law the property of the finder, [but] it is now by the law of nations the property of the lord king himself” (Henri de Bracton, De legibus et consuetudinibus Anglie Anglie, ed. George E. Woodbine, 1915–42, 2:338–39). This is quoted by Roache (JEGP 64, 1965, 1–6), who shows that the rioters commit theft by keeping the treasure.

781 Proverbial; Whiting C384.

783 See GP 1.835.

845 On poison lore see Hallissy, MSE 9, 1983, 54–63.
848 he hadde leve: On God’s permitting the devil to tempt an individual, see Job 1.2, 2.6 and cf. PrT III.1482–96.
889–90 Avycen: Avicenna, the authority on medicine (see GP I.432 and note 429–34); his work included canonists or rules of procedure; in his book a chapter is called a fana (Arabic fana’i, a division of a science). His work treats of poisons in Bk. 4, Fm 6.
907 nobles: First struck in the reign of Edward III, they were worth six shillings eight pence (Baker, Spec 36: 284–86, with illustrations).
sterlynges: The name is said to derive from the Easterlings, Norwegians and Danes, once brought to England to undertake the purification of the minting of English money (Drennen and Wyatt, ed. Pard’T, 79).
916 Cf. Psalms 146.3 (A.V. 147.3).
946 On complicit audiences’ sharing the guilt of fraudulent pardoneurs, see Mitchell, CE 27:437–44.
949 Knapp (ELH 39, 1972, 1–26) suggests there is an allusion here to the hair breeches worn by St. Thomas, an object of veneration at Canterbury.
951 On St. Helen’s discovery of the cross, see Acta Sanctorum, 18 Aug.
955–58 Possibly an echo of RR 7108–9 where there is a word play on “collons” and “reliques” (reliques). This is usually taken as a crude reference to the Pardoner’s eunuchry (e.g., Curry, Ch and Science, 67), but cf. GP 1.691 and n. Baum (Ch, 34) and Faulkner (Twentieth-Century Interpretations, 11) argue that this indicates that the Pardoner is not a eunuch.
958–59 seintuarie: Taken by the OED as “shrine,” but perhaps here rather “sacred relic” as in Roman de Troie, 25515; Cligès, 1194–96; Yvain, 6630–33.
966 they kiste: They exchange the kiss of peace as a formal sign of reconciliation; the custom see Nicholas J. Perella, The Kiss: Sacred and Profane, 1969, 130. Some critics have doubted that the Host and Pardoner are actually reconciled; see Burlin, Ch Fiction, 169–75.

FRAGMENT VII

Fragment VII usually follows Fragment VI in the MSS with the Ellesmere order, but in the Chaucer Society order, which Skeat adopted for his edition, VII was joined with II, forming Fragment B, to correct a geographical inconsistency (see VII.1926 and n. and the introduction to the textual notes to The Canterbury Tales). Seventeen MSS contain lines linking The Pardoner’s Tale with the Shipman’s, and three other MSS contain lines that link The Nun’s Priest’s Tale with the Second Nun’s Prologue and Tale (see textual notes to VI.944 and EpiNPT), but both links are clearly spurious.

Fragment VII is the longest and most varied of the fragments and lacks any very clear unifying theme. Paul F. Baum (Ch: A Crit. Appreciation, 1958, 74–84) argues that the tales of this fragment form a “Surprise Group,” since, though the tellers tell stories that on reflection fit their characters, they often surprise the Host’s expectations. Bernard F. Huppé (A Reading of CT, 1964, 231) emphasizes the dramatic refusal of the clergy to provide the Host with the sort of “mirth” he demands. Gaylold (PMLA 82, 1967, 226–35) suggests instead that the tales form a “literary group,” with Harry Baily acting as a kind of editor. Howard (Idea of CT, 271–88) finds rather a sort of “retrospective” unity supplied by The Nun’s Priest’s Tale read as a skeptically ironic comment on the tales that have gone before. Though the tales that make up the fragment are of varying dates of composition, the fragment itself was assembled rather late in the composition of The Canterbury Tales (see Dempser, PMLA 68, 1953, 1142–59) and perhaps never received a final redaction.

LARRY D. BENSON

The Shipman’s Tale

The Host’s words to the gentil marerorer, which follow this tale (VII.435–42), show Chaucer intended it for the Shipman. The sexual history of EpiMT II.1179, however, suggests that the tale may originally have been intended for another narrator (see note to that line). Furthermore, the pronouns we and us suggest a married female speaker. The tale may therefore have been originally intended for the Wife of Bath (Lawrence, Spec 33, 1958, 56–68, and Pratt, Sts. in Hon. of Bough, 45–79). However, the Shipman may be mimicking a female speaker; see Copland (MAE 33, 1966, 25–26), comparing Shelton’s Magnificence, 461.

The tale is a fabliau, like others of the Tales, but “nearer to the pure fabliau-type” (Brewer, in Companion to Ch, 259). The setting in St.-Denis, the snatch of French at VII.214 and several oaths might suggest a French source, but the nearest known French analogue is not very close: Le bouclier d’Ébresia (Benson and Andersson, Lit. Context, 282–311). The story belongs to a well-known folk tale type, “the lover’s gift regained”: see J. W. Spargo, Ch’s ShipT, The Lover’s Gift Regained, FFC 91, 1930, and S&A, 439–46. The closest extant analogue is Boccaccio’s Deamare 8.1 (8.2 is a similar story). A version preserved in Serçamb’s Novella 19 (text and trans. in Benson and Andersson, Lit. Context, 312–19) perhaps gave Chaucer some ideas (see Pratt, MLN 55, 1940, 142–45). Guerin (ES 52, 1971, 412–19) suggests that he used all three Italian versions. If these were Chaucer’s sources, however, he altered a great deal—particularly the ending where, in his version, the merchant’s wife excuses herself with a ready answer (VII.400–426).

Uncertainty about the tale’s narrator and the lack of any definite source have contributed to difficulties of interpretation. Lawrence (Spec 33:56–68) compares the tale with its analogues, and finds in Chaucer’s untypical ending a profeminist tendency; but Tupper sees only the standard anti-feminism (JEGP 33, 1934, 532–72). The tale may be read as simply cynical, “an immoral tale told by an immoral man” (Howard, Idea of CT, 273); but Richardson (Blameth Nat Me, 100–122) finds traditional Christian standards “embodied in the imagery,” by which the behavior of the characters is measured and found wanting. According to Silverman (PQ 32, 1953, 329–36) the situation in the tale between sex and money shows that in the Shipman’s world human relations are reduced to the level of financial transactions. Many critics see a basic irony directed at the merchant in the tale (e.g.,

The explanatory notes to The Shipman’s Tale were written by J. A. Burrow and V. J. Scattergood.