Chaucer's Pardoner and the Tyranny of Penance

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On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unacknowledged aid on this thesis.

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I. Introduction

In the context of the tale-telling game that frames the *Canterbury Tales*, the reader anticipates a wide variety of different stories and forms as each pilgrim takes his or her turn. What we do not anticipate, however, is that the Pardoner and the Wife of Bath will both turn the prologues of their tales into something starkly original. Not only are these two prologues unusually long, they also do something no other prologues do. The Pardoner and Wife both make their "professional" lives the subject of a drawn out narrative, which takes the place of their tale as the central focus of the text What strikes the reader even more, however, is that the means by which these prologue narratives are spun is a kind of "confession," in which the two pilgrims air their respective sins to the group. In both prologues, the reader (and presumably the pilgrim group) is left to question these pilgrims' motivation in publicly announcing their sins. If we look at the whole of the Pardoner's text, however, -- prologue, tale, and epilogue -- it becomes apparent that the Pardoner is performing, not just confession, but a version of the whole Sacrament of Penance. If we compare the Pardoner's text to the orthodox version of penance, both the ways in which he deviates from this model and the ways in which he conforms, should provide us with significant insights into what the Pardoner is attempting to accomplish through his use of these forms, and thus give us an insight into his underlying psychology.

In order to understand confession, one must evaluate it in the larger context of the Sacrament of Penance, of which it is only one -- though a very crucial -- part. To grasp what the Pardoner may have been trying to accomplish with his "confession," we must

first understand what the medieval Christian expected to accomplish through the successful completion of the entire sacrament.

The role of the Sacrament of Penance was understood on a number of levels, from the superficial understanding of what conditions it was meant to address, to the theoretical conception of how it affected one's relationship with God. Raymond of Peñaforte's definition is simple: "Penance is repenting past evils and not committing them again."[1] The Parson chooses to delineate these "evils" more clearly, asserting that penitence is "agayn three thynges in which we wratthe oure Lorde Jhesu Crist;/ This is to seyn, by delit in thynkynge, by reccheleesnesse in spekynge, and by wikked synful werkynge."[2] Clearly combating sin was not an end in-and-of-itself, however. Man was supposed to be moved to repent his sins out of hope that it would achieve for him three things: Forgiveness of sins, the gift of grace to do well, and the glory of heaven.[3] Before we can fully understand the significance of repentance and forgiveness of sins, however, it is important to have a rough grasp of sin itself. Medieval definitions of sin will be treated in full in a later chapter, but one theoretical understanding of sin can be briefly summarized as such: "Sin is understood in neither psychological or judicial terms (neither as a spiritual condition nor as a criminal act) but ontologically, as a derangement of the divine order."[4] To restate this in Chaucer's (the Parson's) own words "...in mannes synne is every manere ordre or ordinaunce turned up-so-doun."[5] Acknowledging this conception of sin is crucial to understanding the immense reverence for the sacrament,

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[1] Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 105.
[2] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), X (I) 109-10.
[3] Chaucer, X (I) 282.
[4] Lee W. Patterson, "The 'Parson's Tale' and the Quitting of the 'Canterbury Tales'," *Traditio-Studies in Ancient & Medieval History,Thought & Religion* 34 (1978): 341.
[5] Chaucer, X (I) 259.

for if sin is seen as a fundamentally destructive force, then the process by which this destruction is mended -- by which the penitent's spiritual state is made whole -- is an important one, indeed. Patterson captures powerfully the extent to which penitence was seen as a spiritual "cure":

> In medieval thinking, sin results in insufficiency: the fall was a defection that literally unmade (*de-ficere*) man, drawing him back to the nothingness from which he was originally fashioned. And its effect was to alienate him from God, from nature, and from himself. The antidote to this alienation is an act of atonement accomplished through penance: by contrition, confession, and satisfaction the sinner can receive the divine grace that will recover for him the wholeness destroyed by sin.[6]

Clearly, however, the ultimate expectation of confession was salvation, a potential that the Parson was certain it could deliver:

> Manye been the weyes espirituels that leden folk to oure Lord Jhesu Crist and to the regne of glorie. / Of which weyes ther is a ful noble wey and a ful covenable, which may nat fayle to man ne to woman that thurgh synne hath mysgoon fro the righte way of Jerusalem celestial; / and that wey is cleped Penitence, of which man sholde gladly herknen and enquere with al his herte.[7]

And if nothing else worked to incite the sinner to penance, there was always fear -- "Failure of repentance, after all, is punished by God eternally."[8]

The contemporary understanding of sin is complex and difficult to grasp. The workings of the Sacrament of Penance, which responds to sin on such a wide range of levels, are thus themselves hard to define. The imagery through which penance was often presented, however, was designed to aid, not only in presenting the form, but also in demonstrating certain truths about the nature of this crucial Sacrament.

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[6] Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 370-71.
[7] Chaucer, X (I) 78-80.
[8] Tentler, 133.

The Parson declares that "Penaunce is the tree of lyf to hem that it receyven,"[9] a metaphor which will serve a surprising literal function. Although the workings of penitence may be difficult to characterize, the form of the sacrament itself is clearly defined: it is divided into a three-part structure. To return to the Parson's metaphor:

> Penitence...may be likned to a tree. / The roote of this tree is Contricioun, that hideth hym in he herte of hym that is verray repentaunt, right as the roote of a tree hydeth hym in the erthe. / Of the roote of Contricioun spryngeth a stalke that bereth braunches and leves of Confessioun, and fruyt of Satisfacioun.[10]

The tree metaphor reveals, firstly, the three crucial elements: contrition, confession, and satisfaction. As the image implies, these elements were to be completed, if possible in the order stated -- in the order the tree of penitence grows. More powerfully, however, the tree conveys the importance of the unity of the sacrament. Just as all the elements of the tree are linked in one body, so too are the elements of penitence fundamentally intertwined.

Contrition is the most difficult element of the sacrament to define, for it is an internal and emotional, and therefore subjective, state of being. In the brief definition contrition was identified as "...sorrow proceeding from the love of God."[11] This emphasis on the emotion of sorrow is the most common element that links various contemporary treatments of the subject -- beyond that there was much disagreement. The Parson includes in his understanding of contrition the necessity that it include the intention to complete the other two parts of the sacrament, defining it as "the verray

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[9] Chaucer, X (I) 126.
[10] Chaucer, X (I) 111-13.
[11] Tentler, 19.

sorwe that man recyveth in his herte for his synnes, with sad purpos to shryve hym, and to do penaunce, and neveremoore to do synne."[12]

The workings of contrition are equally difficult to pin down, but they had much to do with the understanding that the state of sin is one of thralldom, and that the achievement of contrition has the power to break these bonds. The Parson's definitions, accordingly, assert that "contricioun delivereth a man fro synne," "destroyeth the prisoun of helle," "and delivereth the soule fro...the servage of synne."[13]

Although the discussions of contrition are elaborate and exhaustive, there is nonetheless a great deal of ambiguity. On the subject of confession, however, the literature cannot be clearer: there are precise standards to which a penitent's confession must conform. At the broadest level, "...Confessioun is verray shewynge of synnes to the preest. / This is to seyn verray, for he moste confessen hym of alle he condiciouns that bilongen to his synne as ferforth he kan."[14] The Parson begins his treatment of the subject with the declaration "The seconde partie of Penitence is Confessioun, that is signe of contricioun."[15] This brief statement not only puts confession in its context within the sacrament, it establishes from the first the extent to which the three parts are interrelated. Confession must not only follow from contrition -- must not only be made when the penitent has reached a minimal level of contrition -- but also must show evidence of this contrition. Just as contrition alone does not usually suffice as penance ("[the penitent] must also intend to confess aloud all of his sins, be contrite for all of them, and desire to

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[12] Chaucer, X (I) 128.
[13] ibid, X (I) 301,310-11.
[14] ibid, X (I) 317-18.
[15] ibid, X (I) 315.

confess all of them"[16]), so too is confession without demonstration of contrition inadequate -- "mechanical recitation of sins in not enough...The penitent must be contrite and must *intend* to stop sinning."[17]

The purpose of confession, then, is twofold. Clearly it is intended to provide the confessor with some gauge of the penitent's worthiness for absolution. If the penitent seemed ill prepared for his confession, either because he did not fully grasp the nature of his sins, or because his manner in confessing did not demonstrate adequate contrition, then he could clearly not be granted full absolution. On another level, however, (and one which is not agreed upon by all pastoral authors of the period), the act of confession could be used as a means to try to arouse sufficient contrition, at which point the sinner could become a penitent in earnest. Ultimately, however, the confession of sins was supposed to bring about amendment, for "...the best confession is one that leads to a change of life. The work of the penitent is primarily one of sorrow and reformation."[18] If in the long run confession was intended to produce amendment, in the short-term, clearly a good confession should lead the penitent to satisfaction, and thus the completion of his penance.

Definitions of satisfaction do not abound in the literature of this period the way those for contrition and confession do. On a basic level, the performance of satisfaction is comprised of "expiatory acts of charity and self-denial."[19] The Parson doesn't even

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[16] Tentler, 131.
[17] ibid, 120.
[18] ibid, 105.
[19] ibid, 18.

bother to include a definition in his tale, but rather lists the different acts by which it may be completed, organized under the headings of "Almes" and "Bodily Peyne."[20]

While the definition of satisfaction is rather intuitive, its intended effects are not nearly so obvious. Clearly there is a dimension of obedience, both to the church and to God, and of disciplining the sinful flesh. Beyond that, however, the power of example in influencing one's fellow Christians was clearly deemed important, for the Parson urges his fellow pilgrims to "'Dooth digne fruyt of Penitence'; for by this fruyt may men knowe this tree, and nat by the roote that is hyd in the herte of man, ne by the braunches, ne by the leves of Confessioun."[21]

Ultimately, the Parson's and other definitions stress the importance of the unity of the sacrament of penance. Although it will become clear, with more exhaustive examination of each of these three elements, that there are many exceptions to all of these rules, the ideal portrait of the tripartite system of confession is crucial to an understanding of any of its three parts. We cannot ignore the Parson's bold statement concerning the importance of completing the sacrament: "And right so as contricioun availleth noght withouten sad purpos of shrifte, if man have oportunitee, right so litel worth is shrifte or satisfaccioun withouten contricion."[22]

Although traditional treatments of penitence place its three elements in the order in which I have listed them above, for the purposes of analyzing the Pardoner's response to the Sacrament of Penance it will be necessary to begin with a treatment of confession. To begin with, it is the Pardoner's "confession" which draws us into this analysis of his role as penitent, and the psychology it reveals. At a more fundamental level, however, it

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[20] Chaucer, X (I) 1028-55.
[21] ibid, X (I) 114.
[22] ibid, X (I) 309.

is important to analyze what the Pardoner has willing given his audience -- the overt evidence provided by his speech act -- in order to extrapolate his position with regards to the other two parts of the sacrament.

With the help of the norms supplied by Thomas Tentler's *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* and Chaucer's own "Parson's Tale," I hope, in this next section, to develop a broad understanding of the extent to which the "Pardoner's Prologue and Tale" constitute a legitimate form of confession. Only when we have analyzed his response to this part of the sacrament can we move forward to try and understand the Pardoner's state of contrition (or possible lack thereof) and from there to the final part of the Sacrament, satisfaction.

By examining the Pardoner's response to the three parts of Penance in sequence we can develop a sense of his overall relationship to the Sacrament, and to those things -- namely sin, punishment, and forgiveness -- with which it was concerned. Examining both the ways in which he deviates from the performance of perfect Penance and the ways in which he abides by expectation can help us to understand what the Pardoner hopes to accomplish for himself through this "penance." His very inconsistent response to the Sacrament as a whole ultimately reveals just how conflicted this motivation is. Beyond the mere form of the Sacrament, if we examine his presentation of sin and forgiveness relative to normative treatments such as the "Parson's Tale," we will see just how deeply vexed the Pardoner's understanding of these concepts is. Only after examining his complex treatment, both of the Sacrament of Penance, and of concepts behind it, and the conflicting impulses revealed in this treatment, can we develop an understanding of the Pardoner for what he is -- the medieval figure of despair.

II. Confession

Auricular confession did not always take the form recognizable in Chaucer's day, nor did it always occupy so prominent a place in the Sacrament of Penance. The very importance of the sacrament itself underwent a significant change in the years prior to the Pardoner's "confession." Confession, traditionally performed only once in a Christian's lifetime (and thus most frequently as a deathbed rite), was radically redefined by the congregation, in 1215, of the Fourth Lateran Council. Under Pope Innocent III, the Council promulgated the 21st canon, *Omnis utriusque sexus*, which "bound all Christians of the age of reason to receive annually the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist."[23] This declaration of obligatory confession marked a crucial step in an evolution of the sacrament that began around the ninth century. Three other critical changes occurred in this period as well. First the penances assigned to penitents were "lightened and made arbitrary." Secondly, contrition became the central element of penitence. Finally, and intimately related to these previous changes, "the meaning of the priest's role was more radically defined and its importance in the process of forgiveness radically enhanced."[24] Clearly the priest's role took on a certain urgency with the emergence of the other changes in penance. If penances are arbitrary, then someone is needed to assign them, and if contrition is the most important element of penance, someone knowledgeable must be responsible for evaluating the penitent's state of contrition. The priest became both judge and enforcer in the reconceived Sacrament of Penance. One additional change of note was the increasing emphasis, correspondent with the de-emphasis of satisfaction, on the importance of privacy in performance of confession, as not just the ideology, but the physical space assigned to the sacrament, underwent redefinition.

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[23] *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Lateran Coucils," 408.
[24] Tentler, 16.

It is not surprising, in light of these powerful shifting forces, that a corresponding body of literature developed. According to Craun, "As literacy increased among Western Europeans in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, so...did scripturalism, the practice of using the written word to establish norms and values and so to control conduct."[25] But, as with these other manifestations of change, what begun prior to Fourth Lateran was radically expanded by *omnis utriusque sexus*, as the "Council...and its offshoots, local synods, designed a movement of pastoral care to practice scripturalism within a far larger community: the entire Western Church."[26] The orientation of the religious community was shifting in a direction that looks forward to the understanding of the role of penitence that we presume in Chaucer's *Tales*. The pastoral movement's "cadre of religious teachers were parish priests and mendicants, evangelists whose orientation differed greatly from that of the inward-looking monks who had dominated the church in the preceding centuries....Its basic scripturalist activities were preaching, directing confession, and admonishing individuals."[27]

Tentler has asserted that "...a primary goal of the literature on confession was to instruct and exhort penitents to confess well,"[28] and it attempted to do so through an extremely detailed enumeration of all the components expected to comprise (to borrow Tentler's term) the "good, complete confession".[29] These rubrics for good confession were, for the most part, organized into various forms of mnemonics, either following the structuring principal of an acknowledged formula, such as the Ten Commandments, the

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[25] Edwin D.Craun, *Lies, Slander, and Obscenity in Medieval English Literature: Pastoral Rhetoric and the Deviant Speaker*, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 10.
[26] Ibid, 10.
[27] Ibid, 10.
[28] Tentler, 104.
[29] Ibid, 104.

five senses, or the seven deadly sins, or constructing a pithy verse (often in rhymed Latin) to aid the recollection of both priest and penitent. For the purposes of this paper, however, I will use a different organizing principal. In order to make simultaneous use of both the popular penitential literature, and of the Parson's treatment of penance, I will break down my analysis of the Pardoner's "confession" into three main areas of discussion: the speaking situation in confession, completeness of confession, and the rhetoric of confession.

The speaking situation is the obvious place to begin in our analysis of the Pardoner, for it is precisely the conditions under which his "confession" is made which initially arouse our curiosity about his motives. This "confession" comes under the auspices of the tale-telling game that Chaucer's host has established in the "General Prologue," causing both his fellow pilgrim, and the reader alike to question what sort of game the Pardoner is playing with his audience. The Pardoner's choice of the tale-telling frame to develop an elaborate and incriminating "confession" is not only an unorthodox religious gesture, it is also a bizarre way to fill the discursive space of the prologue. Like the Wife, he turns his prologue, which should take a subsidiary role to the tale, into the centerpiece of his text, by making himself, rather than the figures of his tale, the central spectacle. The composition of this audience is another matter worth note, for while there are a number of religious figures among the pilgrims, there are also an equal number of decidedly impious ones. The manner in which the tale is introduced is also worth note: the Host demands that the Pardoner take his turn in the game (and the pilgrims plead that it not be too vulgar), to which he responds "'I graunte, ywis,' quod he, 'but I moot thynke /

Upon som honest thyng while that I drynke."[30] The subject matter of his tale is, thus, not carefully planned, but rather decided on a drunken whim.

With these elements of the superficial speaking situation in mind, we can turn to the orthodox understanding of the conditions under which confession should be spoken. Tentler makes reference to sixteen conditions of a good confession[31] that were commonly cited in penitential manuals, and it is primarily these sixteen conditions that I have in mind in my analysis of the Pardoner in these sections.

To begin with, the Pardoner's "confession" is clearly not *secret*: he is confessing to a large band of pilgrims, with whom, for the most part, he is barely acquainted. The same *Omnius utriusque sexus* which required annual confession, also established the "seal of confession," which not only binds the priest to secrecy, but it "also binds the penitent: to avoid speaking of his or her confession and even to avoid thinking on it after it has been made."[32] The secrecy of confession had become an important feature of the newly defined Sacrament of Penance, and one penitential manuals sought ardently to defend. These manuals "overtly promote the private and secretive nature of confession in order to eliminate the obstacles that would hinder a complete and honest confession."[33] The public nature of the Pardoner's confession thus violated more than just one of the sixteen conditions; it also violated one of the founding principals of the Sacrament.

The Pardoner's "confession" is also not *laweful*, because the majority of these pilgrims, as laypeople, do not have the authority to absolve him. The public nature of his speech also violates the expectation that the penitent *tell all to one man*, for not only is he

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[30] Chaucer, VI (C) 327-28.
[31] Tentler, 106-108.
[32] Jerry Root, *Space to Speke: the Confessional Subject in Medieval Literature*, (New York: P. Lang, 1997), 74.
[33] ibid, 74.

addressing multiple persons, it is also clear that past and future confessions will not be heard by the same audience.

The Pardoner's "confession" should also be *frequent* and *prompt*, neither of which it appears to be, for we can make two assumptions based on the unusual nature of the Pardoner's speaking situation: 1) he does not confess frequently (he has reserved this remarkable occasion for his confessional speech) and 2) his confession is not prompt, for it takes the form of a general overview of his life and sins. While the Pardoner's speech is not prompt, however, it is also not *"purveyed bifore and avysed"*[34]: the Pardoner, as noted before, appears to be "confessing" on a whim, rather than having carefully prepared his speech.

Another expectation the Pardoner clearly falls short of is humility. Tentler notes that, for a confession to be *humble*, "the penitent must have an inner recognition of his lowliness and infirmity, and show humility in his external bearing by kneeling, uncovering his head, wearing somber apparel, and so on."[35] Based on his "General Prologue" portrait, in which Chaucer the Pilgrim describes a very vain man, it is apparent that the Pardoner is not *humble* in bearing. The Pardoner may uncover his head, but it is actually a token of vanity, rather than a demonstration of humility, -- "But hood, for jolitee, wered he noon."[36] And though we have no exact description of his apparel, it is apparent that the Pardoner has not chosen it for its "somberness," but rather for its fashionableness. His appearance is clearly a studied construction: "Hym thoughte he

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[34] Chaucer, X (I) 1002.
[35] Tentler, 107.
[36] Chaucer, I (A) 680.

rood al of the newe jet."[37] With an examination of the contents of the Pardoner's "Prologue" and "Tale" it will become obvious that he is even less humble in his speech.

Thus, it is clear that the speaking situation of the Pardoner's "confession" is not suitable on nearly all grounds. According to contemporary definitions of the good confession, the Pardoner's speech is not *secret*, *laweful*, *told all to one man*, *frequent*, *prompt*, *'purveyed bifore and avysed*,' or *humble*. By nearly all standards, then, the Pardoner's "confession" would not be an adequate completion of this part of the Sacrament -- it would in no way forward him in a quest for absolution. In light of all of these inadequacies in the Pardoner's "confession," it is interesting to note that there is one area in which he apparently does concur with the normative example. Though by all other tokens the speaking situation is not appropriate, his speech act is apparently quite *voluntary*. This anomaly, however, merely returns us to our original question of the Pardoner's motives.

One important final matter of note: both confession to a confessor with inadequate knowledge, and confession to one without the power to absolve were among the four or five "cases for reiteration"[38] commonly cited. Thus by these tokens alone the Pardoner's "confession" is rendered essentially worthless according to sacramental norms.

Tentler asserts that, "of all assumptions the most universal is that a good confession must be complete,"[39] an expectation which will clearly be problematic for the Pardoner. According to the Parson and other penitential treatises, a "complete" confession must be *faithful*, or truthful, *strong*, with nothing omitted (the Parson asserts

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[37] ibid, I (A) 682.
[38] Tentler, 123-24.
[39] ibid, 109.

that one must not let shame interfere[40]), and *whole*, not refraining from confessing any mortal sins.[41] On top of all this, a good confession must contain an account of any "aggravating circumstances" which pertain to the penitent's sins, for "the penitent must tell the priest anything about the sin that makes it more blameworthy and offensive to God's law."[42]

Evaluating the "completeness" of the Pardoner's "confession" is clearly more difficult than evaluating the speaking situation. We know right off the bat that his confession is not "purveyed bifore and avysed," and thus will be inadequate in certain important respects. Such a confession, according to the Parson, will lack two crucial elements: it will not "comprehend the number and greteness of sins,"[43] and it will not be whole. The understanding was that advance preparation was necessary to recollect all sins, and that "forgetting sins through negligence was a serious fault."[44] In order to understand how completely the Pardoner has confessed his sins, we must first examine both the content of the Pardoner's "Prologue" (those sins which he is "confessing") and the contemporary portrayal of sin itself.

If the conditions of confession occupied a large part of pastoral literary texts, the definition of sin held an even larger place. The purpose of this disproportionate attention is clear: if priests were to examine effectively, and penitents to confess completely, clearly the sins that were the subjects of these confessions must be well defined. Not only was it important that the penitent be aware of which of his actions may have constituted a sin, he must also be prompted, by the exhaustive enumeration of species of

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[40] Chaucer, X (I) 983.
[41] Tentler, 106-108.
[42] ibid, 116.
[43] Chaucer, X (I) 1004.
[44] Tentler, 111.

sin, to recall those sins he might otherwise forget. The method of treating sin, as a subtopic, was similar to that employed in the body of literature as a whole. Sins were most often subjected to some familiar organizing principal, such as the Ten Commandments, the five senses, or, as in the Parson's case, the Seven Deadly Sins. Aggravating circumstances were presented in the form, once again, of a pithy verse, one of the most popular of which was found in *Raymundia*:

> Quis, quid, vbi, per quos, quotiens, cur, quomodo, quando,
> Quilibet obseruet, animae medicamina dando. [45]
>
> Who, what, and where, by what help and by whose help;
> Why, how, and when.

The Parson makes a much more detailed foray into this topic, attempting to illustrate exactly where these circumstances might be relevant to the penitent's experiences. He is concerned with: "what thow art that doost the synne" (young or old, male or female, layman or cleric), how the sin is done, and whether it is "grete or smal," how long the sin is continued, where the sin has been committed (your own house or others'; holy place or secular), whether one has incited or consented to another man's sin, how many times one has sinned, why one has sinned (by self-temptation, by other's temptation, or by force against another), and "in what mannere he hath doon his synne."[46] The Pardoner, however, not only fails to make explicit reference to his aggravating circumstances, but also leaves out entire species of sin, which will divulge themselves as we develop a more in depth picture of his psychology. In the meantime, however, it is revealing to look at the sins the Pardoner does "confess," and what they reveal about the self-portrait he is painting.

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[45] ibid, 117.
[46] Chaucer, X (I) 959-74.

The primary sin that the Pardoner "confesses" is Greed -- indeed he makes it the theme both his prologue and tale -- a sin which was intimately associated with the Pardoner's very profession. A pardoner was "a churchman, usually a cleric, empowered to transmit 'indulgences' to the faithful."[47] Pardoners were hired by religious foundations to sell these indulgences to raise money for construction and maintenance of hospitals, churches, etc. Such "professional fund raisers, pardoners...would undertake to obtain pardons, and, with the permission of the archdeacons of the dioceses (who required a fee), travel about a given area, appearing in churches to offer their indulgences to those willing and able to pay."[48] Penitents were encouraged to buy these indulgences by the instruction that "the giving of alms to the church was the required evidence of true penitence."[49] Cleric and layman alike, however, recognized that "the system was easily abused," and pardoners were thus "frequent objects of satire."[50]

The Pardoner thus makes himself the object of his own kind of satire of pardoners. In regards to his preaching he claims that "My theme is alwey oon, and evere was -- / *Radix malorum est cupiditas*,[51]" a maxim ironically applicable to the whole of his "Prologue." Beginning with this statement, the Pardoner gives a detailed account of his professional practices that leave the reader with a clear sense of his lack of professional scruples. Apparently this is not plain enough for the Pardoner, for if we have missed the method behind his madness, he spells it out for us in no uncertain terms: "For myn entente is nat but for to wynne, / And nothyng for correccioun of synne."[52] He proceeds

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[47] Christine Ryan Hilary, "The Pardoner," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 823.
[48] ibid, 823.
[49] ibid, 823.
[50] ibid, 823-24.
[51] Chaucer, VI (C) 333-34.
[52] ibid,VI (C) 403-404.

from here to mention other sins, but, lest his audience forget, he asserts his message a second time: "I preche of no thyng but for coveityse / ... / Thus kan I preche agayn that same vice / Which that I use, and that is avarice."[53] Lest we not be convinced, he reiterates his statement one more time: "I preche nothyng but for coveitise. / Of this mateere it oghte ynogh suffise."[54]

The Pardoner also "confesses" to other, less explicit species of greed. The Parson identifies "deceite bitwixe marchaunte and marchant"[55] as a species of greed. By the nature of his profession, the Pardoner is highly susceptible to such sin. The Pardoner's exchanges, though ostensibly spiritual in intent, were nonetheless commercial in reality. His sale of pardons, and the offerings he accepts for relics, entailed exchanges of money, in return for which his patrons expected forgiveness and well-being. Because the Pardoner misrepresents his "products" -- he does not sincerely offer absolution, and his relics are obviously phony -- he is clearly guilty of precisely the "deceite" which the Parson condemns. The Parson further elaborates on the sinfulness of the violations of the church, such as those that the Pardoner performs under the auspices of the papal seal: "What seye we thanne of hem that pilen and doon extorcions to hooly chirche? . . . / . . . They been the develes wolves that stranglen the sheep of Jhesu Crist."[56] Although the Pardoner is licensed for the sale of pardons, he makes it clear that his professional practice violates the boundaries of this license. Even the Pardoner's propensity for lying,

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[53] ibid, VI (C) 424-28.
[54] ibid, VI (C) 433-34.
[55] ibid, X (I) 776.
[56] ibid, X (I) 766-67.

which he reveals with pride, can come under the heading of greed, for, according to the Pardoner, "Of Avarice comen eek lesynges."[57]

The Pardoner's next most prominent sin is most appropriately identified as *Ire*. Although he never uses the term itself, it is clear, according to the Parson's definitions, that it is under this category that his professed lying properly belongs. Lying, in fact, is given a separate passage in this section ("Now wol I speken of lesynges, which generally is fals signyficaunce of word, in entente to deceyven his evene-Cristene"[58]), and its own individual species are examined. It is clear that the Pardoner is guilty of several of these species, including lying which "turneth to the ese and profit of o man, and to the disese and damage of another man," lying which "comth of delit for to lye," and lying which "comth for he wole sustene his word."[59] The Pardoner's fondness for lying to increase his own profit is an unmistakable feature of his self-professed greed. The Pardoner boasts of the money he wins through his devious proclamation that the sinful "...shal have no power, ne no grace / To offren to my relikes in this place,[60]" claiming "By this gaude have I wonne, yeer by yeer / An hundred mark sith I was pardoner."[61] His very posture in the pulpit is a lie, for, having revealed the particular tricks of his trade, he generalizes this activity with "Thus spitte I out my venym under hewe / Of hoolynesse, to semen hooly and trewe."[62] Beyond mere greed, however, the Pardoner's joy in the mere act of lying is also evident in his self-portrait:

> I preche so as ye han herd bifoore
> And telle an hundred false japes moore.

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[57] ibid, X (I) 794.
[58] ibid, X (I) 607.
[59] ibid, X (I) 608-10.
[60] ibid, VI (C) 383-84.
[61] ibid, VI (C) 389-90.
[62] ibid, VI (C) 421-22.

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Myne handes and my tonge goon so yerne
That it is joye to se my bisynesse,[63]

he proclaims with pride.

Envy is a sin of nearly equal note in the "Prologue." The Parson identifies two categories of envy: "sorwe of oother mannes goodnesse and his prosperitee" and "joye of oother mannes harm,"[64] under the latter brand of which the Pardoner's sins seem to fall. Clearly the Pardoner is guilty of "bakbityng," or detraction, for he asserts that when someone angers him "Thanne wol I stynge hym with my tonge smerte / In prechyng, so that he shal nat asterte / To been defamed falsely, if that he / Hath trespased to my bretheren or to me."[65] By the same token, then, he is guilty of the species of "accusynge, as whan man seketh occasioun to annoyen his neighebor."[66] The Pardoner's disclosure of these sins reveals much about his attitude both towards his profession, and towards the victims of it. He describes the circumstances in which his "bakbityng" occurs:

For certes, many a predicacion
Comth ofte tyme of yvel entencioun;
Som for plesance of folk and flaterye,
To been avaunced by ypocrisye,
And som for veyne glorie, and som for hate.[67]

Though this defamation is clearly associated with both with his greed (through the desire to protect his professional posture from criticism) and pride, the Pardoner also reveals that his motivation for evil need not be so clearly defined -- it can stem merely from "hate." The Pardoner's envy, as he confesses it, is among his most dangerous sins, for it allows him to affect the diminution, not only of his victims' material wealth, but also of

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[63] ibid, VI (C) 393-99.
[64] ibid, X (I) 490-91.
[65] ibid, VI (C) 413-16.
[66] ibid, X (I) 511.
[67] ibid, VI (C) 407-11.

their public identities. Significantly, the Pardoner's apparent propensity towards revenge gives the lies to his claim "I preche nothynge but for coveitise,"[68] a revelation whose importance will be crucial to a later understanding of the un-"confessed" Pardoner.

One of the Pardoner's more subtly confessed, but wholly pervasive sins, is that of *Pride*. Pride, the first of the seven sins the Parson treats, is attributed a vast number of different species, of which the Pardoner demonstrates at least eight. Based on what he tells the Pilgrims about his professional practices and the motives behind them, it is obvious the Pardoner is guilty of *avauntynge*, *ypocrisie*, *despit*, *inpudence*, *swellynge of herte*, *strif*, *veyneglorie*, and *janglynge*, at the very least. The entire "Prologue" has the effect of demonstrating that he is inpudent, a man "that for his pride hath no shame of his synnes,"[69] a point which he adequately drives home with the penultimate couplet of the "Prologue": "For though myself be a ful vicious man, / A moral tale yet I yow telle kan."[70] But beyond a mere lack of shame for his sins, the Pardoner actually appears to revel in them. Clearly, then, he is an avauntor, "he that bosteth of the harm or of the bountee that he hath doon,"[71] and by the same token demonstrates *swellynge of herte*, as "whan a man rejoyseth hym of harm that he hath doon."[72] The Pardoner's final rant in the "Prologue" is evidence enough of both these sins:

> I wol have moneie, wolle, chese, and whete
> Al were it yeven of the povereste page,
> Or of the povereste wydwe in a village,
> Al sholde hir children sterve for famyne.[73]

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[68] ibid, VI (C) 433.
[69] ibid, X (I) 396.
[70] ibid, VI (C) 459-60.
[71] ibid, X (I) 393.
[72] ibid, X (I) 397.
[73] ibid, VI (C) 448-51.

It is precisely this sort of passage that baffles the reader, for the Pardoner not only reveals his sin of greed, but also takes pride in the brutal manner in which he satisfies his avaricious appetite.

The Pardoner also demonstrates sins of pride that relate to his behavior in the pulpit. The scornful manner in which he speaks of the parishes he has duped reveals that he is guilty of *despit* -- that he "hath desdeyn of his neighebor -- that is to seyn, of his evene-Cristene"[74] -- as evidenced by his interpretation of why some of his methods of preaching are successful: "For lewed peple loven tales olde; / Swiche thynges kan they wel reporte and holde."[75] Clearly the Pardoner is mocking the ignorance and simplicity of his 'even Christian' -- he has contempt for those without the sophistication to see beyond the insincerity on which he prides himself. Though he takes pride in his preaching abilities, nonetheless the Pardoner is also, presumably, guilty of *janglynge* -- "whan a man speketh to muche biforne folk...and taketh no keep what he seith"[76] -- for while his words are carefully chosen to produce effect, it is nonetheless notable that there is no real meaning behind them. Most of the time the Pardoner's sermons are composed of "false japes," which are clearly worthless. But even when his words are able to produce some meaningful affect, the fact that they are not uttered with this intent nullifies the Pardoner's credit in speaking them. If his real "entente is nat but for to wynne,"[77] then there is no connection between his words and any meaning they may appear to convey, so that the Pardoner, in his sermons, "clappeth as a mille."[78] The Pardoner's relish for lying is once again relevant in terms of pride as well. The Pardoner knows that the pardons he

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[74] ibid, X (I) 394.
[75] ibid, VI (C) 437-38.
[76] ibid, X (I) 405.
[77] ibid, VI (C) 403.
[78] ibid, X (I) 397.

offers are not agents of God's grace, any more than the relics he carries can deliver what he promises, and yet he misrepresents them with impunity. The sin of *strif*, in which a man "werreieth trouthe wityngly,"[79] is clearly just such a form of misrepresentation or deception. Because of his corruption of the tools of his profession, the entire enterprise in which the Pardoner is engaged represents a resolute commitment to "werreieth the trouthe," just as clear as the "false japes" he expounds from the pulpit.

The most obvious manifestation of the Pardoner's pride is in his *veyneglorie*, which is "to have pompe and delit in his temporeel hyness, and glorify hym in this wordly estaat."[80] His pride in his professional acumen is one evidence of this, for he appears to "delit" in the superiority of his intellect and rhetorical skills over those of his congregations. He variously boasts that "By this gaude have I wonne, yeer by yeer / An hundred mark sith I was pardoner,"[81] and "...it is joye to se my bisynesse,"[82] ultimately suggesting it would be foolish for one of such natural ability to not pursue his calling to the fullest: "What trow ye," he questions, "that whiles I may preche, / And wynne gold and silver for I teche, / That I wol lyve in poverte wilfully?"[83] He even appears to lord his abilities over his fellow pilgrims, boasting in the final lines of his prologue:

> By God, I hope I shal yow telle a thyng
> That shal by reson been at youre likyng.
> For though myself be a ful vicious man,
> A moral tale yet I yow telle kan,[84]

with the implication that his tale-telling abilities may be superior to the others'.

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[79] ibid, X (I) 400.
[80] ibid, X (I) 404.
[81] ibid, VI (C) 389-90.
[82] ibid, VI (C) 399.
[83] ibid, VI (C) 439-41.
[84] ibid, VI (C) 457-460.

Hypocrisie is one final sin of pride to which the Pardoner "confesses." The Parson defines an "ypocrite" as "he that hideth to shewe hym swich as he is and sheweth hym swich as he noght is,"[85] a definition which clearly fits the Pardoner's self-presentation -- "Thus spitte I out my venym under hewe / Of hoolynesse, to semen hooly and trewe"[86]-- to those to whom he preaches.

Gluttony is another sin in which the Pardoner appears to take great pride, for while it does not comprise a large part of his "confession," it is, nonetheless, the last image with which he leaves his audience:

> I wol noon of the apostles countrefete;
> I wol have moneie, wolle, chese, and whete
> .....
> Nay, I wol drynke licour of the vyne
> And have a joly wenche in every toun.[87]

He is apparently not content to be a figure of mere greed, but wants to paint a portrait of wretched excess as well.

The sin of *sloth* plays a rather minor role in the "confession" of the Pardoner's "Prologue." *Ydelnesse* and *lachesse*, or laziness, are among the species of sloth that the Parson catalogues, which two the Pardoner clearly embodies. He makes it clear that he uses dishonest means, not only to achieve the greatest monetary gains, but to avoid having to do other, more difficult kinds of work: "I wol nat do no labour with myne handes, / Ne make baskettes and lyve therby,"[88] he emphatically asserts.

There is one final sin to whose species the Pardoner gleefully confesses -- that of *Lechery*. With his assertion that he will "have a joly wenche in ever toun," the Pardoner

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[85] ibid, X (I) 393.
[86] ibid, VI (C) 421-22.
[87] ibid, VI (C) 447-53.
[88] ibid, VI (C) 444-45.

clearly implicates himself in the sin of *fornicacioun*, "that is bitwixe man and womman that been nat maried."[89] It is notable, however, that the Pardoner "confesses" this sin only once in his prologue.

Although the Pardoner has not shied away from implicating himself in any of the Seven Deadly Sins, it is still not apparent that his confession meets the criteria of "complete." It is notable that the sins that he emphasizes in his "confession" are among the most material, superficial species that the Parson lists. If we examine the more subtle, intertextual evidence within the "Prologue," it becomes apparent that there certain sins of which the Pardoner is guilty that he pointedly ignores in his "confession."

Although the Pardoner does make certain prideful sins evident, for example, there are others he fails to mention, of which the reader (and the pilgrims) are nonetheless aware. The Pardoner makes no mention of his penchant for "superfluitee of clothynge,"[90] a sin of outward pride, yet his "General Prologue" portrait would suggest that he undeniably interested in his appearance. The description of his physical appearance is that of a silly, vain girl:

> This Pardoner hadde heer as yelow as wex,
> .....
> And therwith he his shuldres overspradde;
> .....
> But hood, for jolitee, wered he noon,
> For it was trussed up in his walet.
> Hym thoughte he rood al of the newe jet[91]

The pride that the Pardoner takes in his rhetoric is also not wholly confessed. Although this pride is readily apparent in his language, he nonetheless does not "confess" it in the

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[89] ibid, X (I) 864.
[90] ibid, X (I) 416.
[91] ibid, I (A) 675-82.

same explicit way in which he confesses his pride in the sins he has committed, or in his lying.

Hypocrisy is another sin of pride that the Pardoner has not completely confessed. Although he tells his audience that he is a hypocrite with regard to the buyers of his pardons, it is doubtful that he has revealed the full extent of his hypocrisy. As the reader is uncertain why the Pardoner "confesses" his sins, we are thus uncertain how much of the self-portrait he presents is real, and how much he "hideth to shewe hym swich as he is."

It also appears that the Pardoner is guilty of other forms of envy. Although he confesses his joy at the harm of an enemy, whom he will "stynge...so that he shal nat asterte / To been defamed falsly,"[92] his envy seems to move beyond the level of mere vengefulness. The Pardoner professes indifference of others' spiritual welfare, claiming: "I rekke nevere, whan that they been beryed, / Though that hir soules goon a-blakeberyed,"[93] but the reader cannot help but suspect that this indifference is not entirely genuine. Based on the other elements of the Pardoner's self-portrait, we cannot help but suspect that, if anything, he takes delight in the possibility of others' spiritual ruin, thus making the him guilty of another of the Parson's species of envy: joy of another man's spiritual harm.

One final sin of notable omission falls under the heading of lechery: though the Pardoner does admit to "fornicacioun," the "General Prologue" portrait suggests that his ctual lechery may be of a different species. "I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare,"[94]

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[92] ibid, VI (C) 413-15.
[93] ibid, VI (C) 405-06.
[94] ibid, I (A) 691.

Chaucer the Pilgrim assesses, suggesting that the Pardoner displays an abnormality sexuality -- that may be, in fact, either a eunuch, or a homosexual.

There are other sins implicit in the "Prologue" which will become apparent after we examine the Pardoner's state of contrition. For the meantime, however, it is apparent that the Pardoner's "confession" does not, in fact, comply with the criteria for completeness. It does not appear to be *faithful*, as we can surmise that the Pardoner is lying in at least one instance: it is clear that, whether or not he is a homosexual, the Pardoner does not, in fact, have a "joly wenchen in every toun." This "confession" is also not *whole*, for the Pardoner has refrained from telling certain of his mortal sins (and perhaps his worst sins). Perhaps most significantly, the Pardoner's speech is not *strong*, for though his demeanor is all bluster and bravado, the Pardoner has nonetheless omitted certain sins. We are left to wonder if, in spite of his boasting of some sins, he is too ashamed to confess others.

If we examine, finally, the rhetoric of the Pardoner's prologue, we are led to the same ultimate conclusion: his speech violates nearly all the conditions of rhetoric for an orthodox confession. One of the primary criteria for the rhetoric is that it be *simple*, concentrating on the sin in question and not lapsing into storytelling. It is almost laughable to consider the "Pardoner's Prologue" in this context, as lapsing into storytelling is precisely what the Pardoner does -- indeed he places his "confession" in the context of a storytelling contest. As has been noted throughout, the Pardoner's speech is also not *ashamed*, as he makes every effort to establish his pride in his sins. By the same token, it is not the least bit *tearful* (at least by all external measures), for he neither sheds tears, nor appears to have sorrow in his heart. The Pardoner's rhetoric is also not

discreet, for uses vulgar, suggestive language. Not only might his invocation of the "joly wenche," and the implicit pleasure he derives from her, be inappropriate for the ears of a priest (as it might potentially arouse desire), his use of the phrase "By God" at the end of his prologue constitutes precisely the kind of vulgar swearing he condemns in his tale. Despite the apparent bluntness of the language, however, it is clear that the manner of his telling has obscured certain sins, so that his rhetoric is also not *unadorned*, or exhibiting a minimum of obscurity.

One final criterion to which we must subject the Pardoner's "Prologue" is that of purity. To be *pure* means to have the right intention in confessing. Are the Pardoner's intentions pure? At the very least we know they are suspect. In order to get at an understanding of his intentions, we must first arrive at an understanding of the second part of penance, contrition, and thereby evaluate the Pardoner's personal state.

It is clear, thus, that the Pardoner's performance of the sacramental element of confession does not comply with the normative model. The Pardoner fails to meet nearly all expectations of the speaking situation of confession, often behaving in direct defiance of these expectations. When, for example, his confession should be *secret*, *laweful*, and *all to one man*, the Pardoner instead "confesses" to a large group of mixed composition, none of who is his normal confessor. The Pardoner's "confession" also fails to meet the criteria of completeness, for he omits, not only aggravating circumstances, but also deadly sins of which it is clear he is guilty. Even the rhetoric of this "confession" is unorthodox. The Pardoner once again flies in the face of expectation by telling stories when he should be *simple*, acting proud when he should be *ashamed*, and seeming triumphant when he should be *tearful*. The Pardoner's "confession," then, is clearly not a

confession in any true understanding of the word. Far from being a "good, complete confession," the Pardoner's suggests that he has strayed far from the "weye cleped Penitence."

III. Contrition and Rhetoric

The Parson defines contrition as "verray sorwe that a man receyveth in his herte for his synnes, with sad purpos to shryve hym, and to do penaunce, and neveremoore to do synne."[95] In order to understand the extent to which the Pardoner is contrite, then, we must study both his intentions in confessing, and the nature of his attitude towards the sins he so gleefully "confesses." But just as we must question the truthfulness and sincerity of the Pardoner's "confession," so too must we look, not only at his expressed response to contrition, but also at the implied response which emerges as we develop a better understanding of the Pardoner's psychology. By examining the nature of the Pardoner's first (and most influential) sin in the context of the Augustinian theory of sin, we will develop a portrait of how the Pardoner perceives his own spiritual state. Only with these tools in mind can we then make an accurate analysis of the Pardoner's complex response to the sacramental element of contrition.

In terms of outward demeanor, the Pardoner is anything but contrite, in the simplest understanding of the word. Briefly, contrition is intended to denote "sorrow proceeding from the love of God,"[96] an emotion the Pardoner's behavior flagrantly contradicts. Although it was understood that contrition is an inward state, and thus difficult to gauge from the outside, it was nonetheless expected that the penitent would exhibit a few behavioral tendencies. We know that confession was intended to be "tearful," whether inwardly or outwardly, as well as humble and ashamed, all of which criteria were clearly intended to demonstrate the adequate contrition necessary before the penitent could be granted absolution. The Pardoner, as has already been demonstrated, displayed none of these characteristics, throughout the pilgrimage and especially during

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[95] Chaucer, X (I) 128.
[96] Tentler, 19.

his Prologue and Tale. His brazen outward demeanor alone shows he feels no shame for his sins, or revulsion against them. Clearly if he does not feel such shame or revulsion, then, he cannot be contrite, because the sorrow of contrition is meant to occur "principally because of the offense against God that a man incurs through sin."[97] The Pardoner, though he delights in how offensive his sins are to others, does not appear to find his sins personally repulsive. More importantly, the Pardoner, far from demonstrating regret, actually brags about all his sins, and the elation he experiences in sinning. When he claims "It is joye to see my bisynesse," he is clearly boasting about his rhetorical abilities, but also of his prowess in the lying and manipulation that are the centerpiece of his "bisynesse" in the pulpit. But whether you take the Pardoner's words at face value or not, ultimately his lack of contrition is made evident in his final behavior. By attempting, at the end of his tale, to once again sell his worthless pardons and false relics, the Pardoner is showing a commitment to the practice of his sins quite the opposite of a purpose to amend.

Though his behavior seems fairly cut and dried, we must nonetheless take into account, as contemporary confessors did, that contrition is ultimately an inward condition, difficult to judge externally. It is, in part, for this reason that the other two elements of Penance were so important. To establish more concretely the Pardoner's state of contrition, it will be helpful to evaluate his susceptibility to the Parson's 'Six Causes that move man to contrition.'[98]

To begin with, a primary cause of contrition is that "man remembers his sins." In the case of the Pardoner, I have already suggested that he is striving to do just the

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[97] Tentler, 253.
[98] Chaucer, X (I) 133-290.

opposite – to forget his sins. The sins that he does acknowledge in the "Prologue," the Pardoner avoids exploring in any detail (i.e. aggravating circumstances). More importantly, we sense that he deliberately avoids "confessing" his real sins. I have already suggested that he omits mention of certain species of pride, envy, and lechery; in the course of examining the Pardoner's contrition, it will become apparent that he also excludes far more grave, spiritual species of sin.

If he is not moved by remembrance of specific sins, perhaps he could be affected by remembering that "whoso does sin is thrall of sin," but again, that does not seem to be the case. Rather than acknowledging to his audience that sin is enslaving, the Pardoner instead seeks to demonstrate that he is master of his sins, and not visa-versa. His insistence on his mastery in performing his sins of choice, as well as his apparent lack of all remorse, constitute a boast that he, not sin, has the upper hand.

Perhaps, then, "dread of the day of doom and pains of hell" might be enough to arouse contrition, but again, the Pardoner's behavior vehemently denies this possibility. To begin with, his manipulations of church institutions indicate a scorn for church doctrine that could certainly extend to its teachings on hell and the punishment of sin. More specifically, the particular institutions that he affects – the sale of pardons, reverence of relics, and of course the Sacrament of Penance – are those that are directly concerned with preventing the "pains of hell." The purchase of pardons could alleviate a part of purgatorial suffering, and penance was intended to "leden folk to oure Lord Jhesu Crist and to the regne of glorie -- to ensure one ultimately did not go to hell. By showing such irreverence for the relics and pardons of his profession, the Pardon defiantly suggests that he has no need for their preventative capacities, for he is not concerned with

what they are intended to prevent. The Pardoner's scorn for the entire Sacrament of Penance (which will be handled more fully in the treatment of his rhetoric and satisfaction) takes this defiance to an even greater level. Ultimately the Pardoner's treatment of the Sacrament proclaims a deep desire to show that he not only does not fear the eternal punishment that results from lack of penance, but also has no need of the spiritual consolation penance can provide.

On a broader level, the Pardoner's willingness to boast his sins to a crowd of virtual strangers – and then to try and swindle them when he is done – suggests an absence of fear of any punishment, earthly or eternal. Interestingly, even when the Pardoner preaches an apparently orthodox version of the punishment of sin, as he does in his tale, he nonetheless seems to focus more on the temporal effects, rather than the spiritual. The lesson of the three rioters' plight -- sinners will be punished by God -- is just as expected of such an *exemplum*. The kind of punishment they receive, however, is hardly the stuff of sermons. Rather than preaching of fire and brimstone, of the worm that will not die, or of the burning which is unquenchable, the Pardoner takes his horrors from the pages of a medical text. Though the message is the same – the crime isn't worth the punishment – the effect is nonetheless quite diminished when we know the duration of the punishment to be mere moments (as the Pardoner's fictional chemist informs us). The apparent dread that affects the Pardoner -- and that he evokes in his listeners -- is of death itself, not of that which follows death. This distinction is dramatized in the "Tale," where the three rioters should seek to slay spiritual death (as in the Death which emerged at the Fall), but instead become preoccupied with the physical death which claimed their

acquaintance, and seek to slay this breed instead.[99] Based on his response to those things which are meant to avert eternal punishment, and on his apparent conception of such punishment itself, it is unlikely the Pardoner will be moved to anything by dread of the day of doom or the pains of hell.

Is the Pardoner, then, moved by recognition that "good works done before of during sin are lost"? In light of his "Prologue" self-portrait, the question is laughable. If the Pardoner as resolutely wicked as he claims, then not only would he not mourn the loss of good works, he also would have performed no good works in the first place. Any man who would take a widow's last dime, and starve her children, would not be moved to contrition by the dubious threat of losing good works done.

Is there a chance, then, that he might be moved by "remembrance of passion Jesus suffered for us"? Curiously, this, more than any other option, holds some possibility. Throughout his tale, in denouncing the rioters' sins, the Pardoner appeals to the injustice of so offending the God to whom we are so indebted, particularly for the life of his only son. Although we must take these verbal gestures with all the salt the Pardoner hands us in his prologue, they are nonetheless worth noting. Most interesting, however, is the moment, at the very end of his tale, when the Pardoner makes the gesture that some critics have interpreted as the only sincere one in all of his speech. When he acknowledges that his pardons cannot rival the absolution of Christ, "for that is best, I wol nat you deceyve,"[100] the Pardoner, some suspect, may be speaking from the heart. At the very least, he is not denying a certain respect for the Christian economy of sin and forgiveness. In light of the fact that he nonetheless continues to capitalize on his own

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[99] Robert P. Miller, "Chaucer's Pardoner, the Scriptural Eunuch, and the Pardoner's Tale," *Speculum*, 30, no. 2 (1955): 193-98.
[100] Chaucer, VI (C) 918.

brand of pardons, and that he boasts of committing the sins that he claims so offensive to God, it seems we must once more be skeptical about whether remembrance of Christ's passion could really lead him to contrition.

The last of the Parson's six causes is both the least likely to move the Pardoner, and the most potentially revealing of his plight. "Hope of three things: forgiveness of sins, the gift of grace well to do, and the glory of hevene," are supposed to move man to contrition, but clearly the Pardoner would not claim to hope for any of the above. He outright boasts that he is neither seeking to do good (and thus does not need that grace to do so), nor courting the rewards of heaven, since he surfeits himself on earthly pleasure. Forgiveness of sins, however, is a different matter. The Pardoner does not tell us he's not interested in forgiveness in the way that he tells us he's not interested in an apostolic lifestyle, but by his resolute flaunting of sin, makes it apparent he refuses to court spiritual forgiveness. Whether his audience believes him is another matter entirely. For the time being, however, we must only note that the Pardoner once again seems unsusceptible to this cause of contrition.

Have I now proved, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the Pardoner is not contrite? By no means. We can never lose sight of the fact that contrition is outwardly difficult to gauge, and that the Pardoner may be deceiving us as blatantly as he deceives his parish audiences. Before we can really evaluate the Pardoner's attitude towards his state of sin, we must try to divine the real nature of his sins, those that I have already speculated lie beneath the surface of the Pardoner's confession.

The key to understanding the Pardoner's psychology is found in his "General Prologue" portrait. Chaucer the Pilgrim, despite his naiveté, depicts a man who is not

only terribly vain, as already suggested, but who expends this vanity on a decidedly feminine appearance:

> This Pardoner hadde heer as yelow as wex,
> But smothe it heeng as dooth a strike of flex;
> . . . .
> A voys he hadde as smal as hath a goot.
> No berd hadde he, ne nevere sholde have;
> As smothe it was as it were late shave.[101]

This femininity is, in itself, puzzling, and suggestive of at least some degree of sexual abnormality -- as Carolyn Dinshaw suggests in her article "Eunuch Hermeneutics," "...the pieces of information (Chaucer) gives us (in the *GP*) -- thin hair, glaring eyes, high voice, beardlessness -- clearly suggest a eunuch, either congenital or castrated."[102] To confirm the worst of our suspicions, Chaucer the Pilgrim continues with the most penetrating line of the entire "General Prologue": "I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare."[103] Although critics have long debated the proper gloss for the second term (the most common suggestion has been that "Mare" translates to "homosexual), the first has been universally understood as denoting "eunuch." This, then, is the fundamental characteristic that defines the Pardoner. In order to understand the deep psychological impact of being a eunuch, however, we must first come to terms with the early Church's understanding of this state.

Difficult as it is for the modern reader to believe, the physical state of eunuchry was considered a sin in the early Christian Church. "The eunuch according to the Old Law is prohibited from entering the church of the Lord," and although "under the new

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[101] ibid, I (A) 675-690.
[102] Carolyn Dinshaw, "Eunuch Hermeneutics," *ELH* 55, no. 1 (1988): 30
[103] Chaucer, I (A) 691.

law he is given a place within its walls,"[104] the stigma nonetheless remained. Broadly speaking, medieval texts "associate eunuchry with immorality."[105] More specifically, "the sins attributed to eunuchs included dissoluteness, shamelessness, cunning, and viciousness."[106] It is worth noting that the Pardoner, according to his prologue, fits this description perfectly. To expand the list of sins of which the eunuch was deemed culpable, "it seems likely that a hermaphroditic or feminoid male would have been suspected of sexual deviance."[107] Once again it seems probable that the Pardoner may himself be guilty, or at least fear that he is, of such deviance. H. Marshall Leicester notes that the Pardoner seems to intentionally strengthen his audiences' suspicions of such deviance by "calling attention to the sexual oddity the *GP* notes so emphatically by deliberately shamming exaggerated virility."[108] The Pardoner's insistent "confession" that he will "...have a joly wenche in every toun"[109] thus functions, like the rest of his prologue and tale, only to intensify the reader's sense that he is concealing something.

Although the "New Law" apparently acknowledged that the eunuch was not necessarily a sinner, it is evident that the Pardoner himself has a much more "Old Law" vision. The Pardoner's preference for the Old Testament is revealed by the preeminence of Old over New Testament *exempla*. Although he is clearly well versed in the New Testament tradition, and makes reference both to the Apostles, and to Christ himself, the Pardoner nonetheless seems to discount this literature in the real development of his lesson. In conclusion of his sermon against gluttony, the Pardoner exclaims:

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[104] Miller, 183.
[105] Monica McAlpine, "The Pardoner's Homosexuality and How it Matters," *PMLA* 95 (1980): 8.
[106] Ibid, 8-9.
[107] ibid, 12.
[108] H. Marshall Leicester, *The Disenchanted Self: Representing the Subject in the Canterbury Tales*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 39.
[109] Chaucer VI (C) 453.

> But herkneth, lordynges, o word, I yow preye
> That alle the soveryn actes, dar I seye,
> Of victories in the Olde Testament,
> Thurgh verray God, that is omnipotent,
> Were doon in abstinence and in preyere.
> Looketh the Bible, and ther ye may leere.[110]

Notably, he only makes explicit reference to the Old Testament. More importantly, by moving in this passage from the more specific "Olde Testament," to the generalized "Looketh the Bible," the Pardoner is implying that the Bible's real substance lies only in its older books. This fixation with the Old Testament has important implications for the Pardoner's psychology. As Carolyn Dinshaw speculates, "the Pardoner's world is dominated by a jealous, unforgiving Old Testament God...Christ's pardon is acknowledged but the Pardoner is still convicted by the image of the forbidding father."[111] The Pardoner will not let himself off the hook, even if the Church (presumably) will.

The Pardoner, born (or early become) a eunuch, was born with the understanding that he is a sinner, though he knows not why. If we recall that, "sin results in insufficiency," then the Pardoner's own physical insufficiency (his lack of testicles) must have been a source of great anxiety. Although the New Testament only referred explicitly to spiritual insufficiency, in the Old Law construction with which the Pardoner was preoccupied, the physically inadequate were automatically suspected of sin. In the Pardoner's own logic, then, he cannot help but feel that, if sin results in insufficiency, his physical insufficiency cannot but be the result of some sin. If we recall further that, in medieval thinking, the effect of sin "was to alienate (the sinner) from God, from nature,

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[110] ibid, VI (C) 573-78.
[111] Dinshaw, 41.

and from himself,"[112] then the Pardoner must feel that the social exclusion he faces as a result of his condition is, through no fault of his own, precisely such alienation. This sense of inadequacy the Pardoner feels at the spiritual level is not only magnified in his sense of physical inadequacy, but actually serves to reinforce it. It is this state of unwilled "sinfulness" that is at the heart of the Pardoner's self-perception, and that results in the very real, very willful sins of which he is clearly guilty by the time we encounter him in his own prologue, tale, and epilogue.

To understand the process by which his theoretical sins became so graphically incarnate, we must turn to St. Augustine's doctrine on the nature and effects of sin. Appeals to such material are significant in that Augustine clearly constituted a source for Chaucer's understanding of sin (as demonstrated by the Parson's citation of Augustinian material). More intriguingly, Alfred L. Kellogg has suggested that, "the Pardoner's Prologue and Tale constitute an integrated study in Augustinian terms of the secret punishment of evil."[113] According to Kellogg, "the portrait of the Pardoner" depicts "a mind averted from God, suffering and struggling against the penalty of its own evil."[114] In the Pardoner's case, however, the "evil" from which he originally suffers is his own eunuchry. The Pardoner senses that, since he suffers the "punishment" of physical and social inadequacies, he must have committed some sin. This "sin," logically speaking, is his eunuchry, which is the cause of these sufferings. The "evil" whose penalty (and the "suffering and struggling" that ensue it) the Pardoner endures, is one that he not only cannot control, but also cannot properly identify.

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[112] Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 370.
[113] Alfred Kellogg, "An Augustinian Interpretation of Chaucer's Pardoner," *Speculum* 26 (1951), 465.
[114] ibid, 465.

Augustine understood that the human soul, while it initially shares in the goodness of its creator, is not actually part of this creator, and is thus susceptible to sin. Human nature is thus presented with the dual possibilities of following God, and of willfully turning away from his goodness -- "the will, like the intellect a part and function of the mutable nature, is free to adhere to God, the supreme good, or to avert itself from God to seek its own satisfactions in lesser goods."[115] The Fall constitutes precisely such an aversion, and "because it separated itself from the source of its being, the nature, which was created good, began to revert to the nothingness from which it came; it began to corrupt and decay."[116] The nature becomes divided against itself, so that "the good nature lusts ('concupiscit') against the evil flaw within itself, striving to remove it utterly; the destructive, corrupting evil lusts against the nature, striving to consume it and reduce it to nothing," and "the will is, through its division, faced by two alternatives -- the way of humility and the way of pride."[117] According to Augustine, "if, despite the knowledge of the existence of God, the will follows pride, it averts itself form God in full awareness of its act, and in that aversion launches itself upon the career of progressive punishment."[118] The Pardoner, though he has not (initially) willfully turned from God, once again falls victim to the theological discourse of his time, for because he believes himself, as sinful eunuch, to have performed such a willful act of perversion, he feels the effects of such an aversion. "The immediate judgment of God upon the aversion of will is misery, the misery of anguish and mental deformity,"[119] and the Pardoner, because he inevitably feels such misery, both in the social exclusion which must have resulted from

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[115] ibid, 465.
[116] ibid, 466.
[117] ibid, 466.
[118] ibid, 466.
[119] ibid, 466.

his sexual oddity, and in his sense of alienation from the Church and from God, must feel that he has already been judged. The willful sinner is not left without recourse, but the way back to spiritual wholeness becomes increasingly difficult as sin continues -- "(the sinner) may still return to God, although the difficulty of such a return has been immensely increased by the damage will and intellect have suffered from sin."[120]

Any sinner faces an inherent difficulty in reconciling himself to God. The Pardoner, however, because of the unusual nature of his "sin," faces a nearly insurmountable obstacle. In order to achieve such a reconciliation, the Pardoner must perform the very act to which his prologue, tale, and epilogue bear such a vexed relationship: the Sacrament of Penance. But if the reader has sensed all along that the Pardoner's is a very imperfect performance, perhaps even a mockery, of this sacrament, now we can understand why. The "confession" which the Pardoner offers us, explicitly in the Prologue and implicitly in the other sections, is inadequate, not because the Pardoner wills it to be so, but because he has no power to make it otherwise. The sin whose effects he feels, through no fault of his own, is also the sin that he cannot confess. Because his first and most fundamental "sin" is the one he did not commit willfully, the Pardoner cannot properly confess it. Perhaps, though he knows he is a eunuch, he does not even recognize that this is the source of his alienation, but merely feels the effects -- "The Pardoner himself seems to feel that he is in a state of alienation from Christ and the Church, a state that is more than the sum of all of his sinful acts."[121] "Ultimately, the

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[120] ibid,468.
[121] McAlpine, 16.

man who cannot confess the unnamed and unnamable sin is the Pardoner himself,"[122] and what he cannot confess cannot be forgiven him.

If the Pardoner's initial "sin" is that of eunuchry, his greatest sin, that which his prologue seeks to disguise, is that of despair. Despair, or *wanhope*, was considered so grave a condition that it constituted one of the Parson's four things which "destourben penaunce."[123] According to the Parson, "Wanhope is in two maneres: the firste wanhope is in the mercy of Crist; that oother is that they thynken that they ne myghte nat longe perservere in goodnesse. / The firste wanhope comth of that he demeth that hath synned so greetly and so ofte, and so longe leyn in synne, that he shal nat be saved."[124] The Pardoner is initially thrown into a state of despair because he recognizes that he cannot perform the necessary procedures by which he can attain the mercy of Christ. Monica McAlpine has assumed that the Pardoner is a homosexual, and thus that his "inability to approach the confessional arise partly from his perception of the gulf between what the church was prepared to forgive and what he had to confess."[125] I would like to suggest, however, that it is not that the church is not prepared to forgive his "sin," for a eunuch was not utterly condemned in fourteenth century Church, but rather that the Church is not prepared to forgive a sinner who cannot fulfill exactly the prescribed formula to achieve absolution. The Pardoner, because he cannot confess a sin that he cannot name, is forced to believe that he is not eligible for the mercy of Christ. Robert Miller has postulated that the Pardoner is (in place of or in addition to his physical condition) a *eunuchus non Dei*, a man whose eunuchry is "the result of an act of will...this man, in full knowledge of

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[122] ibid, 15.
[123] Chaucer, X (I) 1056.
[124] ibid, X (I) 1069-70.
[125] McAlpine, 15.

the *bona et utilia* chooses the worse part: the *otiosa...et vana*....He refuses offered grace."[126] Although it is clear that by the time the Pardoner makes his Canterbury pilgrimage he is as spiritually corrupt and sterile as Miller suggests -- for "the false eunuch...is sterile in good works, impotent to produce spiritual fruit"[127] -- it is nonetheless apparent that the Pardoner's initial sense of alienation from God's goodness was not an act of will at all. The Pardoner did not willfully refuse offered grace, but rather felt that grace was not accessible to him in the first place. He believes himself judged before he has sinned, for he feels, as the result of his alienation as a eunuch, "the immediate judgment of God upon the aversion of will," which is "the misery of mental anguish." Even more condemning, however, is his realization that he can never escape this judgment, and lessen his anguish, because he cannot perform the Sacrament of Penance, the only means by which, according to the Church, he could do so.

The Pardoner, because he feels trapped in his state of "sin," begins to embark on the kind of "career of progressive punishment"[128] Augustine envisioned for sinners. According to Augustine, the sinner felt a conflict between the good part of his nature, which longed to return to the goodness of God, and that part which tended towards sin. As this conflict increased (the longer the sinner remained in sin), the sinner, in order to "escape this intolerable struggle...seeks to give himself up entirely to evil."[129] The Pardoner, because he believes he can never return to a state of oneness with God, seeks to turn entirely in the other direction -- to steep himself in sin. It is no wonder, then, that the Pardoner is such a resolute sinner by the time we encounter him as pilgrim, and why

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[126] Miller,183-84.
[127] ibid, 184-85.
[128] Kellogg, 466.
[129] ibid, 465.

he is also so desperately unhappy -- "...he seeks to laugh at and pervert, if he can, the good he sees about him, but still finds neither rest nor relief."[130] Augustine felt that "the mind (of the sinner) is embittered because it has shut itself off from God, losing thereby sweetness and light,"[131] but in the Pardoner's case this bitterness arises, not from anguish at what he has willed, but from indignation that he has been denied this sweetness. This, then, is the source of the gall we sense beneath the Pardoner's apparently comic self-presentation. It is not difficult to recognize the Pardoner in the characterization that "...evil which proudly struts before the world and defying God rejoices in its own power and success, is only a hollow shell concealing torments which are a kind of prefiguration of those of hell."[132] The principal torment which the Pardoner is concealing in his false confession is that of utter despair.

To return, finally, to the subject of Contrition, it is now apparent why the Pardoner does not appear contrite. Regardless of how deeply he wishes to repent, to do so would be nearly impossible. If we reexamine the Pardoner, in light of this new understanding of his psychology, according to the "six causes that move man to contrition," both his inability to escape the sorrow of contrition, and his difficulty in properly completing this part of the sacrament, become apparent.

The first cause the Parson listed was that 'man remembers his sins,' a condition that clearly applies to the Pardoner. The entire prologue is, of course, comprised of a narration of a vast and varied list of his sins. Even the tale functions, implicitly, as a recitation of these sins, for "the Pardoner is, of course, chief offender with regard to most

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[130] ibid, 465.
[131] ibid, 467.
[132] ibid, 469.

of the vices he treats in his sermon."[133] Not only does the Pardoner preach, in the opening of the "Tale," against the very sins which he "confesses" in the "Prologue," (gluttony, greed, lechery), he also puts himself in the tale in the form of the rioters themselves, who are "indulging in all the sins of which the Pardoner himself is guilty."[134] And though we know the sins he confesses to not be his principal sins, yet they are the sins through which he descends ever deeper into the progressive punishment of sin. Ultimately, though he strives to conceal them from his audience, his real sins must not be far from his mind. The Pardoner cannot help but feel the bitterness of his despair, nor help but remember the first "sin" -- or lack thereof -- which led him there.

The Pardoner feels the second cause -- "whoso does synne is thrall of synne" -- equally deeply. He certainly must feel the thralldom of his despair, which never lessens but instead grows deeper and deeper. He must feel this enslavement all the more poignantly, however, than your average sinner, because his initial enslavement was one he did not will. The Pardoner is, in fact, doubly enslaved -- caught both in a "sin" he does not understand, and in the discourse which created his understanding of himself as sinner.

The third cause unquestionably applies to the Pardoner, for he cannot help but have "dread of the day of doom and pains of hell." Because of his aversion from God (both in his involuntary sin of eunuchry, and in the willful sins that followed), the Pardoner is already living these pains, for "...the man who defies God is ...the pain-racked, mentally deformed captive of an earthly Hell."[135] In a curious way, the Pardoner's very material presentation of the punishment of sin -- a punishment that

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[133] Miller, 193.
[134] Dinshaw, 41.
[135] Kellogg, 467.

consisted entirely of physical pain and death -- actually suggests something of how fearfully the Pardoner must dread the pains of Hell. Although his tale's treatment of sin and punishment would most likely not arouse proper dread in the average penitent, the Pardoner's very unique experience of sin and punishment suggest that his *exemplum*, in addition to its calculated rhetorical purpose, actually provides insight into the Pardoner's internal suffering. Because the internal Hell the Pardoner lives is the result of a physical "punishment," nothing could seem more fearful than to suffer the consequences attendant upon a physical punishment even more radical than castration, such as poisoning and death. The Pardoner's abrupt ending to the "Tale" -- "What nedeth sermone of it moore? / For right as they hadde cast his deeth bifoore, / Right so they han hym slayn, and that anon."[136] -- provides us with another insight. For a speaker who paints all the tavern sins with repulsive vividness, this unwillingness to depict the actual punishment of the rioters -- which "should be the rhetorical high point of the exemplum"[137] -- suggests how deeply the prospect of such punishments, and the Hell with which he associates it, disturbs him.

The knowledge that his good works will be lost, the fourth potential cause, applies to the Pardoner in a curious way. Miller suggests that "by his act of will (the Pardoner) has cut himself off from virtue and good works,"[138] but what he does not realize is that the Pardoner feels cut off from such works, because of his inexplicable alienation, before he has even begun. What the Pardoner feels so deeply, then, is not the loss of good works he has done, but the loss of the goodness (the goodness of God, from whom he is alienated) by which he could do them.

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[136] Chaucer, VI (C) 879.
[137] Leicester, 54.
[138] Miller, 186.

The fifth cause must affect him very deeply. Remembrance of Jesus' passion must have a most powerful effect on the Pardoner, for it reminds him of just how profound a goodness he is losing -- of how tragic it is "to alienate oneself from a loving and merciful God whose power is such that He lays down His own life for man's sins."[139] The Pardoner struggles to deny his need for either consolation or pardon, but for one brief moment in his epilogue he acknowledges just how great this consolation is, and how profound Jesus' goodness. In the midst of trying to sell his own pardons, the Pardoner proclaims:

> And Jhesu Crist, that is oure soules leche,
> So graunte yow his pardoun to receyve,
> For that is best; I wol yow nat deceyve.[140]

At this moment the Pardoner is nearly as vulnerable as we see him at the end of the epilogue, following Harry Bailey's rebuff, for with this statement "the whole fiction of his joyous life has vanished and the anguish of his soul is laid bare."[141]

With regard to four of these first five causes, then, the Pardoner must realize that, while each provides a compelling reason for repentance, he cannot "have stedefast purpos to shryven hym, and for to amenden hym of his lyf"[142] -- the most important components of contrition -- for he can neither confess a sin which he cannot name, nor amend himself of a sin which, even if he can identify it, he has no power to change. The reader must sympathize with the Pardoner's plight, for he "could scarcely form a sincere purpose to amend a condition he probably felt he had no power to change."[143] More importantly,

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[139] Leicester, 53.
[140] Chaucer, VI (C) 916-18.
[141] Kellogg, 474.
[142] Chaucer, X (I) 304.
[143] McAlpine, 16.

because of the cycle of despair his eunuchry initiates, the Pardoner feels that he cannot ever be reconciled to God, no matter how desperately he might try.

The sixth and final cause of contrition, 'Hope of three things,' is one that clearly does not apply to the Pardoner at all, for he cannot begin to hope for what contrition promises. He cannot hope for the first, forgiveness of sins, because he recognizes that such forgiveness can proceed only from proper completion of the entire sacrament, and he knows he can neither confess all his sins, nor amend them by way of satisfaction. He cannot hope for the gift of grace, for he has felt alienated from this grace from the start. Finally, he cannot hope for the glory of heaven, for he undoubtedly feels that the hell on earth he experiences everyday prefigures the damnation he will suffer in the end. Broadly speaking, the Pardoner cannot hope for anything, but rather is consumed by the hope's opposite, "wanhope." As long as he continues in such despair, he cannot ever be said to have contrition.

The Pardoner's response to the sacramental element of contrition is complex and self-contradictory. On the one hand he is extremely contrite, for he feels immense sorrow for the effects of his "sin." The Pardoner suffers immensely from the sense of social alienation and physical inadequacy that attends his eunuchry. Even more acutely, he suffers from the sense of spiritual alienation and inadequacy that result from his own interpretation of his eunuch state. On the other hand, however, the Pardoner realizes that because he cannot form a " stedefast purpos to shryven hym, and for to amenden hym of his lyf," his contrition can never be sufficient to elicit absolution. The Pardoner's despair ultimately shapes his presentation of contrition in the Prologue and Tale. He feels the sorrow and fear of contrition quite deeply, but, just at the moment when this sorrow

becomes a plea for absolution, he nullifies these penitent gestures completely. In the epilogue of the tale, when the Pardoner reverts to the performance of his "confessed" sins, we will see just how resolutely the Pardoner insists on his own unrepentance.

The rhetoric and structure of the Pardoner's tale magnifies the increasing despair that becomes apparent in his prologue. If we compare the Pardoner's tale to cotemporary literature on sin and punishment, like the "Parson's Tale," it is obvious that the Pardoner is manipulating this form, and to very specific ends. As the tale proceeds, it becomes apparent that the Pardoner's rhetoric reflects not only his understanding of Church doctrine as he has experienced it, but also his criticism of this doctrine and its forms. The very fact that the Pardoner, who has such a vexed relationship to the Sacrament of Penance, has structured his speech along the lines, both of penance and of the kind of texts about sin and punishment with which it is associated, suggests just how deeply the Church's teachings are ingrained within him. The evidence of this thorough indoctrination should only serve to emphasize our understanding of the Pardoner as a despairing soul, for it reveals just how trapped he is in the doctrine he feels condemns him. At the same time that the Pardoner cannot escape the forms of Penance and its accompanying literature, however, he also uses his familiarity with these institutions to manipulate them to his own very specific ends.

According to Miller, the Pardoner "stands at the opposite pole from the Parson, the true leader of the church,"[144] and based on superficial details alone, the rhetoric of the Pardoner's prologue and tale differs notably from that of the Parson's. To begin with, the Pardoner's very style is disjunctive compared to the Parson's fluid argumentation. While the Parson interweaves allusions to and quotations from authoritative texts with the flow of his argument, the Pardoner simply inserts such material for its own sake. The Parson appeals to such authoritative material to establish the authority of the moral lesson he preaches; the Pardoner merely aims to establish his own authority.

When he treats of swearing, for example, the Parson first makes clear that that it is "expres agayn the comandement of God."[145] He then goes on to illustrate, through biblical text, different manners of swearing, so that the penitent may understand what constitutes this sin:

> oure Lord Jhesu Crist seith, by the word of Seint Mathew, / 'Ne wol ye nat swere in alle manere; neither by hevene, for Goddes trone; ne by erthe, for it is the bench of his feet; ne by Jerusalem, for it is the citee of a greet kyng; ne by thyn heed, for thou mayst nat make an heer whit ne blak'[146]

More important even than the illustration, however, is the manner in which the Pardoner does not leave his quotations in isolation, but rather explains, in his own words, why swearing is, in fact, sinful. "For Cristes sake," he implores "ne swereth nat so synfully in dismembrynge of Crist by soule, herte, bones, and body. For certes, it semeth that ye thynke that the cursede Jewes ne dismembred nat ynough the preciouse persone of Crist, but ye dismembre hym moore."[147] He continues his treatment of swearing with a quotation from Jeremiah, "thou shalt swere 'in trouthe, in doom, and in rightwisnesse,"

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[144] Miller, 192.
[145] Chaucer, X (I) 586.
[146] ibid, X (I) 587-88.
[147] ibid, X (I) 591.

but again ties it in to the context of the rest of his lesson. "This is to seyn," he explains, "thou shalt swere sooth, for every lesynge is agayns Crist; for Crist is verray trouthe."[148] The Parson never allows his quotations, no matter how authoritative, to stand alone with out explanation or elaboration.

If we compare the Pardoner's treatment of swearing (one of the sins he highlights in the "sermon" portion of his tale) to that of the Parson, the inadequacy of his use of authoritative quotation becomes starkly clear. The Pardoner begins with the same gesture as the Parson, establishing that swearing is a sin: "Gret sweryng is a thyng abhominable, / And fals sweryng is yet moore reprevable."[149] Notably, the Pardoner and the Parson make use of two of the same authorities -- Jeremiah and Matthew -- but they do so with very different success. The Pardoner calls us to "Witnesse on Mathew,"[150] but then makes no reference to the edifying scripture of which the Parson makes such effective use. Unlike the Parson, the Pardoner does not go on to list the different manifestations of this sin. The Pardoner even quotes the same saying from Jeremiah -- "Thou shalt swere sooth thyne othes, and nat lye, / And swere in doom and eek in rightwisnesse,"[151] but again his failure to effectively make use of this material is all the more glaring in comparison to the Parson. He offers no explanation of the particular manner in which the sins of swearing offend God; he makes no effort to explain why such swearing is a sin. The Pardoner even acknowledges his use of such material is superfluous -- "...in Latyn speke I a wordes fewe, / To saffron with my predicacioun"[152] -- for he acknowledges that

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[148] ibid, X (I) 592-93.
[149] ibid, VI (C) 631-32.
[150] ibid, VI (C) 634.
[151] ibid, VI (C) 636-37.
[152] ibid, VI (C) 344-45.

he uses them only to make his sermons sound better -- as the seasoning of his argument, not the substance.

The Pardoner's use of *exemplum* is an even greater departure from the norm. In the prologue, he explains that, after his various efforts at extortion, "Thanne telle I hem ensamples many oon / Of olde stories longe tyme agoon. / For lewed peple loven tales olde; / Swiche thynges kan they wel reporte and holde."[153] Again he acknowledges that his use of such supplementary material is merely incidental to his arguments. The *exempla*, in the Pardoner's usage, are an end in and of themselves -- added to appeal to the congregation -- rather than the means to an end they are intended to be. This gratuitous usage becomes strikingly evident in the Pardoner's "Tale," where the logic of his lesson is strained. The Parson so effectively and logically intertwines his *exempla* and the lessons they are intended to support, that he establishes each as a context for better understanding the other. The *exempla* help ground the lessons in knowable experience, making these broader concepts more accessible. The lessons, in turn, provide evidence that the temporal events depicted in the *exempla* exist in the context of these higher truths. In the words of Lee Patterson, "his approach is **rationalistic**, almost **philosophical**...he grounds the vivid details of sinful action in a comprehensive metaphysic."[154]

The Pardoner, on the other hand, fails to effectively establish a connection between the *exempla* of his tale and the broader moral lessons they propose to teach. The details of the rioters' sinful excesses, as well as those presented in the sermon portion of the tale, are vivid, even grotesque representations, but the Pardoner fails to logically

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[153] ibid, VI (C) 435-38.
[154] Patterson, "The 'Parson's Tale," 340.

connect them to any real lesson. In his preaching against drunkenness, for example, the Pardoner makes all the requisite gestures, but ultimately fails to convincingly argue against the sin. His *exempla* are weakly connected to the matter at hand, for the first fails to establish any causal relationship between Herod's drunkenness and his crime (slaying John the Baptist), and the second is a half-hearted, almost comical condemnation of the sin -- 'Seneca says that drunkenness is like madness, only madness lasts longer.' To drive his dubious lesson home, the Pardoner exclaims "O glotonye, ful of cursednesse! / O cause first of our confusioun!"[155], yet fails to ground this lesson in either authoritative text, or even explanation. He neither tells us why gluttony is cursed (for clearly we will not take him merely on the authority of his word), nor how it led to our ruin. Though the Pardoner has made all the appropriate gestures -- appealing to Biblical authority, citing *exemplum*, and bewailing the consequences of the sin -- he has done so in an utterly hollow, illogical, and unconvincing way.

The presentation of sin that emerges in the course of these *exempla*, and the "Tale" as a whole, is the most revealing element of the Pardoner's speech. He differs notably from the penitential manuals in the striking incompleteness of his portrait of sin. He not only doesn't treat all the major forms, but also fails to give a comprehensive picture of sin as a whole.

The beginning of the Pardoner's "Tale" asserts itself as a sermon against sin, and yet the picture of sin it paints, and the argument against it, turn out to be very one-sided. This opening sermon concerns itself with only the most material forms of sin: gluttony and drunkenness, oaths, and hazardry. Already the Pardoner's portrait is thus withdrawing the concept of sin from its spiritual context. Furthermore, as he describes

[155] Chaucer, VI (C) 498-99.

both the forms of these sins, and their consequences, he does so in an incredibly graphic and physical way. As McAlpine notes, "all the (tavern) sins are developed to some degree in a way which relates them to the human body."[156] As in the case of gluttony, whose ends he describes as "O wombe! O bely! O stynkyng cod, / Fulfilled of dong and of corrupcioun! / At either ende of thee foul is the soun,"[157] he thus makes the sins appear repulsive. This connection, moreover, has a comparable effect in the way it portrays the body. "Evidence suggests that (the Pardoner) finds the root of all sinfulness in the body,"[158] an observation which is not surprising in light of the connection between his imperfect body and his "sin." By so intimately connecting sin and the body, however, the Pardoner is forcing this interpretation on his listener as well. "He is preoccupied by, chained to, the flesh, never rising out of it to reach the spirit,"[159] and wishes his audience to be so also.

Not only does the Pardoner only focus on material species of sin, he also only focuses on material consequences. In the opening portion of the tale, the precautionary examples are all directed towards preventing physical or material harm -- either to oneself, or by oneself. Gluttony, for example, may lead us into embarrassment or poor decisions. He sites stock examples of Lot, who "Lay by his doghtres two, unwityngly; / So dronke he was, he nyste what he wroghte"[160]and of Attila who "deyde in his sleep, with shame and dishonour, / Bledynge ay his nose in dronkenesse."[161] Most

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[156] McAlpine, 15.
[157] Chaucer, VI (C) 534-36.
[158] McAlpine, 14.
[159] Dinshaw, 29.
[160] Chaucer, VI (C) 486-87.
[161] ibid, VI (C) 580-81.

interestingly, he turns the Original Sin into a simple act of gluttony, and its consequences to mere physical hardship:

> O glotonye, ful of cursednesse!
> O cause first of our confusion!
> O original of our dampnacioun,
> ...
> Adam oure fader, and his wyfe also,
> Fro Paradys to labour and to wo
> Were dryven for that vice, it is no drede.[162]

Though he does acknowledge the importance of Christ's role in redeeming our race after the fall -- "Crist...boghte us with is blood agayn!"[163] -- the Pardoner makes no real effort to explore the reality of what his blood "boghte" us from. "Confusioun," and "dampnacioun" are mentioned, yet still the Pardoner does not explain what these concepts mean for modern man. The endless spiritual struggle of fallen man is pushed aside in favor of portraying the nuisance of physical toil.

In the case of the central *exempla*, that of the three rioters, this materiality becomes all the more glaring. The rioters' sins are, of course, those of the opening sermon, and their punishment is equally material. The horrible consequences of their impiety are graphically described:

> But certes, I suppose that Avycen
> Wroot nevere in no canon, ne in no fen,
> Mo wonder signes of empoisonyng
> Than hadde thise wrecches two, er hir endyng.
> Thus ended been thise homycides two,
> And eek the false empoysonere also.[164]

Although he appends this description with a diatribe on the injustice of sin to God -- "Allas, mankynde, how may it bitide / That to thy creatour, which that the wroghte / And

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[162] ibid, VI (C) 488-507.
[163] ibid, VI (C) 501.
[164] ibid, VI (C) 889-894.

with his precious herte-blood thee boghte, / Thou art so fals and so unkynde, allas?"[165] -- the Pardoner, curiously, says nothing of the punishment God will inflict. The punishment these rioters receive is not the eternal damnation which befalls the Friar's Summoner, but rather a very earthly, very temporal fate. And to contrast this punishment even more with the eternity of hell, these deaths by poison are instantaneous. As the fictional Apothecary informs us, whoever takes the poison "'sterve he shal, and that in lasse while / Than thou wolt goon a paas nat but a mile, / This poysoun is so strong and violent.[166]'" Notably, it is the hands of these resolute sinners themselves, not that of God, which doles out the punishment in this tale.

Though God's action is, ostensibly, understood, it is nonetheless intriguing that the Pardoner fails to explain the spiritual consequences of sin to the listeners he is meant to instruct. In fact, because he fails explain these consequences, the very lesson of the Pardoner's tale serves to mask or even contradict sin's real effects. The very way in which this *exemplum* unfolds seeks to give the lie to the reality of how sin affects man's lives. Whereas in reality, "in mannes synne is every maner ordre or ordinaunce turned up-so-doun," in the Pardon's tale everything proceeds according to a certain unquestionable logic. One reason the Pardoner need not "sermone of it moore" at the end of the *exemplum*, is because the end is self-explanatory: "right as they hadde cast his deeth bifoore, / Right so they han hym slayn." Though the Pardoner's abrupt ending serves a greater rhetorical purpose, it also serves to suggest that there is an unassailable order to the world these rioters have created. The "Tale" also does nothing to reveal the insufficiency that results from sin. The absolute, instantaneous way in which the rioters'

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[165] ibid, VI (C) 900-903.
[166] ibid, VI (C) 865-67.

punishment is achieved -- they become, through death, literally nothing -- serves to inhibit the audience's perception of the gradual process by which sin punishes itself, drawing the sinner "back to the nothingness from which he was originally fashioned."[167] The manner in which sin alienates the sinner from God is actually the consequence the Pardoner comes closest to portraying. In the figure of the Old Man, the Pardoner gives us a model of alienation. The Old Man cries desperately for some sort of reunification, for he moans:

> ...on the ground, which is my moodres gate,
> I knokke with my staf, both erly and late,
> And seye 'Leve mooder, leet me in!
> ...
> But yet to me she wol nat do that grace.[168]

However you choose to interpret both Old Man and "mooder," however, the image ultimately loses its instructive power, for the Pardoner even here fails to connect this sort of spiritual suffering to the actions of the sinners who are the center of his tale.

Even more important than his failure to explain the spiritual consequences of sin, is the Pardoner's failure to define sin at all. The Parson divides sin into seven categories -- those of the seven deadly sins -- and he elaborates extensively under each of these. He not only describes the different species of each of the seven sins, but how each of these may arise, and, ultimately, how they may be prevented in the future. For each of the seven sins he catalogues, the Parson appends a "*remedium contra*" that particular sin. Just as clearly as he explains the different species of each sin, and how they manifest themselves in day-to-day life, the Parson gives different species of these remedies, and demonstrates how man may realistically counteract his sins. The "*remedium contra*

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[167] Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 370.
[168] Chaucer, VI (C) 729-37.

peccatum Ire," for example, includes the categories of *mansuetude* (meekness) and *pacience*. Meekness, or *debonairetee*, "withdraweth and restreyneth the stirynges and the moevynges of mannes corage in his herte, in swich manere that they ne skippe nat out by angre ne by ire."[169] Under *pacience* the Parson explains that "thou shalt understonde that man suffreth foure manere of grevances in outward thynges, agayns the whiche foure he moot have foure manere of paciences."[170] He acknowledges how legitimate suffering may lead man to sin, but simultaneous shows how such suffering, and the corresponding sin, can be combated. Using the example of Jesus, the Parson provides an archetype on which the penitent may model his own efforts at patience. As he details each of the modes of suffering, the Parson interjects "Thilke suffrede Jhesu Crist," "Theragayns suffred Crist ful paciently," "That suffred Crist ful paciently in al his passioun," and "Heer-agayns suffred Crist ful paciently and taughte us pacience."[171] By providing a complete catalogue of sin, the Parson's purpose is clearly to help penitents recognize their own sins in his model, so that they achieve a complete confession. Just as importantly, by placing each sin in its realistic context, and showing how it may realistically be combated, his tale provides a measure of consolation, to help combat despair.

The Pardoner, on the other hand, provides such an incomplete catalogue of sins, that it would be useless to perform the kind of instructive functions for which it was ostensibly intended. His tale does not even cover all of the seven principal sins, and those it does -- Avarice, Gluttony, and perhaps Ire -- he does not treat with any thoroughness. Notably, the Pardoner makes no mention at all of his principle sin of "wanhope," which, according to the Parson, falls under the heading of sloth. Unlike the

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[169] ibid, X (I) 655.
[170] ibid, X (I) 661.
[171] ibid, X (I) 663-68.

Parson as well, the Pardoner does not incorporate aggravating circumstances into his portrayals of sins, so that even if a penitent was, in fact, reminded of his sins by this incomplete text, he might still make an unsatisfactory confession.

The gravest flaw of the Pardoner's tale, however, lies not in his failure to provide an exhaustive catalogue of sin, but in his failure to explore the very nature of sin itself. The Parson goes to great lengths to explain what, precisely, sin is, and how it effects man's spiritual state. By way of general explanation, the Parson asserts that "synne is every word and every dede , and al that man coveiten, again the lawe of Jhesu Crist; and this is for to synne in herte, in mouth, and in dede, by the five wittes, that been sighte, herynge, smellynge, tastynge or savourynge, and feelynge."[172] Sin, then, is understood in Augustinian terms -- as the choice of the lesser good over the greater. The Parson emphasizes this Augustinian perception elsewhere when he states that, "...in mannes synne is every manere ordre or ordinaunce turned up-so-doun."[173] He thus begins to explain, not only the nature of sin (as a derangement of divine order) but also the effect it has on the sinner's life -- severing it from the only true source of meaning. To further emphasize the destructive effect of sin on the sinner, he continues with an explanation of the spiritual enslavement sin affects: "as seith Seint Peter, 'whoso that dooth synne is thrall of synne'; and synne put a man in greet thraldom."[174] One final explanation he offers, of powerful relevance to the Pardoner's own state, is that "synne bireveth a man bothe goodnesse of nature and eek the goodnesse of grace."[175]

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[172] ibid, X (I) 958-59.
[173] ibid, X (I) 259.
[174] ibid, X (I) 141.
[175] ibid, X (I) 248.

The Pardoner's tale, with its limited and utterly un-intellectual presentation of sin, thus stands in great contrast to the Parson's. The sermon section of the "Tale" treats only the evils of specific sins, not the general evil of sin itself. In fact, the word "synne" appears only twice in the whole of the "Pardoner's Tale." Sin is mentioned first in the opening lines of the tale when the rioters "ech of hem at otheres synne lough,"[176] and does not appear till again till the Pardoner is summarizing the lesson of his tale:

> O cursed synne of alle cursednesse!
> O traytours homycide, O wikkednesse!
> O glotonye, luxurie, and hasardrye!
> Thou blasphemour of Crist with vileynye
> And othes grete, of usage and of pride![177]

Once again, however, the Pardoner is not treating the concept of sin in any general way. In the first instance the "synne" at which the rioters laugh refers only to those specific sins of which we know them to be guilty, not to the condition of the sinner in general. In his summary, the Pardoner at first appears to be bewailing the condition of sin, but then makes it apparent, by connecting his exclamation "O cursed synne" with the list of particular sins that follows, that he is only concerned with the specific, very material sins that appear in his tale. By failing to connect the vices of his sermon and story with the broader concept of sin, he fails to, like the Parson, "ground...the vivid details of sinful action in a comprehensive metaphysic." The sins that he portrays in his tale are depicted so graphically, and are so focused on the material, that they appear as nearly isolated events, not as manifestations of a broader spiritual state. Sin, in the "Pardoner's Tale," becomes a merely temporal occurrence.

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[176] ibid, VI (C) 476.
[177] Ibid, VI (C) 895-99.

The Pardoner's presentation of sin reveals much about what he is apparently trying to accomplish with his tale. The deficiencies in the Pardoner's use of *exempla* and homiletic material may at first appear only to correspond to our understanding of the Pardoner as a phony religious. If we examine the implications of these deficiencies for the instructive potential of this tale, however, it becomes apparent that the Pardoner's message is not incomplete, but rather carefully constructed -- in an utterly unorthodox direction. The Pardoner's manipulations of the conventions of the penitential manual reveal something not only about his own understandings of church doctrine, but also about his attitude towards the church as a whole. In a subtle yet deeply subversive gesture, the Pardoner is trying to use the Church's own tools to mold the minds of his listeners in a direction that contradicts everything the Church (in the Pardoner's opinion) stands for. The rhetoric of the Pardoner's text reveals just how deeply he is affected by the teachings of a Christian culture. We already know how deeply he has internalized the judgments of the Church in the despairing self-consciousness revealed in his prologue. If we examine the entire three-part text, it becomes apparent that even his rhetoric and structure reflect an inability to escape the forms of the Christian culture. Not only is the "Tale" a distortion of traditional uses of *exemplum* and homiletic material, but the entire text functions as a perversion of the three elements of penance. These perversions of traditional forms clearly represent something of the Pardoner's own distorted imagination -- an imagination formed by a Church that has ill-used him. At an even deeper level, however, the Pardoner's manipulations of these forms represent a very conscious effort to undermine the tools of an institution from which he has been so cruelly excluded.

The incompleteness of his text represents a very deliberate effort to prevent his fellow pilgrims from benefiting from those Church forms that do not include him in their definitions-- "as he leads them away from the legitimate sacrament, it is as if he were saying, 'If I cannot be truly forgiven, neither shall they be.'"[178] By exposing how he, a sinner, can use the Church's own institutions to actually inhibit repentance and forgiveness, he is exposing just how inadequate these forms are for the functions they purport to perform.

The incompleteness of the Pardoner's presentation of sin, both in his prologue and in his tale, thus functions to inhibit the performance of proper penance. Clearly a confession which models itself on the Pardoner's prototype will not fulfill the criteria of the 'good, complete confession. If a penitent seeks to use the Pardoner's catalogue of sins to remind himself of his own, there will undoubtedly be some significant omissions. And the "Tale" not only fails to describe *what* the penitent is supposed to confess, but also fails to explain *how*. The penitent is not informed that he must confess all of his sins, or that he must include aggravating circumstances, or that he must exhibit a certain demeanor in the performance of his confession. The only model for a follower of the Pardoner, then, is his own "confession" in the "Prologue." But if any of the pilgrims follows the Pardoner's model, his confession will not only be inadequate, it will be inappropriate. This penitent's confession will not only omit important sins, it will defy the expectations for the speaking situation of the confession. Such a confession will neither be faithful, strong, and whole, nor humble, secret, and prompt, for the Pardoner's "confession" is none of these things.

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[178] McAlpine, 16.

The Pardoner's tale is also designed so as to inhibit the formation of contrition. To begin with, the incompleteness of his list will prevent the pilgrims from having contrition for all of their sins (since they wont be able to recall them all). More importantly, total failure to explain the spiritual consequences of sin precludes the possibility that the pilgrim will be susceptible to any of the six causes that affect the Pardoner so poignantly. If he does not realize how greatly his sins offend God, or how close he stands to the brink of hell, the pilgrim cannot sincerely form "stedefast purpos to shryven hym, and for to amenden hym of his lyf."

In terms of satisfaction, finally, the Pardoner clearly fails to provide an adequate model. When we turn, finally, to a discussion of the epilogue and of the Pardoner's "satisfaction," we will see just how resolutely he defies the normal expectations for this part of the Sacrament.

The Pardoner's sermon should explain the nature of sin and the importance of penance, his *exemplum* should provide a concrete picture of sin and punishment in action, and his own confession should act as a prototype on which penitents can model their own. It takes very little insight to recognize that his tale does none of the above. A pilgrim who turns to the Pardoner for instruction will not know what it means to be contrite, or why one should be, how or what to confess, nor what they can do to amend their sinful ways. What the Pardoner hopes, however, is that this total inadequacy will not be evident to his pilgrims -- "...the Pardoner subverts the sacrament of penance he cannot use, while simultaneously setting himself up as a substitute confessor."[179] He hopes to prompt them to repent on his terms, so that when they do not receive absolution, his own sense of the inadequacy of the Sacrament will be validated.

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[179] ibid, 16.

The Pardoner's rhetoric thus ultimately reveals how utterly the institutions of the Church have failed him. Through his own grotesque performance of the Sacrament and his one-sided understanding of sin, the Pardoner dramatizes the extent to which the Church's brand of repentance is not available to all. As McAlpine notes, "...the Pardoner seems to represent a deliberate intention to explore the reality of an outcast misunderstood by his church."[180] Beyond this, however, by demonstrating how utterly he can pervert the Church's tools – how he can use these tools to actually lead the faithful away from atonement – he is calling into question the very primacy of the Sacrament over the pursuit of salvation: "his parodic presentation...constantly enforces his contempt for the available instruments of salvation as they are used in real life."[181] The Pardoner desperately needs to demonstrate the fallibility of these tools, for it is only by exposing the flaws in this institution that he may discover hope for his own salvation. If the tools themselves are flawed, then the Pardoner's inability to make use of them does not condemn him as a forsaken sinner. And if the Sacrament of Penance does not have a monopoly on the road to salvation, than the Pardoner may, himself, discover some means to be saved.

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[180] ibid, 16.
[181] Leicester, 42.

IV. Satisfaction

The final element required to complete the Sacrament of Penance is that of satisfaction. Although satisfaction is, in some sense, less important than the other, more spiritual elements of the sacrament, it was nonetheless an important step in solidifying one's repentance. Just as outward tearfulness was an important indication of inward contrition, so were the external motions of satisfaction necessary demonstrations of an overall internal repentance. According to the Parson, one must "'Dooth digne fruyt of Penitence'; for by this fruyt may men knowe this tree (of penitence), and nat by the roote that is hyd in the herte of man, ne by the braunches, ne by the leves of confessioun."[182] The Parson separates satisfaction into two categories, "almes" and "bodily peyne," each of which is further subdivided. Almes consists of the penitent's "contricion of herte," "pitee of defaute of his neighebores," and "yevynge of good conseil and comfort." Bodily peyne is divided into the four categories of prayers, waking, fasting, and discipline or teaching.

According to all outward appearances, then, the Pardoner fails in the completion of satisfaction just as he does in the other elements of penance. To begin with, he clearly does not subject himself to any bodily pains. Fasting, which entails "forberynge of bodily mete and drynke...of wordily jolitee, and...of deedly synne,"[183] is clearly not in the Pardoner's agenda. We need only return to his "Prologue" assertion that, "I wol noon of the apostles countrefete; / I wol have moneie, wolle, chese, and whete, /.../ And have a joly wenche in every toun,"[184] to be certain that the Pardoner will willfully forbear nothing.

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[182] Chaucer, X (I) 114.
[183] ibid, X (I) 1048.
[184] ibid, VI (C) 446-53.

One form of "disciplyne" entailed self-mortification, as in "werynge of heyres, or of stamyn, or of haubergeons on hire naked flessh,"[185] yet it is doubtful the Pardoner ever subjects himself to such discomfort. Not only does he resist the ascetic lifestyle, he is also extremely vain with regards to his apparel. The description of the Pardoner's appearance -- "But hood, for jolitee, wered he noon, / For it was trussed up in his walet. / Hym thoughte he rood al of the newe jet"[186] -- suggests that he is more interested in the appearance of his clothes than their function -- particularly if that function entails his own discomfort.

The Pardoner not only fails to perform satisfaction with regard to himself, but also with regard to others. The sacrament demands that he give counsel and comfort, both "gostly and bodily,"[187] to his neighbors, yet, quite to the contrary, he often knowingly pursues the ruin of his fellow man. Their spiritual well-being is of no concern to him, for he insists that, "I rekke nevere, whan that they been beryed, / Though that hir soules goon a-blakeberyed!"[188] The material comfort of his neighbors is of no more concern, for he will have his money, wool, cheese and wheat "Al were it yeven of the povereste page, / Or of the porvereste wydwe in a village, / Al sholde hir children sterve for famyne."[189]

Satisfaction is the most material element of the Sacrament of Penance, and thus the one we would expect the Pardoner could perform. What quickly becomes obvious, however, if we compare the Pardoner's activities to those expected of the penitent, is that the Pardoner not only fails to perform satisfaction, but also actually inverts the execution of this element of the sacrament. For every category of satisfaction, the Pardoner

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[185] ibid, X (I) 1051.
[186] ibid, I (A) 680-82.
[187] ibid, X (I) 1029.
[188] ibid, VI (C) 405-406.
[189] ibid, VI (C) 449-51.

performs its exact opposite. Instead of fasting he boasts gluttony. Instead of charity he avows stealing. Instead of spiritual comfort he induces misery. This inversion takes on an even more powerful significance if we examine the Pardoner's performance of the bodily pain of "techynge."

The Parson notes that "bodily peyne stant in disciplyne or techynge, by word or by writynge, or in ensample."[190] By the nature of his "Tale," the Pardoner is setting himself up as a sort of teacher. Although he deliberately undermines his own sincerity in the "Prologue," he nonetheless insists on his prowess as a teacher. Not only does he hold up his monetary gains as the mark of his success, he even suggests that he can, on occasion, bring a sinner to repentance. He makes his skill as a preacher seem all the more astounding in light of his utter hypocrisy "But though myself be gilty in that synne, / Yet kan I maken oother folk to twynne / From avarice and soore to repente."[191] When he moves to his tale, then, he has not only established that he can teach a good lesson, he also insists that he will do so for the pilgrims -- "For though myself be a ful vicious man, / A moral tale yet I yow telle kan."[192]

As I have already demonstrated, the Pardoner employs Christian literary conventions to establish his tale in the context of a certain body of didactic literature. Just as obvious, however, is the manner in which he perverts the intended function of these conventions to teach an unorthodox lesson. Interestingly, it is through this teaching that the Pardoner most closely approaches the performance of some kind of satisfaction -- and where he again reveals his despair.

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[190] ibid, X (I) 1051.
[191] ibid, VI (C) 429-31.
[192] ibid, VI (C) 459-60.

One of the important requirements of satisfaction was that the outward deed be performed with the appropriate inward state of mind. The Pardoner may thus have felt inhibited from the performance of satisfaction, just as he was from the achievement of contrition and confession, by his perceived sinfulness and corresponding despair. Prayers, for example, demanded "a pitous wyl of herte, that redresseth it in God and expresseth it with word outward[193]" and were to be said "trewely and in verray faith,"[194] neither of which conditions the Pardoner could have very well met, for he cannot express his sins in the proper outward form, confession, and his despair represents a total lack of faith in the mercy of Christ. Moreover, the penitent was cautioned to studiously avoid allowing the strains of satisfaction to create bitterness. Bitterness was seen as an obstacle to true repentance, for the Parson advises that, "bettre is to caste awey thyn heyre, than for to caste awey the swetenesse of Jhesu Crist."[195] The Pardoner's heart, however, may already be too filled with bitterness at the mortification inflicted on him as a result of his eunuchry, to allow him to commit self-mortification with any impunity. The Pardoner may even have felt inhibited at the physical level, for one of the Parson's four 'things that disturb penance' is "drede, for which he weneth that he may suffre no penaunce"[196] The effeminate Pardoner, in response to ridicule about his symbolic lack of masculine fortitude, may have feared he lacked the fortitude to perform physically trying forms of satisfaction as well.

The Pardoner may be hopelessly inadequate in other dimensions, but in the rhetorical department he knows he possesses great skill. By setting himself up as a

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[193] ibid, X (I) 1038.
[194] ibid, X (I) 1044.
[195] ibid, X (I) 1052.
[196] ibid, X (I) 1057.

teacher, and preaching an appropriate Christian lesson -- *Radix malorum est Cupiditas* -- the Pardoner is making one of the few hopeful gestures of his text. By apparently choosing to overcome his shortcomings and play on his strength, the Pardoner begins down the road to satisfaction and repentance. He may be a sinner himself, but if he can lead these pilgrims to a greater understanding of Christian precepts, this will suffice as a beginning of penance. Precisely when it appears that he may be on the right path, however, the Pardoner deliberately sabotages his own efforts. Just as he nullifies the efficacy of his confession by failing to perform it properly or completely, the Pardoner invalidates his performance of satisfaction by the nature of the actual lesson he teaches. By preaching a lesson that he knows to be inadequate, even inhibitory, for the performance of its supposed purpose, the Pardoner retracts his plea for forgiveness even at the very moment he makes it. His hope for forgiveness draws him to take the penitential pose of the teacher, but ultimately his despair gets the best of him. He cannot allow himself to hope that he will be forgiven, cannot believe that the church which ridiculed him will accept his meager effort at repentance. To avoid the agonies of expected rejection, the Pardoner merely plunges himself further into the well of sin and despair. In the final stage of penitence, when the Pardoner should be solidifying his repentance, he is actually solidifying his sinful state.

If throughout the "Prologue" and "Tale" the Pardoner is teaching a perverted form of Christian doctrine, and setting an example for a corrupt form of penance, in the Epilogue the Pardoner takes this "teaching" to a whole new level. Having completed his sermon against the sin of avarice, and having shown the pilgrims something of his breed of penance, the Pardoner now attempts to get them to act in accordance with the doctrine

he has preached. He pesters them to come forward and receive absolution on his terms: "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!"[197] By attempting to convince these pilgrims that an offering of money is a sufficient performance of satisfaction, he corrupts their performance of this element of the sacrament. He leads them away from legitimate acts of charity to self-indulgent efforts to buy spiritual security -- "Looke what a seuretee is it to yow alle / That I am in youre felaweshipe yfalle, / That may assoile yow, bothe moore and lasse, Whan that the soule shal fro the body passe."[198] The Pardoner's very material presentation of sin throughout the "Prologue" and "Tale" thus begins to take on a new significance. Not only does this incomplete presentation prevent the pilgrims from developing proper contrition, or of performing a complete confession, it also primes them to accept the Pardoner's portrait of satisfaction. Perhaps more significantly, the Pardoner has connected his pardons and relics themselves with avarice, the very sin he purports to "warice." He sells his relics with the claim that, not only can they restore the property of the man who uses them, but also increase it: "His beestes and his stoor shal multiplie," or "He shal have multiplying of his grayn."[199] When he offers these same relics again in the epilogue of his tale, then, the Pardoner is implicating the pilgrims in his own sin of avarice, and luring them away from proper satisfaction -- he "uses his 'relikes' to turn the mind of the goodman not to God through charity, but to his personal material wealth through cupidity: a reversal insidiously perverse with regard to his victim's well-being."[200]

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[197] ibid, VI(C) 906-909.
[198] ibid, VI (C) 937-40.
[199] ibid, VI (C) 365,374.
[200] Miller, 188.

More important even then the Pardoner's attempts to corrupt the pilgrims performance of satisfaction is his obvious attempt to corrupt their performance of the entire sacrament. In the first two parts of his text the Pardoner has inhibited their performance of penance by setting a poor example and teaching an inappropriate lesson. In the epilogue he takes this inhibition to a whole new level. The Pardoner does not give his tale the proper summary to relate the sins of the rioters to the general concept of sin -- in fact he stops his own tale short with the abrupt "What nedeth it to sermone of it moore?"[201] The sale of pardons is thus substituted for the spiritual lesson that his tale should drive home at its conclusion. Just at the moment when he may be, despite his best efforts, on the verge of arousing contrition in these pilgrims, the Pardoner pulls one last trick. By delivering his sales pitch at this precise moment, the Pardoner is trying to convince the Pilgrims to perform satisfaction -- and an improper satisfaction at that -- in lieu of the other two components of penance. Just as he cannot achieve adequate contrition and confession, he attempts to prevent the pilgrims from doing so. As McAlpine cleverly realizes, "the Pardoner subverts the sacrament of penance he cannot use, while simultaneously setting himself up as a substitute confessor."[202] He hopes to prevent these pilgrims from engaging in the traditional Sacrament of Penance, and lure them instead into performing his own particular breed of repentance.

The Pardoner's epilogue reveals the desperation that accompanies his deep despair. Throughout the "Prologue" and "Tale" he strives to inhibit the pilgrims' understanding and performance of penance through manipulations of Christian forms and lessons. The last minute effort to sell them his pardons represents a desperate attempt to

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[201] Chaucer, VI (C) 879.
[202] McAlpine, 16.

ensure that this inhibition is achieved. He acknowledges in his "Prologue" that his sermons sometimes inadvertently make others "soore to repente," and he may not be able to bear the thought that this could happen again with the pilgrims. If, in spite of its inadequacy, the lesson he preaches, and the example he provides of repentance, serves to allow these pilgrims to properly complete the Sacrament of Penance -- if it serves to earn them the forgiveness he so desperately desires -- the Pardoner's despair will undoubtedly reach unfathomable new depths. The Pardoner must prove that he is not alone in his exclusion from the efficacy of penance. If he can use the Church's own rhetorical tools to make the Sacrament of Penance inaccessible to this body of pilgrims, the Pardoner will validate his own sense that the sacrament, not his soul, is inadequate. The bizarre "confession" of his prologue thus takes on a double significance, for he seeks to confront the pilgrims with the reality of who has the power to affect the sacred institutions of their Church. The Pardoner establishes himself as the object of a broad reaching satire, for

> In every case what ought to be a manifestation of divine power, mercy, care, and love is shown to be cheapened and undone by human stupidity or malice, unthinking literalism, or calculating self-interest. What the Pardoner is making fun of is the way the putative transcendence of the institutions of the church is continually reduced to a set of merely human practices.[203]

If he can use the Church's own forms and institutions -- his career as Pardoner and the rhetorical tools of the sermon and exempla -- to elicit the pilgrims' impenitence, he can effectively call into question the primacy of these institutions in the quest for salvation. The Pardoner

> has nothing but contempt, a deeper sense of contempt than we have yet examined, for the consolations of religion, but he takes very seriously the things they are intended to console. . . . On the one hand there is the horror of existence; on the

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[203] Leicester, 43.

> other hand there is the church that fails to address or ameliorate this horror -- the church that has become a dead letter, and one that kills.[204]

If he can but implicate others in this contempt for the Church's "dead letter," the Pardoner hopes to achieve a measure of consolation himself.

Of all the pilgrims, the Pardoner singles out the Host as the object of his persuasion, explaining:

> I rede that oure Hoost heere shal bigynne,
> For he is most envoluped in synne.
> Com forth, sire Hoost, and offre first anon,
> And thou shalt kisse the relics, everychon,
> Ye, for a grote! Unbokele anon thy purs.[205]

That the Host is "most envoluped in synne" is a crucial distinction for the Pardoner. Even more crucial is the kind of sin with which Harry Bailey is associated. Of all the Pilgrims, Bailey is in many respects the most similar to the Pardoner. As a greedy innkeeper -- one who stands to garner a monetary benefit from the story contest he has organized -- the Host is one of the most materially minded of the pilgrims. From the Pardoner's perspective, this is extremely encouraging. This materiality suggests that Bailey is inclined to accept the Pardoner's vision of sin, and his version of penance. For such a man, the efficacy of a monetary transaction will not only seem appealing, but utterly logical as well. Approaching the material Host thus represents one of the Pardoner's best chances to succeed in implicating someone in his breed of penance. Bailey's position as host, which carries the possibility he can influence other pilgrims, thus makes him the Pardoner's most logical target.

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[204] ibid, 44.
[205] Chaucer, VI (C) 941-45.

Although the Pardoner's choice of victim represents a very deliberate attempt to achieve the validation he desires, yet the despair that informs his approach to the Host functions to destroy the possibility of this validation.

McAlpine suggests that,

> The latent aggression in the Pardoner's statement that Harry 'shalt kisse the relikes everychon' (l. 944) and latent sexual implication in his command to Harry to 'Unbokele anon thy purs' (l. 945) turn the scene into one of implied seduction or even rape; the Pardoner uses his homosexuality as a weapon.[206]

Although I disagree with her assertion that the Pardoner intends any symbolic sexual mastery, as well as her insistence that we can label the Pardoner a homosexual, there certainly is sexual innuendo in the Pardoner's language. The Pardoner's address of Harry Bailey is not intended to achieve a symbolic sexual purpose, but he does use his sexuality as a weapon. The Pardoner is well aware of his position as a social outcast, of the uneasiness with which his condition as eunuch is perceived, and he manipulates this perception to a bizarre end. With the intimate and suggestive manner with which he addresses Bailey, the Pardoner is attempting, not to achieve sexual congress, but to anger and repulse him.

If the Pardoner had maintained a certain business-like tone in his speech -- if he had restricted his appeal to the spiritual efficacy of paying for his pardons and relics -- he could have, if not succeeded, at least escaped humiliation. When the Pardoner replaces his cynicism and practicality with a suddenly intimate tone, however, he mortally offends the pilgrims' sensibilities. He insists that,

> It is an honour to everich that is heer
> That ye mowe have a suffisant pardoneer
> ....
> Looke which a seuretee is it to yow alle

[206] McAlpine, 17.

> That I am in youre felaweshipe yfalle,
> That may assoile yow, bothe moore and lasse,[207]

thus suggesting not only that he is in fellowship with this group, but also that he is a central part of it. The Pardoner implies that he is the companion and helpmate of every member of this group, "bothe moore and lasse." For the pilgrims, this is a disturbing suggestion. They can tolerate the presence of this bizarre and ambiguous figure, but not the suggestion that he is somehow one of them. When he confronts Harry Bailey, he takes this implication to an intolerable level. By claiming that the Host is "moost envoluped in synne" and asking him to come forward first, the Pardoner is suggesting that Bailey is, of all the pilgrims, most like him -- a suggestion Bailey cannot bear. The sexual undertones of the Pardoner's insistence that he "kisse" the relics, and "unbokele" his purse serve to imply an even greater bond between the Pardoner and Host. Bailey is understandable angered by this assault on his sense, not only of sexual normality, but also of social inclusion. He must retaliate as he does -- and as the Pardoner knows he will -- in order to reestablish the boundary between himself and the realm of the social outcast. When he insists that, if he should kiss the relics, "'thanne have I Cristes curs!'"[208] he means not only that it would be sinful to cooperate with the Pardoner's obviously corrupt enterprise, but also that he fears a kind of guilt by association. The Host recognizes the "curs" the Pardoner suffers in the form both of his eunuchry, and of the corresponding exclusion. The Host has, in fact, inadvertently expressed the very heart of the Pardoner's understanding of his problem. The Pardoner, because he cannot conceive of himself outside the Church's teachings on sin, nor conceive of forgiveness outside its Sacrament of Penance, is trapped in self-condemnation and despair. Caught as he is within the

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[207] Chaucer, VI (C) 931-38.
[208] ibid, VI (C) 946.

Christian institutions that condemn him, the Pardoner is, in a sense, a victim of "Cristes curs."

Just as he has sabotaged all his own attempts at penance, then, so too does the Pardoner destroy the possibility of resurrecting, if not his soul, then at least a measure of hope. As much as the Pardoner questions the Church's perceived judgment of him, and as brutally as he satirizes the sacrament which has left him no means of reversing this judgment, he has nonetheless deeply internalized the very thinking he questions. Ultimately, the despairing Pardoner cannot ask for forgiveness because he believes himself unworthy of it. Even in despair, the Pardoner hopes to find some consolation through his manipulations of the other pilgrims. In the end, however, the Pardoner believes himself so unworthy, that he cannot even allow himself to reach for this meager consolation, which he so desperately needs.

When the Host has finished his brutal rebuff of the Pardoner's advances, "This Pardoner answerde nat a word; / So wrooth he was, no word ne wolde he seye."[209] The hot-tempered Pardoner we encounter in the "Prologue," who uses the pulpit as a tool for revenge, would undoubtedly be angered at such a cruel public slight. What the naive pilgrim Chaucer fails to realize, however, is that this silence, more than it expresses anger, reveals the utter depth of the Pardoner's despair. With the failure of his last effort to halt his spiraling despair, the Pardoner has lost his last hope. His silence represents the realization that his only asset, his rhetorical prowess, has failed him utterly. His one hope was to use this prowess to implicate the other pilgrims in his contempt for the Sacrament of Penance, thus alleviating his sense of isolation and despair. If he cannot even use the power of language to grasp at salvation, his very motivation for speech is

[209] ibid, VI (C) 956-57.

lost. In the end of the epilogue, the Pardoner has nowhere to turn but inward, into the torments of his earthly hell.

The despairing consciousness with which we are presented at the end of the Pardoner's text suggests a that goes far beyond just the Pardoner. The pitiful trap in which the Pardoner is left at the end -- able to escape neither his sin through penance, nor his own self-condemnation -- reveals something about the Sacrament of Penance, in whose terms the Pardoner's despair is conceived. The portrait of the Pardoner that emerges in the course of the prologue, tale, and epilogue, functions to reveal the destructive potential of the Sacrament. The Pardoner, trapped as he is between conflicting impulses, represents an exploration of the tyranny the Sacrament can potentially inflict. Penance, with its correspondent definition of sin, can be an inescapable trap for those whose identity it defines on the one hand and whom it deems unworthy of inclusion in its practice on the other. The Pardoner's plight is all the more provocative, for while he recognizes the injustice of this tyranny, and is intimately familiar with the mechanisms by which he is trapped, he ultimately cannot escape. The Pardoner, despite his efforts to question and to undermine the Sacrament that enthralls him, ultimately cannot conceive of himself outside of its discourse. And though the reader might recognize the potential harm inherent in such framing of the Sacrament, and though we might sympathize with the Pardoner's plight, in the end, the reader, like the Pardoner himself, cannot conceive of him outside the penitential terms in which he frames his text.

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