

‘A Bette Felawe Sholde Men Noght Fynde’

Satirical Criticism of Chaucer’s Friar, Summoner

and Pardoner

by

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Sammendrag

I denne oppgaven tar jeg for meg hvordan Geoffrey Chaucer bruker satire i sin *Canterbury Tales* til å belyse sosial kritikk av middelalderkirken i England, og hvordan denne kritikken gjør leserne oppmerksom på Kirkens misbruk av makt og dens materielle fokus. Chaucer fremstiller pilgrimmene the Friar, the Summoner, og the Pardoner på en humoristisk, men likevel kritikkverdig måte. Denne kritikken av karakterene som er representanter for Kirken, blir gradvis mer krass og seriøs som et symbol på at Kirken har mistet sin guddommelige tilknytning. For å forstå bruken hvordan satire er brukt i *Canterbury Tales*, bruker jeg både en middelaldersk og en moderne forståelse av satire som belyser ulike perspektiv på satirens funksjon og mål. En satirisk tekst angriper ofte institusjonell umoralsk opptreden ved å gjøre narr av det, og selv om forfatterens verk er fiksjon, overbeviser hun leserne sine om at det hun angriper, er latterlig. Ved å la fiksjonen være virkelighetsnær og med en klar moralsk standard, engasjerer forfatteren leserne sine slik at de kan identifisere seg med «ofrene» i teksten, som igjen får ringvirkninger på hvordan de opplever sin egen livssituasjon.

Selv om Chaucer ikke gjorde noe nytt og radikalt ved å fremstille datidens mektigste institusjon i et dårlig lys, så skaper han et bilde som avslører kirkelig misbruk, og opplyser leserne om dette misbruket. I kapittel 1 diskuterer jeg hvordan satiren fremstår som lett og morsom, hvordan den angriper tiggerordenene som the Friar representerer, og hvordan dette belyses i både portrettet hans, og i the *Summoner's Tale*. I kapittel 2 tar jeg for meg hvordan kritikken blir stadig mer krass og seriøs tilknyttet the Summoner og representasjonen av han i the *Friar's Tale*. I kapittel 3 går den satiriske kritikken fra å være vits om en fis, til at tre forbrytere dreper hverandre i the *Pardoner's Tale*. Alvorligheten i fremstillingen av både portrettet til the Pardoner og fortellingen hans belyser hvor alvorlig Kirkens misbruk er, og hvor stor avstand den har tatt fra sin guddommelige funksjon og mål til fordel for materialistiske goder, som jeg argumenterer at Chaucers litterære verk i stor grad belyser.

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I am dedicating this thesis to my late cat, Tussa (1995-2016), who never cared for books.

Only sleep, food, and pets. In that order.

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Introduction

“A better felawe shilde men noght fynde,” refers to Geoffrey Chaucer’s (1340s-1400) Summoner, who, along with the Friar and the Pardoner, is ironically praised in the *Canterbury Tales* to describe the exact opposite. Chaucer’s brilliant satirical depiction of medieval social classes in the *Canterbury Tales* has made him and his works popular for many centuries. While the notion of what satire has changed through the ages, there is still something within Chaucer’s literary works that entices and beguiles his readers which makes it feel contemporary. Chaucer’s choice of words, his descriptions, and the way he uses satire to criticize his own contemporary society, is still applicable to many areas and social issues one faces today. The medieval Church was a target for Chaucer’s severe criticisms, just like many religious institutions today, which are also under scrutiny for different abusive practices. However, as many of the medieval Church’s functions and institutions have dissolved over time, it is possible to perceive these changes through Chaucer’s literary works. While we cannot know what Chaucer thought, we can, interpret his satirical characterizations through different critical perspectives, such as modern and medieval understandings of satire, which is what I seek to do in this thesis.

In the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer employs a satirical depiction of the corrupt pilgrims the Friar, the Summoner, and the Pardoner as a social critique to highlight the abuses within the Church, and to teach his readers to be aware of these abuses. Chaucer does this by having the satire against the pilgrims evolve from a light-hearted and witty mood, to become dark, and much more intense and serious. These satirical moods are based on the development and severity of what is at stake in the pilgrims’ *Tales*. The Friar, the Summoner, and the Pardoner are all presented in that particular order in the *General Prologue*, although not consecutively of each other. Although all three pilgrims are faced with hard criticism, I argue that this

succession represents a satirical gradient of the pilgrims, where each of them is portrayed from the least criticized pilgrim to the most denounced pilgrim.

Their physical appearance parallels their moral corruption, and by comparing them in that particular order, it helps to show how Chaucer criticizes the medieval Church for changing from a spiritual focus to a material one. Chaucer highlights the correlation between how the pilgrims are presented physically, and how they are presented morally, by creating a parallel between physicality and inner morality. In this parallel, he gives suggestions of how the superficial aspects of the Church replace the spiritual aspects. In this thesis, I put the pilgrims' physical appearance and their inner morality in comparison to each other and their parallel fictional characters, and the comparison draws upon contemporary attitudes towards these clerical professions. This type of comparison has, to my knowledge, not been done before, and I use the comparison to track Chaucer's criticism deterioration of the Church, while I also argue for the progressive increase in critical seriousness between these three characters.

Chaucer portrays the critique as such, I argue, not to provide solutions for the social critique, but to warn his readers about abuses by having the laity in his stories serve as exemplars for his audience, as a way to educate them. The exemplars are represented by people who these pilgrims try to trick, and the laity's purpose in the stories, I argue, is to prevent Chaucer's contemporary audience, as members of a Christian society, from being tricked by the pilgrims' real-life parallels. In this thesis, I will address how satire develops to show the pilgrims' moral corruption, and how the critique becomes more severe based on the pilgrims' physical appearance, their actions, and what their *Tales* represent. By addressing modern and medieval purposes of satire, this can illustrate the degree criticism directed towards the medieval Church and the clerical professions.

The pilgrims are introduced in the *General Prologue*, where their physical and moral attributes are described, and these depictions are elaborated upon in their respective *Prologues* and *Tales*. Chaucer introduces the characters, and the relationship between the Friar and the Summoner, who are portrayed as rivals, and their *Tales* are used to “quite” each other, meaning to “take revenge” (MED). The Friar’s pleasant physical appearance and manner overshadow his corrupt moralities, and he uses witty and light satire to make jokes about the people around him, especially when he is joking about the Summoner. The *Friar’s Tale* serves as a joke on summoners, where Chaucer, through the Friar, addresses common medieval attitudes towards them to exemplify their degree of corruption. However, the Friar ends his *Tale* on a light note where summoners are given the opportunity to redeem themselves if they stop abusing their position. The Summoner takes offense at these jokes, and escalates the situation with his revenge tale, while at the same time appearing both physically and morally corrupt. The *Summoner’s Tale* is a direct response to the *Friar’s Tale*, where friars are mocked by using typical mendicant satire, but to a slightly more serious degree than what the Friar did. The seriousness becomes apparent in the *Summoner’s Prologue*, where he, instead of returning the favor of letting the Friar redeem himself if he changed his ways as well, the Summoner blatantly condemns the Friar straight to Hell. The Summoner ends his *Prologue* on a significantly darker note than the Friar ever did. However, as the *Summoner’s Tale* reflects the Friar’s wittiness more than the Summoner’s crudeness, the *Tale* ends on a hilariously absurd note instead, not reflecting the *Summoner’s Prologue*. The Pardoner, appearing as the last pilgrim in the *General Prologue*, represents the most criticized pilgrim of the three where his physical description can be considered as perverse. He tells a tale that is not funny, but rather serious and sad, which represents ultimate moral corruption. However, the ethical implications of each of the pilgrims’ tales differ from each other.

For the Friar joking around, there is little at stake for his level of satiric wit, where the most severe consequence for the Summoner, whom the Friar is mocking, is the loss of dignity. For the Summoner, however, with his crude and violent demeanor, the loss of dignity is not enough. The Summoner's stake, in addition to a loss of dignity, is his own physical well-being on earth, which is represented through his sickly appearance and corrupt morals. Lastly, the Pardoner's stakes are the most severe. While addressing corrupt individuals, they can either be expelled, or be rehabilitated which is possible with both the Friar and Summoner. However, with the Pardoner, the stakes are too high.

Through his abnormal physicality and humorless *Tale*, the Pardoner's stakes are the fate of not only his own soul, but of everyone's souls. His own soul is at stake for the suggested physical inability to procreate, which by extension symbolizes the Church's spiritual inability to generate more followers. What puts the people's souls at stake, is that they buy fake relics from the Pardoner to reduce their temporal punishment in Purgatory and go to Heaven faster.

In the rest of the introduction that follows, I will provide a brief discussion of Chaucer's life and the *Canterbury Tales*, followed by a lengthy discussion of satire, where I address how understandings of modern and medieval satire can be used to illuminate what Chaucer is doing in the *Canterbury Tales* in regards to satire. The relevant individual *Tales* are in this order:

- The *Friar's Tale* is the seventh *Tale* told over all, but of the three pilgrims discussed in this thesis, it is told by the Friar, and it is about a corrupt summoner. This tale is discussed in the second chapter in the context of discussion about the Summoner pilgrim.
- The *Summoner's Tale* comes after the *Friar's Tale* as a response to it, and is the eighth *Tale* told overall. It is about a corrupt friar, and it is discussed in the first chapter in the context of the discussion about the Friar pilgrim.

- The *Pardoner's Tale* is the fourteenth *Tale* told overall, and is the last *Tale* to be discussed in this thesis in chapter three. It is a self-enclosed tale and does not refer to the professions of the other pilgrims.

The first chapter will discuss how the Friar represents mendicancy, the practice of begging, and how and to what degree Chaucer criticizes what the Friar represents. The first chapter also suggests that by drawing on contemporary attitudes towards Friars, Chaucer's satirical remarks on the Friar are hidden behind his charming exterior, only to be fully realized by the immoral actions of the friar character who is presented in the *Summoner's Tale*. In the second chapter, I will address how the degree of Chaucer's satirical criticism of the Summoner becomes more serious in the way his revolting physical appearance reflects a severe lack of morals, which in turn represents a diseased Church. I will address how this serious satirical tone differs from how Chaucer presents the Friar, and how this affects the summoner in the *Friar's Tale*. In the third and final chapter, I will present Chaucer's Pardoner as the most criticized pilgrim based on his perverted physical appearance and immoral actions. I will discuss how his physical appearance represents a Church that has lost its spiritual ability to reproduce or generate followers, and to care for the soul of others. I will discuss the loss of spiritual connection demonstrated in the *Pardoner's Tale*, where the inability to perceive what is figurative results in the loss of divine grace or inability to be spiritually redeemed.

In the conclusion, I will discuss my findings on how medieval and modern understandings of satire illuminate Chaucer's characterization of the pilgrims and what they represent. I will also address how the laity in the different tales, who were potential victims of abuse, but managed to escape their abuser by various means, can function as positive exemplars for the readers.¹

¹ In this thesis, I have used the *Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, edited by Larry D. Benson as my primary text. I have also used the Douay-Rheims Bible in my biblical references, because it is a translation of the Latin Vulgate, which Chaucer would have had access to in his time.

Chaucer and the *Canterbury Tales*

There is not a whole lot known about Geoffrey Chaucer's life. Nothing on his childhood, education, or personal imperfections which can be attributed to his inspirations for writing, nor any evidence of "Chaucer's life as a man of letters" (Evans 9). However, the records that do exist, consist mainly of legal documents such as house leases, records of expenses and witness statements (Evans 9). What we do know about Chaucer, is that he was born sometime in the early 1340s and that he was the only child of a wealthy wine merchant. He lived through the Black Plague, became a royal servant, and perhaps through his own virtue and family fortune, rose through the ranks to become a royal esquire, meaning a title of high social class. Through his connections, he met and married lady-in-waiting Phillippa, who became his wife in 1366. Together they had two sons, Thomas and Lewis, and possibly a daughter, Elizabeth, however, the evidence for this is not clear (Evans 13). Chaucer had friends in high places, and worked on behalf of both Edward II and Richard II, while also enjoying connection within the king's inner circle, such as the Duke of Lancaster, John of Gaunt (Evans 12). Chaucer's poetic career, Ruth Evans states, began in the late 1360s, when he wrote the *Book of the Duchess*, which was influenced by French poetry, and dedicated to the Duke's late wife, Blanche (Evans 12).

There are no records or evidence of how Chaucer was exposed to literature to which he seems to know a lot about, and one can only speculate that he was exposed to classical, French, and Italian literature while at court and through traveling. As a poet, he became widely known for his work the *Canterbury Tales*, which he began to write in the last decade of his life, starting around 1387 (Evans 12, 15). While there are no official records of Chaucer's death, his death is "customarily accepted to be 25 October 1400" (Evans 16). Concerning his last literary work, the *Canterbury Tales*, it is not known whether he finished it or not, but due to its fragmentation, one can assume that Chaucer did not finish it completely.

The *Canterbury Tales* is a compilation of stories told by pilgrims, who after a long winter, are ready to pilgrimage from Southwark to Canterbury. The pilgrims, who number almost thirty, are organized by the host of the inn Tabard, Harry Bailly, who decides that the pilgrims will tell two tales each on the way to and back from Canterbury. This kind of storytelling might be influenced or inspired by Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Chaucer presents his *General Prologue* with a range of characters from almost every social class in England: a sergeant of law from Lincolnshire, a clerk from Oxford, a reeve from Norfolk, a lawyer, a friar, a summoner, a pardoner from the areas surrounding London, and so forth. Each of the storytellers is presented with "a rich vitality that is without precedent", serving as exceptional individual examples, while at the same adding another dimension to the institutions they represent (Pratt xx). Pilgrimages had during Chaucer's time been firmly established, and while the greatest shrine to visit was in Jerusalem, the most famous and popular shrine in England was the shrine of St. Thomas at Canterbury (Pratt xx). In the *General Prologue* Chaucer displays great knowledge of each of the pilgrims' professions, such as the Yeoman's knowledge of alchemy and the Doctour of Phisik's medical prowess.

In addition to his extensive professional knowledge, Chaucer also gives each of the pilgrims agency, so that they are at liberty to control the order of the tales themselves, to argue with each other, and to dispute authority. When the narrator, Chaucer himself, does intercede, the pilgrims reject what he says, which creates a narrative that is not guided by a clear moral voice. The narrator throughout the story is a passive figure, perhaps to bring out the strong personalities of the other pilgrims more. Even the Host, Harry Bailly, who Chaucer seems to give a sort of authority, is disputed and contested, as is shown when he intercedes on behalf of the Summoner to the Friar's Tale, who promptly tells him to mind his own business, because the Summoner does apparently not need anyone to speak for him. By creating a

dynamic group of pilgrims, and giving them agency, Chaucer makes the fiction of the *Canterbury Tales* seem real and entertaining.

The *General Prologue* consists of descriptive portraits of the pilgrims. These portraits shed light on underlying conflicts, and they reveal contrasts between the pilgrims and society as to attest to the readers that this is real. Chaucer sometimes obscures the portraits by the use of puns, suggestive and ambiguous language, to show that there is more to each of the pilgrims than what meets the eye. Many of the portraits in the *General Prologue* offer a complexity in “conflicting purposes and ideals,” where important questions about morality and political and social change arise (Pratt xxiii). Chaucer’s attention to the rapid economic and political changes in the context of the late fourteenth century, is reflected in the *Canterbury Tales* where the established authority is challenged. The Catholic Church, as an established authority, is not only challenged by reformers’ and laity’s discontent about the state of the Church, but also by the rising power of the merchant class, and by peasants’ and crafters’ economic strains and ambitions (Phillips 2).

Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* is a satirical commentary on these social issues that challenge the Church, where he through an abundant setting of themes, allusions, digressions, and moral values represents mankind in all its vices and virtues. As Helen Phillips states: “[Chaucer’s] writing illustrates well the way that clarity, depth and perceptiveness in narrative depiction of society can expose the weak points, omissions and conflicts inherent in a dominant ideology” (11). In relation to the topic of this thesis, Chaucer does in fact expose weak points concerning the Church and its agents. He does this through satirical characterizations of his pilgrims where he shows how they fail in their professional duties as a result of moral decay and giving parables to educate his readers.

Satire in the Middle Ages

Originating in ancient Rome, satire has had a rich literary tradition, as well as a tradition in performance arts such as acting, singing, and dancing. Satire is, simply put, an “artistic form ... in which human or individual vices, follies, abuses, or shortcomings are held up to censure by means of ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, parody, caricature, or other methods, sometimes with an intent to inspire social reform” (Britannica). There are many distinct forms of satire, such as Juvenalian and Horatian within the classical tradition, and in medieval satire, one can find Latin satire and estates satire among others. What these different kinds of satires share, is the tradition of directing attention to social problems, possibly as an attempt to stimulate the audiences’ decisions and actions, or as an attempt to improve the current social situation for the better through a wide range of emotions. In the words of Ruben Quintero, satirists can be compared to social watchdogs where they “rouse [the audience] to put out the fire” by encouraging a “need for the stability of truth by unmasking imposture, exposing fraudulence, shattering deceptive illusion, and shaking us from our complacency and indifference” (4). While emotions play an important part in social change, acting as a driving force, it is the decisions and any possible actions that comprise the final stage, before change supposedly happens.

In the Middle Ages, satire was popular because it played an important social role as it was used to ridicule a variety of social classes and individuals ranging from peasants to nobles, and to institutions such as the Church. In medieval Europe, the three most famous satirical works were arguably Chaucer’s *the Canterbury Tales*, William Langland’s *Piers Plowman*, and Jean de Meun’s French *Roman de la Rose*, where the two first mentioned originated on the British Isles. These three works share similar approaches to social criticism by instructing the estates to change for the better, and Ben Parsons states that in “the medieval theory of satire, most critics tend to focus on the strand of commentary which treats satire

primarily as a tool for instruction” (Parsons 107). This instruction functioned as a set of moral lessons, to which the literate, which included the clergy and upper classes, were exposed to. Paul Miller examines this tool of instruction in medieval satire, arguing that it was a “type of ethical verse, ranging in tone between bitter indignation, mocking irony, and witty humor, which in forthright, unadorned terms censures and corrects vices in society and advocates virtues” (82). In this understanding of satire in the Middle Ages, medieval satire has a didactic form, where it serves to direct its audience towards an ideal.

Medieval satire, in contrast to classical satire, does not always conform to formalist patterns, and it can be found in a variety of literary works with different genres and structural patterns. This disregard of formalist satirical patterns can make medieval satire difficult to recognize because of its episodic appearance within other works. John Peter points out that “medieval literature ... tends to be impersonal, generalizing, abstract, and often allegorical; it is addressed to an audience that may feel guilty of the behavior being criticized; and its chief purpose is to correct vice, not merely denounce it” (Kendrick 53). This view does not always account for every work of medieval satire, but it helps to bring out contrasts in order to distinguish medieval satire from classical satire on a general basis. Laura Kendrick holds however that “medieval satire differs from classical satire, inevitable to the extent that medieval societies (agrarian and feudal, but increasingly commercial) and their [Catholic] values differed from those of the classical world” (53). In turn, this means that even though medieval satirists were influenced by classical satire, medieval satire was driven forward by Christians values. This type of satire targeted different social groups that could concern corruption of the clergy or the laity’s greed (Kendrick 53).

From a medieval Christian perspective, satire was thus understood as a “fundamentally charitable act motivated by the concern for one’s neighbor [,] rather than a desire to do him harm” (Kendrick 54). Medieval satire was therefore often seen by later Elizabethan satire

theorists as “lamentable deviation” from the standards “set by the classical pagan writers” (Griffin 12). Classical satire was thus turned by medieval satirists from targeting individuals and contemporary society in either a comedic Horatian style or a contemptuous Juvenalian style, into “a more deliberately comprehensive criticism covering the vices of the different estates of society in hierarchical order” (Kendrick 54).

The criticism of these hierarchical social orders in the Middle Ages was a dominant and popular type of satire, which developed into a modern term called estates satire, to which Phillips has defined estates satire as:

a broad range of medieval writings describing representative members of different ‘estates’ (ranks or professions) and the sins to which each social rank was prone. ... The range of professions varies from text to text but most estates satire began with clerics (for example, popes, cardinals, bishops, priests, monks, nuns, and sometimes other educated professions like lawyers and doctors), moved on to those who rule and govern (kings, barons, knights, etc.), and then those who work (merchant, burgesses, peasants, etc.) (23).

Roughly these estates are divided into *oratores*, *bellatores*, *laboratores*, respectively, those who pray, those ones who fight, and those who labor, consisting of a wide range of working classes. The general division of social classes allows the satirist to criticize fictional individuals, and thus what they represent, namely their estate. Without turning fully to a Juvenalian satire of hate and scorn, nor of a Horatian satire of comedy, medieval satirists could keep their writing from targeting specific individuals with slander, while still be able to target “anyone” with full satiric power due to its impersonality. They could therefore still operate within the limits of estate satire.

Medieval estate satire ought to function within such an ideal setting as Phillips’ definition proposes, and Sadenur Doğan argues that the estate model is used by Chaucer “to put forward his arguments about the social characteristics and roles of the medieval people who are expected to talk, behave, wear and live in accordance with what their social group requires” (50). This means that, ideally, characters should be limited to the boundaries of the

estate model so that the Parson, the Knight, and the Plowman who represent correct social, moral, and spiritual values are fully set in the estate hierarchy they “belong” to, because they were important in a social and religious construct. On the other hand, the Friar, Summoner, and Pardoner, based on contemporary attitudes towards them, fulfill the traditional definitions of what bad friars, summoners and pardoners do. The estates satire shows how the pilgrims stray from an ideal social, moral and spiritual monasticism like the Parson, Knight and Plowman presumably comply to. Contrary to, for example, Langland’s *Pierce Plowman*, Chaucer does, however, not limit his characters completely to the boundaries of the estate model.

Chaucer uses the estates model for his own purpose, playing on social stereotypes to show how the different estates fail in representing the ideal version of the estate. He shows his audience that our own view of this kind of hierarchy is not absolute, but that it depends on our own position in the world. The foundational work on Chaucer’s estate satire, is Jill Mann’s *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* (1973). In her book, Mann covers the *General Prologue* as an example of estates satire, and the pilgrims’ irregular order to how Chaucer deviates from the tradition. She further demonstrates how Chaucer manipulates his text to fit within a unique pattern of estates satire. Mann states that Chaucer, “more than once, uses the estates concept against itself: the notion of specialised duties, when taken to its limits, destroys the idea of a total society in which all have their allotted place and relation to each other” (7). Chaucer shows his readers the failures of social classes in light of a social ideal (Mann 7). He does this through the use of social stereotypes because “satire takes on a historical life of its own, perpetuating both specific ways of observing reality and conceptual frameworks within which it can be organised” (Mann 8). This framework is called ‘social stereotypes’ by Mann, and it can be used possibly as a source for the satiric technique in the *General Prologue* because of the way it conveys a traditional image of a character belonging to a specific group,

be it an ethnic, social, or moral group (8). Social stereotypes “are transmitted by a variety of means, of differing degrees of formality, ranging from proverbs and anecdotes to learned treatises” (Mann 8). The transmission of Chaucer’s characters contributes to and reflects social stereotypes, which are vital parts of their descriptions.

Besides Jill Mann’s influential work on estates satire, other influential scholars such as Helen Cooper, Helen Phillips, Ian Forrest, and Guy Geltner, have written articles or books about satire against the Church in the *Canterbury Tales*, however, none has discussed this in relation to the three pilgrims. This thesis shows that it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of Chaucer’s satire against the medieval Church by putting the three pilgrims in direct comparison, which has not been done before.

In order to stimulate a reaction of amusement with the audience of the pilgrims’ interests, Chaucer provides detailed, elaborated descriptions of each of the characters’ abilities and actions, to make sure that the audience is aware that the pilgrims all are the best within their respective trade or profession. Mann argues that “an estate can be typified in two ways: Chaucer can evoke the qualities that should go with the profession, the ‘idealised version’; alternatively, he can evoke malpractices and frauds which usually go with it in actuality, the ‘normal version’” (14). Chaucer does this, because, as Mann puts it: “the estates are not described in order to inform us about their work, but in order to present moral criticism” (198). With the descriptions of the band of rogues at the end of the *General Prologue*, Chaucer entertains his audience, but in their exceptional abilities to deceive and graft people, the amusement comes from a parodic representation of their skills because they direct the audience’s attention towards moral criticisms of each estate.

The moral criticism that Chaucer conveys through his texts, results in each of the estates failing to fulfill their professional duties. Chaucer’s portrayal of each of the social classes’ failings in their duties is represented as though they are eccentric individuals and not

solely a representation of an estate. This way, the characters fit in with a social stereotype, in that the Pardoner enjoys dressing ornately and selling fake relics, while the Parson spends his time being devoted to God (Mann 14). By this, I mean that Chaucer tries to pass the pilgrims off as independent individuals with ties to their estate through social stereotypes, while they really *are* the estate themselves. Chaucer uses this disguise to point out moral criticisms of each estate by dressing his pilgrims in a robe of social stereotypes which applies to certain individuals. For example, on the comparison of the smooth-looking Friar and the horrible-looking Summoner, Mann states:

Chaucer ... turn[s] their procedure round in order to point to its [physical appearance's] origin in our irrational, instinctive reactions. The explicit moralising attitude to beauty and ugliness – that they are irrelevant beside considerations of moral worth – coexists, paradoxically, with an implicit admission of their relevance in the use of aesthetic imagery to recommend moral values” (192-93).

In essence, both pilgrims represent the same estate, but the characters' individuality comes from an ambiguity and complexity that is a result of how the two pilgrims are perceived. The venality, or corruptness, represented in the actions of the Friar and the Summoner are fundamentally alike, morally speaking, but because the Summoner is presented as a physically disturbing being, and the Friar characterized as a physically pleasant individual, it affects how we as humans perceive them. Sometimes it can be difficult to point out the grounds of liking or disliking someone, but Chaucer's imagery makes it easy in this case. Chaucer diverges from presenting either a stereotypic character or estate, but he allows each estate to be judged according to its own standards, by drawing on stereotypical attitudes. It is through these attitudes that Chaucer manipulates the stereotype of each estate, where the pilgrims who correspond to a traditional stereotype, such as the Friar, Summoner, and Pardoner, are built up from satirical traditions, while the Knight and Parson, the good pilgrims, come from either instruction on their appropriate duties, or from a reversal of common satirical themes. Even as the *Canterbury Tales* is clearly estates satire in the

representation of these church figures, the satire is also a part of a long tradition against the Church. Where estates satire is related to satire written in Latin, and even overlaps it, they are not the same thing.

Satire in Relation to the Medieval Church

Much of satire produced in the Middle Ages between 9th and 16th century AD, however, was mostly written in Latin by clergy, for clergy, criticizing the ecclesiastical elite for selling and prostituting God's grace, divine forgiveness, and justice (Kendrick 54-6). Church leaders were supposed to be prime examples of virtue for the common people and the rest of the clergy, but instead, some ambitious individuals within these higher ecclesiastical ranks corrupted Christian society, and the Church itself by committing simony, which refers to the act of selling church offices and roles. Originally during the Roman Empire from ca. 1st century BC to 5th century AD, "[Classical] satire was from the beginning a written text ... aimed at Rome's relatively small and elite reading culture, and created and disseminated through the support of private patrons" (Keane 40). Similarly, concerning satire in the Middle Ages, it was the elite of the laity and the clergy who were schooled in literature, rhetoric, and philosophy, all of which is significant in a satirist's way of portraying his or her contemporary society.

Of the critical themes of medieval satire, venality and avarice were two frequent topics. Already in 1099, the satirical *Tractus Garciae* written by a canon of Toledo, who accompanied the archbishop, deals with the archbishop of Toledo's quest for climbing higher on the clerical hierarchic ladder, made possible by simony (Kendrick 55). In the tract, gold and silver are allegorically represented by two martyred saints: Rufinus, which corresponds to "ruddy gold", and Albinus, which corresponds to "white silver." The tract states: "[O]ffer the Roman pontiff the two martyrs through whom is granted entry the Roman Church ... Ask

therefore through Silver [Albinus], and you shall receive, seek through Gold [Rufinus] and you shall find, knock through either martyr and it shall be opened unto you” (Thomson 20-21). It parodies Matthew 7:7, which essentially deals with the Lord providing for his believers, but twists the passage into a satiric point where the Pope, in the position of God, will provide for them as long as his coffers are filled.

Satire in Latin was written for other clergymen, which is why it was allowed. It had a moral point to it where it concerned clergy members engaged in immoral activity as a way to remind the readers not to fall in the same immoral pattern. As discussed above, satire in the Middle Ages served as instructional, and showed its readers how one ought *not* to act. A possibility for Latin satirists to address their fellow clergymen might have been a concern for one’s neighbor, and a reminder for them not to stray off the Christian path. One can then argue that “satire’s most salient effect is not to actually punish its targets or change its audience’s views, but simply to convince that the genre performs an important function in society” (Keane 40). By reminding the audience, and in this case, the clergy, how not to act, an important function of satire is a social role where it attempts to keep its targets, e.g. other clergymen that could be on the brink of immorality, to uphold moral norms and laws. By keeping in mind that medieval satire often held a moral point, serving as instructional, modern definitions of satire often include the same point, while at the same time reaching out to a larger audience. In the next section, I will theorize satire in general and discuss how it can be used for the purpose of this thesis.

Theorizing satire

Northrop Frye, in his book *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), suggests that for satire to function, one needs an object of attack, and one needs “wit or humor founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd” (224-225). This function, as stated earlier, is used to reveal and

discern social issues through different forms of ridicule, and it works by different means. By referring to a situation outside the text itself, through a fictional reality that is very similar to the readers' situation, satire emphasizes the current situation's inefficacy. The satirists point out what is wrong with society, and they do this by ridiculing an individual or an institution that is the cause of, or a factor in, social problems which the readers possibly have to endure. As Brian A. Connery and Kirk Combe write about satire, "the one thing we know about satire is that it promises to tell us what we do not want to know – what we may, in fact, resist knowing" (1). The readers may resist this knowledge because its unpleasant truth may create oppositions between what is good and evil, not only on a textual or social level, but also between the reader and himself, where he risks staying in bad company if he agrees with the satirist, or face the risk of being labeled a hypocrite if he does not align oneself with her.

However, Quintero states that "satirists do not wither in despair, but on the contrary, feel compelled to express their dissent" and that they "write not merely out of personal indignation, but with a sense of moral vocation and with a concern for the public interest" (1). Satire serves to show the audience the consequence of one's foolish acts by punishing the fool, or what the fool represents, but only through humanizing the subject. One cannot mock Adolf Hitler for being responsible for the extermination of six million Jews, Romani, homosexuals, disabled, and political prisoners, because these are acts of pure evil. One can, however, satirize Hitler for the person, or the office he possesses, just like Charlie Chaplin does in his film *The Great Dictator* from 1940.

Chaplin plays Adenoid Hynkel, a non-Aryan man-child who is allowed to do what he wants in a world where he is surrounded by sycophants. As Gilbert Highet puts it: "Some villainies are too awful for us to despise. We can only shudder at them, and in horror turn away – or try to write a tragedy. Against such crimes, satire is almost impotent. Against all lesser crimes and against all follies, it is a powerful weapon" (23). For something to be made

satiric, there must be a perspective of humanizing the subject, or an iconoclastic perspective where the evil acts of the subject must be an act of error, and not pure evil (Quintero 2).

Paralleling this notion of satire against the Pardoner, who I argue is the most criticized pilgrims based on the severity of his stakes, it is only possible to satirize the Pardoner based on his peculiar appearance, which both humanizes and ridicules him. The stakes of losing everyone's souls would be too serious to satirize alone, which is why the office and the character the Pardoner is, can be ridiculed.

Unlike with comedy or tragedy, satire's purpose is not to purify the readers' unresolved feelings and emotions through *catharsis*. Satire's purpose is to invoke the same feelings as in a comedy or a tragedy, however, instead of creating an emotional harmony through character conflicts, a satiric work leaves the audience with no sense of reconciliation or resolution of the emotions and feelings that are evoked. Ronald Paulson states: "The satirist, in short, demands decisions of his reader[s], not mere feelings" *because* "he wishes to arouse [the readers'] energy to action, not purge it in vicarious experience" (15). It is through this emotional disharmony where the satirist "provokes mirth or sadness, a concern for the innocent or the self-destructive fool, or a revulsion for the deceitful knave", which hopefully will lead to some sort of reaction from the readers and audience, directed towards the subject with either laughter or scorn (Quintero 3). This reaction is thus supposed to inspire action to resolve the audience's own feelings, while also improve the current social situation in the eyes of the satirist.

It is important to note, however, that for a change to happen, one must assume that the satirist has the readers' "best interests at heart and seeks improvement or reformation", while both parties share a similar perception of social and moral standards (Quintero 3). A shared essential perception of standards, and the readers' ability to compare the ideal situation to that of a problematic one, is key for change to happen. As Frye states, "to attack anything, writer

and audience must agree on its undesirability, which means that the content of a great deal of satire founded on national hatreds, snobbery, prejudice, and personal pique goes out of date quickly” (224). As a consequence, if there are no established social or moral standards, those who are targeted by satire may fail to recognize it and take literal offense by claiming that the satirist is a liar and a fool (Quintero 4). The audience can also fall in the same trap of not understanding that it is satire, which is why it is important with a common ground of reason so that there are no “confusions between literal fact and the truth of art” (Quintero 5).

To avoid confusion, it is important to clarify how satire ought to be understood in relation to parody and irony. Parody can be understood as “a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text” (Hutcheon 6). By understanding irony as a discrepancy between what is expected and what actually happens, usually with a comic twist, Linda Hutcheon argues that “irony is the major rhetorical strategy deployed by the [parody] genre” (25). Ironic inversion then “evokes amusement, derision, and sometimes scorn” through what Highet argues is “distortion and exaggeration” (69). Satiric parody is thus an imitation of an original, a copy where errors are pointed out, hidden facades are revealed, weaknesses are emphasized, and strengths are diminished (Highet 68).

Highet argues that the patterns of satire throughout the history of Western literature, including medieval and Renaissance satire, usually fall within three main shapes (13). These patterns or general principles then result in a pattern of satire. One of these shapes is monologues where the satirist speaks behind a mask, speaking to the audience indirectly where she addresses the problems imposes her views on the public. The mask Highet discusses may be a device to protect the satirist because of unwanted attention. The satirist has to operate with an awareness of satire’s limitations which are the power of words, the influence wielded by the mocking figure, and the topics that may safely be addressed. The

supposed dangers of writing satire are better understood as a fiction cultivated by the genre by authors who are well-connected enough to be insulated from real threats (Keane 41). This may be evident of Chaucer's social position as well, where it is not Chaucer the author who is satirizing pilgrims, but Chaucer the pilgrim. Much of the satire in the *Canterbury Tales*, is also projected by other pilgrims, who can act as different masks for Chaucer as a form of protection because it is not the words of Chaucer, but the words of the Friar, or the Miller, or the Reeve.

While Hight includes the mask, Dustin Griffin omits it, but still provides a sound explanation of satire:

A work of satire is designed to attack vice or folly. To this end it uses wit or ridicule ... It seeks to persuade an audience that something or someone is reprehensible or ridiculous ... It engages in exaggeration and some sort of fiction. But satire does not forsake the "real world" entirely. Its victims come from that world, and it is this fact (together with a darker or sharper tone) that separates satire from pure comedy ... Satire usually proceeds by means of clear reference to some moral standard or purposes (1).

Griffin's modern definition of satire includes how works of fiction wittily exaggerate certain features in a near-real world, and how a moral standard is portrayed through the victimized characters. This explanation separates satire from comedy by having the victims appear as real, happening in a real world. However, as satire's chief purpose in medieval literature is to correct vices, and not explicitly to spark a revolution, it is similar, but not the same as satire's function in the modern age. Both modern and medieval theory on satire illuminates the aspects of satire the other one lacks. While estates satire presents the shortcomings of the different social classes in the Middle Ages, and Latin Satire, which overlaps with estates satire, is directed more towards correcting the vices of the clergy, modern understandings of satire encompass a larger perspective in what can be targeted, and how it is targeted more so than what medieval understandings of satire seem to do. Instead of criticizing a behavior to make the audience feel guilt, like medieval literature tends to do, modern understandings of

satire persuade its audience that something is ridiculous by letting them identify with the text's victims. Modern satire highlights in Chaucer's text, his invitation to the victims and potential victims to stand up to the abuse and to reject these figures that take advantage of them.

In relation to Chaucer's use of satire in the *Canterbury Tales*, it seems to depart in some ways from a medieval expectation of what satire is supposed to do. His characters are not punished, and there is not much evidence for the correction of sin according to the satirical purpose of certain medieval literature. However, since medieval theories come up short in explaining what Chaucer is doing with satire, modern theories on satire may shed more light on how he diverges from typical medieval satire. Instead of correcting vices, Chaucer, in coherence with a modern understanding of satire, persuades his audience that the pilgrims, or estates, he satirizes, are in fact ridiculous. At the same time, Chaucer's satire may serve to correct vices with clergy, like medieval satire usually did, although this does not appear to be the main purpose. Instead, the purpose of Chaucer's satire seems to be that his readers can identify with the exemplum he provides in the form of the laity who almost fall victims for clerical abuse, but who instead overturn the situation the abusers have put them in, and end up ridiculing them instead.

Chapter 1

‘He was the beste beggere in his hous’: The Friar’s Great Personality and Hidden Venality

For unto swich a worthy man as he
Accorded nat, as by his facultee,
To have with sike lazars aqueynetaunce
(I: l. 242-45)

This description captures the essence of Chaucer’s Friar, where the pursuit of money and a high social position comes at the cost of breaking mendicant vows explicitly for the orders of friars. These vows involve living like an imitation of Christ by caring for the souls of the sick and poor, while at the same time adopting a lifestyle of voluntary poverty. Chaucer, in his anti-mendicant satire, uses the Friar as the first pilgrim to put money above God by rejecting the poor and instead surrounding himself with wealthy people, as it is more financially lucrative. The Friar is ironically praised as he serves as an example for the rest of the orders of friars by being described by Chaucer in the *General Prologue* as a pillar of the Church, ‘a noble post’ (I: l. 214). The ironic praise is how Chaucer criticizes not only the Friar himself, but all mendicant orders. He does this through the satirical descriptions and actions of Friar Huberd, who appears in the *General Prologue*, and through Huberd’s double, Friar John, who acts as an extension of Huberd’s persona in the *Summoner’s Tale*.

These descriptions, however ambiguous, indicate that behind the Friar’s pleasant façade, he is a corrupt, greedy individual and that he serves as a representative for all four mendicant orders. In this chapter, I argue that by drawing on contemporary attitudes towards mendicancy, Chaucer criticizes it through satirical depiction. He does this, as I will show, through satirical remarks that at first are hidden behind a charismatic and pleasant character, only to become more visible throughout the portrait, and then made fully obvious in the

Summoner's Tale. The light level of satirical wit which the Friar employs in his *Tale* is discussed in chapter two. In this first chapter, I will address Chaucer's use of anti-mendicant satire and how it becomes more evident throughout the Friar's portrait, only to be fully realized in the *Summoner's Tale*, where the satirical tone becomes more serious, inflicting a more clear-cut social critique, as well as a result of the quarrel between the Friar and Summoner. I will first introduce the historical background for mendicancy in medieval England, then address the Friar's descriptive portrait in the *General Prologue*, before addressing the friar represented in the *Summoner's Tale* and how the two friars are connected to each other. In my discussion, the Friar and Friar Huberd refers to the pilgrim-friar, while the friar and Friar John refers to the friar portrayed in the *Summoner's Tale*.

Historical Background

A friar is a member of a mendicant order, often called a brotherhood. Friars take the same vows as monks, which consists of vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, but instead of living in cloistered asceticism like monks do, friars instead live in service to society. The profession came from mainland Europe to the British Isles at the beginning of the thirteenth century. After first facing severe criticisms from the locals, the four orders of Augustinian Hermits, Carmelites, Dominicans, and Franciscans came to eventually serve important purposes for the medieval Church, mostly in the urban centers of Britain. Brother Solomon, who was the first Franciscan convert in Britain, attests to this early struggle, stating that he was rejected by his family after conversion. In another situation, the inhabitants of Dover treated Dominicans, who had newly arrived, as spies (Geltner, "The Friar" 157). Despite having the locals expressing their reservations towards the new orders throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth century, mendicant orders soon became popular and powerful on the British Isles. This was because they filled a spiritual and administrative gap left by the Church

in that they could “address the needs of a growing urban population” which the already established church institution could not (Geltner, “The Friar” 157).

The new orders also helped “define the boundaries of orthodoxy”, meaning that they introduced new devotional practices to prevent the decline of Christian morality at the cost of profit-economies, which are necessary for urban communities to prosper (Geltner “The Friar” 158). Religious mendicancy became a highly influential movement due to several factors which included “charismatic leadership, local pride, papal and royal support, rising rates of literacy, social and cultural accessibility, the promise of mobility (both social and geographical), and a capacity to dovetail with urban elites’ political and economic agendas” (Geltner, “The Friar” 158). By the end of the fourteenth century friars had filled many of the highest ecclesiastical ranks in Britain, as well as positions in royal administrations where they acted as “inquisitors, confessors, and bishops as well as urban and princely treasurers, missionaries, and ambassadors” (Geltner, “The Friar” 158).

It was problematic that mendicants could possess powers that previously were separated between the secular and regular clergy. Regular clergy consists of monks, while the secular clergy is represented by priests. Monks normally prayed in isolation for their own spiritual growth, and also received economic compensation for also praying for their benefactors’ and patrons’ souls (Geltner, “The Friar” 159). Priests, on the other hand, administered the sacraments. Friars, representing their own independent institutions, could carry out both priestly and monastic duties. The blurring of the lines between secular tasks and regular tasks gave cause for resentment towards friars, which is represented in the quarrel between Chaucer’s Friar and Summoner, who each represent different clerical institutions in competition with each other. The merge, however, between secular and regular ecclesiastical duties was indeed a success, despite that it could be undermined by opportunistic individuals, thus damaging the mendicant institution. This damage is represented in how Chaucer’s Friar

conducts his profession, where he shows how both Friar Huberd of the *General Prologue* and Friar John of the *Summoner's Tale* fall short of their ecclesiastic duties.

Anti-mendicant satire targets the abuses and malpractice mendicants were associated with. David Salter states that “the emergence of anti-fraternal satire can be dated very precisely to the middle of the thirteenth century, and the comically disparaging image of the friar which is perpetuated proved to be extremely durable and long-standing” (25). While anti-mendicant satire refers to satire against specifically mendicant orders, anti-fraternal satire could also be applied to secular clergy such as monks. In this context, the terms are however used interchangeably. Mendicants’ autonomy made them difficult to control, because they answered to either themselves or the pope, which could spark conflicts between friars and everyone else. As Guy Geltner puts it: “friars were often accused of collaborating with external enemies: the emperor, the pope, a hostile ruler; or vice versa: an invading power would target them for siding with the local population” (*Antifraternalism* 63). These attitudes provide inspiration for satirists to write about friars to express disdain and critique malpractice. This critique is evident in other works such as Gower’s *Mirour de l’Omme* where the “friars ‘Ipocresie’ [Hypocrisy] and ‘Flateries’ [Flattery] are hand in glove” (Mann 38). The notions of flattery and hypocrisy are traditional features of anti-mendicant satire, which relies on mocking friars’ “gift of the gab;” referring to the ability of having a highly persuasive tongue (Mann 37). Like the Friar in the *Canterbury Tales*, Faux Semblant in de Meun’s *Roman de la rose* “cloaks his deception with ‘softe ... and pleasaunt words” (Mann 38). The stereotypic notion of friars using words to influence the people around them is a prominent feature in anti-mendicant satire. This notion may possibly stem from friars’ scholastic practice, where they trained and honed their debating skills (Geltner, “The Friar” 166). Friars could thus be mocked for all their vices, be it sexual relations, exploitation, or general misconduct.

Among the critics who discuss the Friar and anti-mendicant satire, Salter states that Chaucer's satire is not only done to "ridicule and disparage the corruption of friars, but to provoke feelings of indignation at their conduct" (23). Derrick Pitard elaborates on this idea by explaining that Chaucer's use of vernacular language could imply a mocking resistance towards the mendicant malpractice (208). Helen Phillips argues that both the Friar and the Summoner (who also will be addressed to an extent) "are primarily examples of established literary traditions of anticlerical satire" because they voice the hatred between the rival professions, while the humor in the *Summoner's Tale*, Robert Hasenfratz argues, "uses inversion to drive home its satirical point" (Phillips 103; Hasenfratz 257). In the rest of this chapter, I will address Chaucer's use of satire against the Friar.

The General Prologue

In the *General Prologue*, it seems that Chaucer atypically follows the framework of medieval social estates of representing first those who fight, then those who pray, and those who labor, in a different order than Phillip's definition. Chaucer starts with the description of the Knight and his servant, the Yeoman, and continues with describing clergy members in the form of a nun, prioress, a second nun, a monk, and then the Friar. While both nuns' descriptions are omitted, the Prioress, the Monk, and the Friar are described in detail, and they show a steady decline in moral standards (Cooper 40). When Chaucer presents the Friar, there is a possibility of him being the pilgrim with the most corrupted morals of the three. The Prioress focuses more on her social status and courtly love than her professional calling, displaying a distance between the ecclesiastical office and being a woman, while the Monk disregards monastic rules, as he is described as 'reccheles' (I: l. 179), meaning heedless of rules (Cooper 40). Neither the Prioress's vanity or the Monk's rule-breaking harm anyone directly (Cooper 40).

However, the Friar's infringement of his office is more extreme than the Prioress and Monk, though this does not become clear at first because the description of the Friar seems overly positive. The introduction in the *General Prologue* states:

A Frere ther was, a wantowne and a merye, A lymytour, a ful solempne man. In alle the ordres foure is noon that kan So muchel of daliaunce and fair langage. He hadde maad ful many a mariage Of yonge women at his owene cost. Unto his ordre he was a noble post. (I: l. 208-14)	<i>jovial/pleasure-loving, merry licensed friar, dignified/important the four orders of friars, knows much, sociability</i> <i>supporter (pillar of the Church)</i>
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The initial passage describing the Friar is excessively praising so that the Friar comes off as a well-liked, respectable, 'solempne' and 'merye' man, while he also serves as an important figure of his order. However, the word 'wantowne' (I: l. 208) suggests ambiguously that the Friar is not what he seems. In the Riverside Chaucer, 'wantowne' is glossed as *jovial* or *pleasure-loving*, but the Middle English Dictionary, shows that the word also can relate to sexual indulgences, being extravagant, and of a person lacking discipline, or is difficult to control, which hints to the reader where the description of the Friar is going (Benson 27; MED). Being a 'lymytour' (I: l. 209) means that the Friar was licensed by his order to beg in a specific district, and he seems to have a well-connected network, with his 'muchel of daliaunce' (I: l. 211), which means sociability, to which he uses by means of his 'fair langage' (Benson 27). This passage serves as an example of the abuse of begging, because friars, in general, were supposed to take care of the outcasts in society, and not surround themselves with people of high class as an easy access to wealth when begging. Mann adds that "the ambiguity of the word 'daliaunce' prevents us [the readers] from being sure that the Friar's eloquence has a sexual aim" (39). While Langland in *Piers Plowman* also condemns all the four orders of friars stating that they were 'prechyng the peple for profit of [the wombe]' (P59), Chaucer never specifies which order the Friar belongs to. Instead, he concentrates his

criticism of all orders in one character, by describing the Friar as being the best friar of all the four orders.

The accessibility to money can thus explain how the Friar weds so many couples ‘at his owene cost’ (I: l. 213), but it does not explain why he, in his seemingly altruistic ways, pays for them. In the portrait of the Friar, we find descriptions which address his relationship with women. They are described as ‘yonge women’ (I: l. 213), ‘faire wyves’ (I: l. 234), ‘worthy women’ (I: l. 217) , and ‘tappestere’ (I: l. 241), meaning barmaid, and such words in relation to a friar who has taken the vow of chastity, has no natural connection to him. The subtle descriptions may indicate that the Friar is a womanizer because of his smooth appearance, winning nature, and the authority of his office. The Friar may thus be in need of marrying off a young woman quickly if he has laid with her. Mann argues that “charges of spiritual seduction [can] readily become charges of bodily seduction” (40). Like a sailor has a woman in every port, and like the Pardoner claims he has a ‘joly wenche in every toun’ (VI: l. 455), a friar who travels frequently, could easily “have secret conferences with women” wherever he goes (Mann 40). The intention of these deceptive descriptions remains subtle, because the emphasis on the Friar’s façade is effective in hiding his true self beneath praise that does not seem wholly ironic at first.

Chaucer continues the Friar’s description:

Ful wel beloved and famulier was he
With frankeleyns over al in his contree,
And eek with worthy women of the toun;
For he hadde power of confessioun,
As seyde himself, moore than a curat,
For of his ordre he was licenciat.
Ful swetely herde he confessioun,
And pleasaunt was his absolucioun:
He was an esy man to yeve penaunce,
Ther as he wiste to have a good pitaunce.

landowners, everywhere
also
licensed to hear confessions

lenient, give
expected, gift (literally food
allowed to members of a religious
house)

(I: l. 215-24)

In the elaborations of his social network and his profession, the Friar comes off as a highly likable character, but despite being popular, the Friar neglects his monastic duties. He is well-known with both landowners (I: l. 216) and ‘worthy women’ (I: l. 217) across towns and regions because he possesses the ‘power of confessioun’ (I: l. 218), as friars usually had. Friars were often highly educated due to fraternal regulation concerning age and educational requirements because hearing confessions was important work, and it was important for the confessor to know how to extract the sins from the confessant well enough to save their soul (Pitard 220). Friars and priests were the clergy that were able to hear confessions and deliver absolution through penance and contrition given by the sinners. This friar was no different in that he heard confessions and absolved people when penance was given. In fact, the Friar claimed himself to be an ‘esy man to yeve [*give*] penaunce’ (I: l. 223) more than any ‘curat’ (I: l. 219), meaning parish priest (Davis 30). Chaucer addresses the contemporary common issue of rivalry between regular and secular clergy, where friars capitalize on the laity’s spiritual needs at the expense of the local parish priests’ clerical tasks, such as penance and absolution. The Friar’s absolution is described as ‘pleasaunt’ (I: l. 222), because he ‘wiste [*knew, expected*] to have a good pitaunce’ (I: l. 224), meaning he would receive a gift after delivering absolution. Chaucer subverts a divine action and makes a satirical point of critique out of it. By handing out absolutions easily and pleasantly, the Friar was sure to profit from it in the form of a gift given to the Friar personally.

This gift may come in many forms, whether it be an economic gift or a sexual gift. These kinds of profits can also come in a more carnal form. As Geltner expresses his thoughts on this issue, he states that “certain friars were accused of using their skills as speakers, their ‘fair langage’, to their own advantage, as a means of exhorting money and seducing women” (“The Friar” 166). Compared to *Pierce the Ploughmans Crede* it seems that Chaucer does keep with the social stereotype of friars being womanizers where their ‘glauerynge wordes’

are “primarily a tool in their seduction of women” (Mann 38). It certainly helps the Friar’s situation when Chaucer then describes him as being ‘swich a worthy man as he’ (I: l. 243), with a sensual lisp (I: l. 264), and eyes twinkling ‘as doon [*do*] the sterres [*stars*] in the frosty nyght’ (I: l. 268) to add to his enticing looks and manner.

The Friar’s good looks, manner, and profession enables him to take advantage of people, as the next passage reveals:

For unto povre ordre for to yive	<i>poor, give</i>
Is signe that a man is wel yshryve;	<i>confessed/penitent</i>
For if he yaf, he dorste make avaunt,	<i>for if a man gave, the Friar dared to assert</i>
He wiste that a man was repentaunt;	<i>knew</i>
For many a man so hard is of his herte,	
He may nat wepe, although hym sore smerte.	<i>cannot/is not able to, he sorely/painfully suffers</i>
Therefore in stede of wepyng and preyeres	
Men moote yeve silver to the povre freres.	<i>must give</i>
(I: l. 225-32)	

If a man is ‘wel yshryve’ (I: l. 227), indicating that he has confessed sufficiently, he should give enough money so that his penance represents his sincerity in his contrition (I: l. 228).

Although something causes him ‘smerte’, pain, which could be something the man has confessed, he should not ‘wepe’, but instead give money to the friaries: ‘men moote yeve [*must give*] silver to the povre freres’ (I: l. 232). Besides manipulating men’s emotions, corrupted friars also preyed on them for other economic reasons. One of the premises for friars’ urban mission was disposable income (Geltner, “The Friar” 166). The bleeding wound of excess wealth, which was often called “the friars’ spiritual balm”, meant that the friars did their best in relieving the laity of the spiritual wound caused by having too much money (Geltner, “The Friar” 166). This was usually done with approval from the papacy, but Chaucer opens up the possibility of a collusion where someone could abuse this system. This kind of abuse shows how Chaucer satirizes the Friar’s profession, but also prevents the Friar from being placed in solely a good or evil category. Despite his freely given, but costly

absolutions, the Friar is much more concerned with the material effects these absolutions have, rather than a positive spiritual effect which could possibly harm people's spiritual well-being. The Friar preys on the laity's faith in his office, and of him cleansing them of sin in exchange for material gifts. The way Chaucer uses 'povre [poor] freres' (I: l. 232) ironically plays on the idea that friars, in general, were poor people, traveling around in rags, begging and hearing confessions.

The Friar, however, does not travel around in rags nor does he seem very poor, as the next passage states:

His typet was ay farsed ful of knyves And pynnes, for to yeven faire wyves. And certainly he hadde a murye note: Wel koude he synge and pleyen on a rote; Of yeddynges he baar outrely the pris.	<i>dangling tip of the hood, stuffed give merry/pleasing, voice stringed instrument for reciting ballads (yeddinges), he absolutely (outrely) took the prize lily</i>
His nekke whit was as flour-de-lys; (I: l. 233-38)	

It is in this description much of Huberd's physical attractiveness lies. His 'typet' (I: l. 233), the dangling tip of the hood, is stuffed with knives and pins, 'pynnes' (I: l. 234) which he gives to pretty women. His 'nekke whit', white neck, is compared to the French fleur-de-lis, a symbol connected to courtly love, which again suggests inappropriate relationships with women. A man who has a rich cape and has enough economic stability to give away possible courting gifts to fair ladies, is not a person who is in dire financial need, like the ideal brother of the order ought to be. The Friar is also described with a pleasant voice, 'murye note' (I: l. 235), which is so good that he metaphorically wins prizes for reciting ballads for being the best. The 'murye note,' however, can be seen as a parody of an aspect of the friar's profession as St Francis called his followers 'joculatores Domini', meaning God's minstrels (Mann 45). St Francis himself has been known to, in moments of spiritual ecstasy, "mimic the playing of a viol, and sing in front of the faithful", which could possibly have encouraged his followers to do the same (Mann 45). However, the Friar's adept skill of singing ballads also indicates

spiritual sloth (Cooper 41). By spending time singing and dancing instead of praising God, the Friar shows how detached he is from the spiritual aspect of his profession. The Friar's attractiveness at this point seems to be merely superficial.

The Friar's personality seems ever so alluring in that he is a man of many talents and high virtue. At the same time, the description seems unsettling as the next passage serves as an example for:

Therto he strong was a champioun.	<i>representative in a judicial duel</i>
He knew the tavernes wel in every toun	<i>every, innkeeper, barmaid</i>
And everich hostiler and tappestere	<i>better, leper, beggar-woman</i>
Bet that a lazar or a beggestere,	<i>such</i>
For unto swich a worthy man as he	<i>it was not suitable, in view of his</i>
Accorded nat, as by his facultee,	<i>official position</i>
To have with sike lazars aqueynetaunce.	<i>sick, lepers</i>
(I: l. 239-45)	

Although friars were supposed to take care of the spiritual well-being of individuals on the lowest ranks of the social order, like beggars, and the sick, this is not the case with Chaucer's Friar. It is strange that the Friar has knowledge of every tavern around, and their innkeepers and barmaids, but he does not mingle with either beggars, 'beggestere' (I: l. 242) or lepers, 'lazars' (I: l. 242). The contradiction that it is not suitable that such a 'worthy man as he' (I: l. 243), in accordance to his office, should not have 'aqueynetaunce' with 'sike lazars' (I: l. 240), goes against both what his office demands of him, but also the people he surrounds himself with. Being 'worthy' can, however, be used to describe the Friar without being ironic because of his social standing, without regard to his moral qualities (Mann 53). Taking those moral qualities into account, creates a contradiction of the tension between contemporary spiritual and social ideals which the Friar is unable to live up to.

Spiritual ideals demand that the Friar associate with the poor and sick, and care for their spiritual well-being. The Friar, in turn, denounces this ideal, while making room for materialism, because it enables the Friar's high level of education and spiritual authority to

give him a high social ranking. Associating with lower standing members of society would therefore cost him access to the higher standing members of society and their economic wealth. The Friar chooses to access the ‘ideal’ notion of a social hierarchy at the cost of the spiritual ideal. This notion is explicitly stated in the next passage, where it states:

<p>It is nat honest: it may nat avaunce, For to deelen with no swich poraille, But al with riche and sellers of vitaille. And over al, ther as profit sholde arise, Curteis he was and lowely of servyse; Ther nas no man and nowher so virtuous; He was the beste beggere in his hous; [And yaf a certayn ferme for the graunt;</p>	<p><i>honorable, cannot be profitable such poor people victuals/provisions where graciously humble was not capable</i></p>
<p>Noon of his brethren cam there in his haunt;] For though a wydwe hadde nought a sho, So plesaunt was his “<i>In principio</i>,” Yet wolde he have a ferthyng, er he wente. (I: l. 246-55)</p>	<p><i>fee/ fixed payment, grant (of an exclusive territory of begging)</i></p> <p><i>territory shoe in the beginning farthing</i></p>

To deal with ‘swich poraille’ (I: l. 247), poor people, ‘may nat avaunce’ (I: l. 246), is not profitable. The Friar’s neglecting attitude towards the people whose souls he ought to be taking care of, is reflected in his pursuit of material wealth, where he is described as a being that is around where ‘profit shole arise’ (I: l. 249). Ironically, usually avoiding other beggars, the Friar is also described as ‘the beste beggere in his hous’ (I: l. 252), which can suggest that the house or order the Friar belongs to, or perhaps signify that all orders, has money-making as a primary principle. This principle undermines what was discussed earlier: that money and social status overshadow mendicant fraternal ideals of caring for the sick and the imitation of Christ in every way. Anti-fraternal attitudes are also shown in that none of his brethren entered his ‘haunt’ (I: l. 252b), or territory, which was unusual for a brotherhood that was supposed to share everything equally. The Friar’s quest for material wealth leaves him unscrupulous in his way of greedily defending a territory of his own in which to beg.

Despite Chaucer's satire not being explicit, he incorporates satire of friars in ambiguous hints related to their hypocrisy, their avarice, and their pride instead of addressing them openly. The territory, where he has paid himself to a 'graunt' (I: l. 252a) of the area he begs in, shows a pilgrim with exceptional, self-serving, business skills. The Friar had no trouble in amassing money wherever he went, which is the result of his outwardly pleasantness, and his impeccable oral skills that he displays by preaching the opening words of Genesis: "*In Principio.*" This kind of praise is a typical traditional feature of anti-mendicant satire which is based on the Friar's exceptional rhetorical skills. The Friar's persuasive tongue, stressed numerous times by Chaucer, exemplifies the Friar's winning nature when it comes to his speech and manner (Mann 37).

It is through these ambiguous hints that Jill Mann argues that "the use of ambivalent words ... make it hard to subject the Friar to moral analysis" (54). Yet Mann does not consider Chaucer's ultimate end, which I argue is light-hearted satirical critique of anti-mendicant orders, and the use of the laity as exemplars for not being tricked by corrupt clerics. I understand Mann's point, but Chaucer provides evidence for such moral critique, though it is not stated explicitly. First, instead of stating that the Friar is lecherous, he brings gifts to women: 'knyvves and pynnes, for to yeven faire wyves' (I: l. 233-34) and Chaucer surrounds him with words not normally connected to his station such as 'yonge' and 'worthy women'. Second, instead of calling the Friar out for being greedy, he 'was an esy man to yeve penaunce' (I: l. 223) and he receives many gifts through this. Third, instead of stating that the Friar deceives his clients, Chaucer has the Friar appear as a pleasant person through his exterior and through his manner.

The exterior pleasantness is further exemplified in his 'semycope' (I: l. 262), which is a very wide, expensive cloak which was 'rounded as a belle out of the presse' (I: l. 263), meaning that it was as if it was new. Fine clothing matches the friars' self-importance, to

which Langland also has exemplified in *Piers Plowman*: ‘Many of this *maisteres freris* mowe clothen hem at lyking, / For here money and marchandise machen togideres (Mann 44). Laura Hodges states that the use of the Friar’s ‘typet’ could be considered sinful because of its superfluous, prideful length, while his ‘semycope’ is only appropriate to wear if someone actually has the right to dress that well (319, 323). Huberd does not have that privilege, and there is thus an “inversion of the holy habit”, which was the outfit friars were supposed to wear, made of coarse wool (Hodges 332). The flaunting cloak, and his clothes which were unsuitable for his profession, make thus the Friar appear as a wolf in sheep’s clothing. A wolf he is, because the Friar’s pleasant manner makes him socially and physically attractive, in which the closing lines ‘as doon the sterres in the frosty nyght’ (I: l. 268) shifts the mode of the narrative where morality is outweighed by physical attractiveness. Instead of judging the Friar based on the content of his corrupted character, he is seemingly judged by his looks. This kind of judgement, shows that corruption is represented in how aesthetics obscure morality, much like the same way the Pardoner uses words to obscure his relics to make a profit. The Friar’s good looks outweigh his morally corrupt self, which can result in an inflated self-image.

The last example of Chaucer’s ambiguous hints is that instead of Chaucer stating that the Friar is a proud man, Chaucer describes the Friar of being ‘lyk a maister or a pope’ (I: l. 261). The latter one has further implications where the use of ‘maister’ was linked by satirists to friars’ pride in learning (Mann 39). St Francis exhorted that his followers should not be called masters, which is why satirists might have continued to do so, to ridicule their pride (Mann 39). In his self-inflated description of being like a pope, similar to the Monk being like a ‘prelaat’ (I: l. 204), just more pompous, it is not surprising that the Friar’s courtesy and modesty is only limited to situations where ‘profit sholde arise’ (I: l. 249) (Cooper 40). As I will discuss later in the chapter, Chaucer, through the voice of the Summoner, mocks the

pilgrim-Friar's pride by using Friar John as a double for Friar Huberd. Chaucer gives thus his audience all these hints of anti-mendicant satire, which eventually become obvious signs of moral corruption. Through Friar John in the *Summoner's Tale*, Chaucer also generates enough evidence to impose a moral judgement on the Friar in the *General Prologue*, without it having an explicit criticism from the narrative voice, but instead hides it in plain sight, only to be stated elaborated upon and stated explicitly in the *Summoner's Tale*.

The *Summoner's Tale* thus starts out as anti-fraternal satire similar to Langland's "general" anti-fraternal critiques in *Pierce Plowman*, or de Meun's *Faux Semblant*. But the *Tale* develops a friar that is a slick individual who comes off as socially pleasant and humble. However, Chaucer's way of manipulating the *Tale* to seem very realistic, show off the character's dubiousness (Finlayson 469). The Friar's realness coincides to Mann's argument of estate satire that Chaucer makes his characters seem like real individuals, while, in essence, is a complex representation of the estate the Friar represents. The realistic characterization of the Friar thus extends to the friars in Chaucer's real contemporary society, whom he criticizes through satirical depiction (Finlayson 469).

The *Summoner's Tale* and the Quarrel Between the Friar and Summoner

The *Summoner's Tale* is the last the audience hears from the quarrel between the Friar and the Summoner, and it is told as a revenge tale as the final blow to Friar Huberd. As mentioned, friars and summoners belonged to two different, rival church institutions because they competed for money from the same laity. Chaucer might be playing on the long-standing rivalry between these two professions by having the two pilgrims quarrel with each other (Havely 10). The Friar and the Summoner start attacking each other already at the end of the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, where the Friar critiques the Wife of the length of her prologue stating: "Now dame," quod he, "so have I joye or blis, / This is a long preamble of a tale!"

(III: 830-31). The Summoner, in his attempt to defend the Wife, interrupts the Friar with a satirical complaint: ‘Lo, goode men, a flye and eek a frere / Wol falle in every dysh and eek mateere’ (III: l. 835-36), suggesting that friars, like flies, are a nuisance. These comments introduce the underlying contempt between the two pilgrims with the Wife acting as a catalyst between the men when the Summoner, in his crude way, defends her.

The Summoner is visibly angered by the *Friar’s Tale* told earlier by the Friar, which the Summoner indicates in his *Prologue*. The Summoner uses the Friar’s knowledge about Hell to show that there is little distinction between devils and friars, and takes the opportunity to compare friars like bees flying around the Devil’s arse hole:

‘Hold up thy tayl, though Sathanas!’ quoud he;
‘Shewe forth thyn ers, and lat the frere se
Where is the nest of freres in this place!
(III: l. 1689-91)

Satan’s arse, shows the crude satirical mockery of the Summoner towards friars, and the bee simile, caricatures the behavior of busy, inquisitive friars in general (Havelly 18). The story of hidden friars in Hell, Helen Cooper states, is a parody based on a story told about the Cistercians, “who could not be found in heaven among the other blessed until the Virgin lifted her cloak to reveal them there under her special protection” (Cooper 176). Furthermore, when the Summoner exclaims ‘God save yow alle, save this cursed Frere’ (III: l. 1707), which shows that the Summoner does not give the Friar a chance to redeem himself, the satirical tone becomes more serious, most likely as a revenge for the previously told *Friar’s Tale*. The Friar, on the other hand, does indeed give the summoner of his tale of his tale a chance to change his ways. While chapter two will deal with the Summoner’s reaction to the *Friar’s Tale*, the rest of this chapter will be dedicated to analyzing the *Summoner’s Tale*: how it both contributes to the vitriolic relationship between the Friar and the Summoner, and how it criticizes the character Friar John as a representative for the pilgrim Friar Huberd, and the mendicant orders in general. As mentioned earlier, the *Summoner’s Tale* works as an

elaboration of the vices that are ambiguously hidden but have evolved to become more clear throughout the Friar's portrait. Compared to the representation of summoners in the *Friar's Tale*, which only elaborates on anti-clerical satire connected to summoners in general, the *Summoner's Tale*, instead, noxiously targets this specific Friar.

Already in the Wife of Bath's *Prologue* which comes before her *Tale* and both the Friar's and Summoner's *Prologues* and *Tales*, the uncivil appearance of the Summoner contrasts with the Friar's smooth approach. The Friar uses witty language, addressing his nemesis mockingly with 'sire Somnour' (III: l. 840) to emphasize his academic and religious background, and to project an image of an intelligent and polished man to the other pilgrims and the readers. The Summoner on the other hand, shows off his crude and violent manner, reflecting his grotesque appearance and non-educated background when he tells the Friar, 'bishrewe thy face' (III: l. 844), meaning that he curses the Friar for stating that he will '[t]elle of a somnour swich a tale or two / That alle the folk shal laughen in this place' (III: l. 842-43). While the *Friar's Tale* does not instigate the conflict between the Summoner and Friar, because it is told before the *Summoner's Tale*, it certainly fuels the ongoing quarrel between them, only to reach a climax in the graphic *Tale* of the Summoner.

The *Summoner's Tale* is a fabliau that deals with anti-fraternal satire, fraud, and a common topic that Chaucer imposes on not only the Friar, but also on the Summoner and Pardoner: the reduction of spiritual ideals to earthly counterparts. It is a "comic story in verse with an everyday, middle-class setting, more concerned with folly than evil, in which the conman gets his come-uppance" (Cooper 176). The *Tale* is hinged on the notion of being a 'cherles dede' (III: l. 2206), similar to the Miller's 'cherles tale' (I: l. 3169), and the quality of parody is found in ecclesiastical and spiritual elements such as the friar's sermons and supposed humility (Cooper 177).

In the *Tale*, the audience is introduced to the character Friar John, a ‘limitour’ who wanders about seeking alms and contributions in exchange for prayers. He wanders from door to door, begging for contributions with his bag and ‘tipped staf’ (III: l. 1737) as a symbol of his authority. He writes down the names of all the people who contribute to him ‘ascaunces that he wolde for hem preye’ (III: l. 1745), meaning “as if he would pray for them”. The line serves as an early indication that the friar does not care about the spiritual well-being of the villagers, but instead he only cares about material wealth. One day, however, going from house to house, Friar John comes upon a house where the rich, but long-term sick Thomas lies bedridden. The friar meets with both Thomas and his wife, where he hugs and fondles her excessively. When John goes on a long rant of a sermon on the vices of having too much money and then into a new sermon on the vices of anger, Thomas gets angry, and in order to silence John, he agrees to give John something.

Telling John to reach down his pants to ‘grope’ around, Thomas lets loose a thunderous fart, which angers the friar. Before losing his temper, John runs over to the lord of the manor of the town to tell him what happened, interrupting the lord and his wife’s dinner. After being told what happened, the lord lets his squire solve the problem, to which he suggests letting the fart be divided, as gifts to the friary ought to be divided among the brethren, by having Thomas fart on a wheel. The twelve spokes on the wheel would each serve one friar, with Friar John in the middle of the wheel, since he first got the gift. Before anyone can comment any further, the *Tale* is over.

The *Tale* serves to emphasize criticism connected to the pilgrim Friar. In the beginning of the tale, at the house, John greets Thomas ‘curteisly and softe’ (III: l. 1771), while Thomas greets the friar with ‘O deere maister’ (III: l. 1781), and in the conversation between them the friar assures Thomas that he and his brethren have been praying for him to get well. The friar goes on to tell Thomas about his sermons in the local church about being charitable, before

Thomas's wife shows up, and greets the friar: "Ey, maister, welcome ye be, by Seint John!" (III: l. 1799). As mentioned, this way of addressing a friar was problematic, because it was a way of mocking someone's pride of being learned and because St Francis rebuked the use of the term. When John is addressed as 'maister' by Thomas and his wife, he does not protest the use of the title. However, when addressed the same way by the lord of the village in line 2184, the friar states:

'No maister, sire,' quod he, 'but servitour,	<i>servant</i>
Though I have had in scole that honour.	<i>Master of Arts degree</i>
God liketh nat that "Raby" men us calle.'	<i>rabbi</i>

(III: l. 2185-7)

These lines show Friar John's hypocrisy in saying that instead of a master, he is a servant. He merely pretends to be humble in the presence of the lord, contrary to when he is in the presence of lower standing members in the social hierarchy of medieval England. The hypocrisy does not stop with John's false humility but continues with the issue of him being a womanizer in the way he behaves around Thomas's wife.

The friar greets the wife with a full embrace, and 'kiste hire sweete, and chirketh [chirping sound] as a sparwe' (III: l. 1804), while he complements her excessively, showing an improper relationship between a friar and a woman. The sparrow in medieval literature is described as a lecherous animal, which also applies to the description of the Summoner being 'as hoot he was and lecherous like a sparwe' (I: l. 625). Friar John's greeting to Thomas's wife with a kiss could indeed have an innocent meaning, but combined with the tight embrace, it is possible that the customary kiss of peace is abused, which thus renders the character of the friar vile and detestable (Kellogg 115). Chaucer uses satirical references hinted at in Huberd's portrait to explicitly show off the Friar's hypocrisy and thus mock him.

This mockery is also noted in the sermons Friar John holds for both the wife and Thomas, but in addition, he also shows off a distasteful arrogance. The wife asks the friar to talk to Thomas about his anger. But before he returns to the bedridden Thomas, the wife

reveals to the friar that they recently lost their child. In response, the friar boasts by pretending to know the circumstances of his death, stating: ‘After his deeth, I saugh [*saw*] hym born to blisse [*brought to heaven*] / In myn avision, so God me wise [*guide*]’ (III: l. 1858-59), and also includes that his other brothers had seen the same. By taking advantage of the death of the couple’s son, John shows how morally disconnected he is with himself and the rest of the laity in his quest for material wealth. The friar continues to preach to the wife with a sermon of the virtues of fasting and the sins of gluttony, before addressing Thomas, first with a sermon of avoiding excessive wealth, and then with a sermon on anger.

In his sermon on the avoidance of amassing excessive wealth, the friar is adamant in his encouragement that Thomas should give all his money to the friary because they ‘preye for yow ... ay so diligent’ (III: l. 1976), before continuing his sermon on the sins of anger with many classical and literary quotes a man like Thomas has never heard of. When John asks Thomas about confessing to him, Thomas tells the friar that he has already confessed to his local parish priest, saying “I have hym toold hoolly al myn estat; / Nedeth namoore to speken of it” (III: l. 2095-96), meaning that this topic of conversation ought to be dropped. John, in his greedy desperation, refuses to let it go, and inquires with Thomas several times about making a contribution. He eventually turns to outright asking Thomas for money, and in doing so, John ironically angers Thomas. The sermon on the vices of anger, combined with his persistence in asking for money angers Thomas to the point that he finally tells the friar that he will give John something that he can share with his brothers, stating:

“Now thanne, put thy hand down by my bak,”
Seyde this man, “and grope wel bihynde.
Bynethe my buttoke there shaltow fynde
A thyng that I have hyd in pryvetee”
(III: l. 2140-43)

The groping down Thomas’s pants ends with Thomas letting loose a fart in the friar’s hand, a ‘fart of swich a soun’ (III: l. 2151), to which Friar John responds with explosive internal

anger. John does, however, not lose control of his temper because he is contained by his hypocrisy and needs to maintain a devout image. The final satirical expression of the *Tale*, however, happens when John rushes over, angrily, but maintaining his composure, to the lord's house, where the "impression of spluttering indignation conveyed by his arrival and greeting is brilliantly contrasted with the mild surprise and friendly concern of the lord as he sits quietly eating at his table" (Havelly 21).

When presenting his problem, claiming that such an insult is blasphemous to his holy convent, the wife of the lord says that "I seye a cherl hath doon a cherles dede" (III: l. 2206). It is with this comment that the friar finally loses his temper and explodes in anger, stating that he will defame Thomas to his greatest extent, and that concerning sharing this fart with his brothers he states: "This false blasphemour that charged me / To parte that wol nat departed be" (III: l. 2213-14), indicating that a fart cannot be divided. The friar is insulted because the word 'cherl' refers to a person not belonging to the nobility and lacking morals, to which Thomas's deed is an example of humiliating Friar John (MED). It is ironic that John is duped by an individual whose estate Thomas represents, John normally fools. The use of dramatic irony here, where John gets angry despite his long sermon against it, demonstrates the type of ignorant folly that is bred by the habitual self-centeredness John suffers from, and it celebrates John's downfall (Phillips 110).

The friar's long sermon readily angers Thomas, and when John preaches first on the favor of virtues in poverty, his inclination to aggressively begging for money shows that by favoring material wealth, instead of living in devout poverty, Friar John is poor in spirit (Cooper 180). He then preaches against sins of gluttony and anger, stating that 'A lord is lost, if he be vicious' (III: l. 2048), which John ironically later demonstrates himself. When John's empty words fall on deaf ears, it signifies the friar's declining clerical authority, which is further emphasized by the priest who already heard Thomas's confession. and he himself

becomes angry. Thomas is not persuaded by John's talk, although he tries to find a point of entry to Thomas's purse in every way he can. He talks about how the poverty and abstinence of friars make effective prayers, and that his own friary is praying hard for Thomas, so they should get more money for the convent's building fund. The basis of Friar John's hypocrisy is twofold: his lecherousness, which is discussed above, and his greed, to which the gift of the fart is a part of.

In his greedy, self-serving attitude, Friar John seems to believe he is entitled to receive money because the only way the friary can earn money is by "showing others that they deserve pity", and if people do not give them money, they are selfish and deserve their ailments (Pitard 224). Friar John's greed is thus a reaction to institutionalized avarice, where his greed is a "manifestation of fundamental selfishness" (Pitard 224). Friars were not allowed to ask for money in exchange for penance, but to John, it seems that he thinks direct payment and fundraising are interchangeable (Pitard 221). When he asks Thomas about confession, and gets declined, John denigrates the local parish priests by saying 'these curatz [curates] been ful necligent and slowe / to grope tendrely a conscience' (III: l. 1816-17) which addresses the tension between regular clergy and friars by having a friar belittle the competence of the regular clergy. John ends his quote with a reference to him 'walke and fische Cristen mennes soules / To yelden Jhesu Crist his propre rente' (III: l. 1820-21), as though he walks and fish people's souls to collect rent like a landlord.

The comparison of a landlord collecting rent does not seem compatible with a man whose professional purpose is to save people's souls, and it hints at how mendicancy can be abused. William of St Amour argued that one should not give money to friars because their voluntary poverty was a false imitation of apostles, and the act of asking for money, when they could work for it instead, incited vices, especially greed (Pitard 220-21). John's appeals for charity are thus seen as selfishness, and the professed poverty of his calling is merely a

cover for avarice. The irony, which is also a central part of anti-mendicant satire, is Friar John's educated rhetorical skills which backfire on himself when he overreaches in his sermons. Not only does he sabotage himself by making Thomas angry, but he shows his hypocrisy by becoming angry himself for getting what Thomas gives him: the fart. The fart can be recognized as a "primal outburst of Thomas's churlish anger, as elemental as a child's scream, and at least as justifiable, given his provocation by the friar" (Pitard 218). The fart also symbolizes the friar's own empty rhetoric, because the fart, as insulting as it is, is also as worthless as broken air. The main satirical pay-off happens when Thomas delivers his gift, trapping John using his greed, to fart in his hand, as a way to say that the reward John deserves for his hypocrisy and excessive greed, is a fart (Havelly 21).

Friar John's motive of greed is exemplified by his eagerness when searching for money down Thomas's pants:

And doun his hand he launcheth to the clifte	<i>thrusts, cleft of the buttocks</i>
In hope for to fynde there a yifte.	<i>gift</i>
And whan this sike man felte the frere	
Aboute his tuwel grope there and here,	<i>anus</i>
Amydde his hand he leet the frere a fart	
(III: l. 2145-49)	

By thrusting his hand down Thomas's pants in the hope to find a 'yifte', a gift, John's greed, and profession are satirized by the double meaning of 'grobe' which first is used to examine a penitent's consciousness in line 1817, but here refers to grasping or feel about for. Then when in the right position, Thomas blasts John's hand with wind. This indicates that the *Tale* tells the friar that he is worth nothing but a fart, as farting and bared bottoms are used as insults in medieval literature, but creates comedy when it happens (Phillips 109). As Susan Signe Morrison argues, scatological humor is bifold:

First, excrement literally emerges from the humoral theory of the bodies, wherein the excessive waste or imbalance of humor catapults waste to create a balanced and healthy body. Second, humor emerges as an offshoot of the tradition of humiliation associated with excrement. (67)

She continues with

The humiliation of being covered by or associated with excrement is pitiable when the recipient is sympathetic to the viewer/reader. But if we have little regard for the “victim”, then we can laugh at him/her. The line between humiliation with pathos and humor with mockery depends on who is the recipient of excrement, and who is being “filthed.” (67-68)

In this case, it is the hypocritical Friar John, and his double Friar Huberd as is addressed in the *Summoner's Prologue*, who are being “filthed”, and since the audience has little regard for them, it creates a comical situation. This comical situation stems from a transgression of norms, where a person is usually not associated with excrements as is it considered something private. Breaching these social norms of associating someone with bodily functions, can, because it is regarded as funny, affect the audience in a way where they feel superior to the fool in the story, or that the audience feels a kinship with the fool (Classen 5). In this case, the audience feels superior to the friar because he is the fool whose hand received the fart, and because of his greed and hypocrisy, he deserves it. The same can be said of Friar Huberd who is associated with the Devil's anus in the *Summoner's Prologue*. John is ridiculed by someone of a class he usually exploits and has become accustomed to depend upon. The “agreement” between Thomas and John can be considered a rash promise, where Chaucer through the Summoner targets blinding greed, which the friar certainly suffers from. The *Tale* throughout also offers puns between the association of money and filth to further emphasize the “filthing” of both Friar John and Friar Huberd.

In the initial sermon of avoiding excessive wealth, the friar asks Thomas ‘[w]hat is a ferthyng worth parted in twelwe’ (III: l. 1967) which is a play on the words farting/farthing, where one refers to a bodily function and the other money. The same goes for ‘fundement’ (III: l. 2103) which is used in the sermon of how the friary lacks money to maintain their buildings and their foundation. The word also has scatological connotations meaning “anus”, which reiterates the association between friars and filth (Davis 64). The most gratifying pun, however, is the use of ‘ars-metrike’ (III: l. 2222), where potential religious values such as a

fart insulting the Holy Church, is instead regarded as a problem of physics, where it sounds like the word “arithmetic”. Concerning the division of the fart, which required a friar’s nose on each of the cartwheel spokes, it draws its satire on fraternal virtues where they share everything equally, including breathing in “the most crudely physical stink” (Cooper 179). The intellectual conundrum, which also serves as an offensive anti-mendicant joke, may also be a religious parody with a Pentecostal inspiration of the Holy Spirit, where they all receive the Supreme Breath. Or, the fart alludes to scientific medieval ideas of God being the only being that is indivisible by using the wheel instead of medieval scholastic problem-solving methods (Cooper 112). The fart as a mathematical problem ironically reflects the friar’s own cleverness and arrogance.

The cleverness and arrogance both Huberd and John possess play a part in their moral decay, and by treating John as a part of, or an extension of Huberd, this moral decay is shown by how insidious he is, and in his manner of begging. Though the Friar did not do anything wrong, socially or doctrinally, in performing his routines such as uniting two people in marriage, hearing confessions, and absolving people, he embodies religiously conflicting goals. His actions make him morally questionable based on the company he surrounds himself with, the food he eats and clothes he wears. The big contrast between the humility and moral austerity members of mendicant orders possess, and the Friar’s hypocrisy, can resonate with how Christ accused the Scribes and Pharisees of being self-righteous, having pride and being hypocrites (Geltner, “The Friar” 165). As Matthew 23: 23-25 states:

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; because you tithe mint, and anise, and cummin, and have left the weightier things of the law; judgment, and mercy, and faith. These things you ought to have done, and not to leave those undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; because you make clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but within you are full of rapine and uncleanness.

One can thus see Huberd’s moral decay as a notably criticizing parallel to the Pharisees, where he serves only himself and the pursuit of riches. Like the Pharisees, the Friar only

pretends to care about the real issues of judgment, mercy, and faith while he in reality he seeks to amass material goods, which Chaucer critiques through mockery. In John's sermon on the avoidance of excessive wealth, he states 'I am a man of litel sustenance' (III: l. 1844), which is wholly ironic when like the Pharisees who 'strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel'. Huberd does not contribute to the spiritual well-being of the people in his territory, but instead preys on them, robbing them of spiritual care and money. The same can be said of the Pharisees who 'make clean the outside of their cup', but inside it is still filthy. The Friar's moral corruption is hidden by a "clean" façade, which is apparent from his physical looks, while he still remains morally filthy and repugnant on the metaphorical inside. The targeting of Friar Huberd and John may also serve as a reminder for erring friars.

By using these characters as an example of how not to act, by targeting deviant brethren who represents the whole of mendicancy, Chaucer's estates satire can be seen as a public chastisement where it also has a comedic effect. It might not have been Chaucer's agenda to "cast religious mendicancy in the dustbin of history" as Geltner puts it, but satire's moral purpose in the Middle ages might serve as a reminder for erring friars and other clerics ("The Friar" 164). The satirical description, however subtle and ambiguous at first, provides possible information to the readers of Chaucer's stance on the mendicant orders, while at the same time upholds contemporary stereotypes and attitudes towards Friars and other ecclesiastical members. It is difficult to understand Chaucer's personal views on religious mendicancy, because he likely consciously tried to avoid taking a position of authority (Geltner, "The Friar" 169). The way Chaucer has ambiguously portrayed the image of the Friar attests to Chaucer being a social satirist, but his anti-mendicant satire is to a degree subtle enough that he does not need to attack mendicancy openly, but instead incorporates it in the characters of Friar Huberd and Friar John.

By speaking behind a mask like Hight incorporated into his patterns of satire, which in this case is the Summoner, Chaucer can convey severe clerical critique behind the impression that it is the Summoner that critiques mendicancy, and not Chaucer himself. Chaucer promotes the ideas of a struggling society where he speaks indirectly to his audience as a way to impose his views on the readers, while letting the Summoner take the blame as he “rightfully” can criticize the Friar because of their problematic relationship. Keeping in mind that satire in the Middle Ages often held a moral point, especially satire written in Latin by members of the clergy, the fact that Chaucer writes in the vernacular as opposed to Latin, can indicate that friars, and other clergy members, are not the only targets for his satire, but also his audience, who would be aware of the stereotypic attitudes towards this estate.

Through the description of the Friar, Chaucer can create a tension in the moral and emotion judgement through the audiences’ eyes. He does this by addressing the Friar as a good-looking, well-connected man, but at the same time showing that he refuses to fulfill the most basic function of his profession. This tension which comes from the complexity of the friar-character, where it initially can be challenging to decide on how to perceive him, while this decision is a much easier choice in chapter two, where the Summoner is described as unpleasant, both physically and morally right away. The moral-emotional tension might also make it difficult for the readers to readily critique the Friar, instinctively because of this physical pleasantness. The way Chaucer draws on social stereotypes, but still diverges from traditional estate satire, makes it confusing not to isolate the Friar as an individual, while he also serves as a representative of all mendicant orders in England during the fourteenth century. However, as I have tried to argue in this chapter, Chaucer does indeed criticize the Friar, and by extension all the orders of friars, but not as seriously as he critiques the Summoner and Pardoner.

The light-hearted satire used to condemn the Friar in the *General Prologue* plays on his supposed cleverness by making the whole ordeal more complicated than it has to be, which is rooted in the notion of friars being highly educated men with exceptional academic skills. While the most severe consequence of the Friar's portrait is a loss of dignity through witty humor based on his moral qualities, the same can be said of the loss of dignity in the *Summoner's Tale*, but with a darker motivation. As mentioned, the Friar in his *Tale* gives the Summoner a chance to redeem himself, while the Summoner in his rage, damns Huberd to Hell in his *Prologue*. In the *Summoner's Tale*, Friar John, being the butt of the joke, still loses his dignity like Friar Huberd, but to a much stronger degree than Friar Huberd does in the first place in his portrait. Although the *Summoner's Tale* is told by the Summoner, who tells it as a revenge tale for the *Friar's Tale*, it still reflects the witty and light-hearted portrayal of the Friar, whose satirical criticism is explicitly stated based on his ambiguously portrayed portrait. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the same can be said of the serious satirical tone that surrounds the Summoner, which is also reflected in the *Friar's Tale* in the critique against summoners.

Chapter 2

‘Of His Visage Children Were Aferd’: Inner and Outer

Ugliness as Ecclesiastical Corruption of Chaucer’s

Summoner

For saucefleem he was, with eyen narwe.
As hoot he was and lecherous as a sparwe,
With scalled browes blake and piled berd.
Of his visage children were aferd
(I: l. 625-28)

With this description, the Summoner might as well be the monster under the bed, or the troll living under the bridge. Chaucer, like he did with the Friar, presents the Summoner satirically as a corrupt representation of the regular Church institution, but to a stronger and more serious degree, and with stronger consequential severities. This kind of serious satire, which differs from the Friar’s light-hearted wittiness and persiflage, is represented in the Summoner’s sickly physical appearance and his corrupt morals, the latter which are visible through his actions.

The satire against the Summoner is not wholly dark and ominous, and because the *Tales* of both the Friar and Summoner are connected, the *Friar’s Tale* is still an amusing joke on summoners where they are given the opportunity to save themselves from criticism. Contrary to what was discussed in the last chapter, the character friar was not given the chance to redeem himself in the Summoner’s *Prologue* and *Tale*. The *Friar’s Tale*, which plays a funny joke on summoners, still reflects the Friar’s amusing and entertaining tone, while the Summoner’s portrait, on the other hand, described in the *General Prologue*, reflects a more serious criticism of the pilgrim. In this chapter, I will argue that the Summoner’s moral corruption has manifested itself as a physical disease, and that his sickly physical body is a symbol for the spiritual decay of the Church. I will discuss how Chaucer portrays the

Summoner satirically as a representation of the corrupted Church, and that he does this to address important social issues of contemporary medieval England, where he warns his audience to beware and not let themselves be exploited by abusive clerics.

In this chapter, I will address how the satire directed against the Summoner and what he represents has taken a more serious tone than what it did on the satirical characterization of the Friar. I also will address how both the *Friar's* and the *Summoner's Tales* represent the seriousness connected to the character it is about, so that the satire directed against the Friar in the *Summoner's Tale* reflects the light-hearted persiflage of the Friar's description in the *General Prologue*. The same goes for the *Friar's Tale*, where the consequences of the character summoner's greed are more severe than the consequences for the character Friar John in the *Summoner's Tale*. In this chapter, I will first introduce the role of summoners in the Middle Ages, before continuing a discussion on the Summoner's portrait, and finally a discussion on the summoner in the *Friar's Tale* and the Summoner.

The Summoner's role in the Middle Ages

Summoners in the Middle Ages, also called *apparitors*, represented a part of the pastoral-judicial hierarchy of the Church which no longer exists today. This institution was concerned with the civil and criminal jurisdiction of the Church, which was supposed to reform individuals to create a virtuous society. This rectification of society was done by containing sin "using denunciation, suspicion, legal proofs, and punishments" as a form of forced generosity and kindness (Forrest 426). Summoners were responsible for "summoning" people to appear before the ecclesiastical court, thus the name apparitor. It was common in Chaucer's time that there were two main ecclesiastical courts in each diocese, with each court respectively presided over by a bishop and an archdeacon, where the latter even today acts as the bishop's administrative assistant in each district (Havely 6). The court was where judges,

often a bishop or an archdeacon, would hear all cases concerning the clergy, but also crimes of the laity that involved sexual offenses, attendance in church and defamation (Forrest 422). Money was also an issue the court was concerned with, which could be settlement in payment of tithes and offerings, keeping contracts and paying debts, and the court also carried a responsibility for probate of wills (Forrest 422). Those who were employed as summoners were responsible for following a certain norm to perform these judicial-administrative tasks.

This norm involved the authority to act on behalf of a plaintiff, in order to summon a defendant to the ecclesiastical court to answer for a criminal charge. Summoners could also be “instructed by a judge in response to reports of ‘public fame’ regarding some moral crime”, such as rumors and gossip (Forrest 427). A summons itself took the form of an oral reading of a written letter, which is called a citation. Summoners were often urged to make their announcements as loud and clear as possible, with the largest number of people present to increase the chance of the word reaching the defendant. They also had the responsibility at times to report to the bishop or archdeacon if a person died intestate, meaning that if someone died without a will, and the court would uphold laws of intestate succession. Summoners could also confiscate goods in connection to a contested will so that it could be sorted out by the court (Forrest 428). Summoners involved themselves in other aspects of diocesan administration such as penance supervision and visitations, which meant that, combined with their main tasks, they were a judicial power of the Church highly visible to the laity.

This visibility demanded persons of high moral standards to represent the Church and its court among the laity, and from the middle of the thirteenth century summoners were required to swear an oath of fidelity to their bishop:

If you would be our faithful man in the office of apparitor and humbly perform that which is canonically enjoined on you by our ministers in our consistency, you will not reveal the secrets of the court, you will tour the diocese often and faithfully report the offences of our subjects – so far as you are able to discover through *fama* – to the registrar of the consistory; you will not ignore any suspected person nor cite anyone not suspected in return for a bribe; nor will you create or procure the creation of any

obstruction on behalf of a suspected person by which our ministers are prevented from freely performing their office as they are bound to do; nor will you impede our ministers in any way by resistance and obstruction for your own gain. And you will swear to the lord bishop on these holy gospels (Forrest 428).

Many of the points in the oath refer to possible abuses which are apparent in the behavior of Chaucer's Summoner. These points also reflect upon real-life situations where attitudes towards them were rather problematic, and at times resulting in violence towards them. Stereotypes, tales, and gossip about summoners sometimes worked as catalysts for hostility towards summoners, which is apparent from evidence found in judicial records and bishops' registers (Forrest 436). At Montgomery, in 1316, two summoners, William of Wyntone and Adam of Wentnor, were flogged by villagers until they bled profusely, while John Molyngtone was killed by an angry mob in 1368 while carrying the bishop's letters, for whom he was appointed apparitor (Forrest 437). The violence projected towards summoners can be understood as a protest of this function of the Church (Forrest 437).

This kind of protest, with murder being an extreme consequence of the aggression and attitudes held against summoners, paints a picture of the laity's frustration over summoners' abuse of power. Working as a summoner meant that wages were low, traveling usually had to happen by foot, and that people had a general contempt for the line of work that was performed (Forrest 433). Other factors which the job entailed were that summoners worked by commission, and while working mostly alone, it was difficult to supervise (Forrest 434). These conditions that the summoners worked in, made it therefore easy to infringe on the offices that summoners were bestowed. When working alone in the midst of lechers and drunkards, who may even be offering bribes instead of receiving a summons, the incentives for abuse become much stronger. It is unreasonable to believe that all summoners were initially dishonest and fraudulent men when accepting the job, but because making a living out of being a summoner was easier if the system was abused, malpractice happened. The

same can be said of the positions of friars and pardoners as well. These abuses aggravated people's negative attitude towards these positions and their role in society.

To find explanations and answers for the abuse of offices as a part of contemporary moralistic and reformist projects, the relationship between the function of officials and the officials' moral character has been explored by scholars (Bryant 182). According to Brentley Bryant, there were two lines of thought: first, contemporary critics blamed personal moral choices instead of blaming the importance of institutional change (182). Second, corrupt official behavior is explained as a function of the financial or organizational imbalance of a bureaucracy itself, where the officials are caught between the demands of their superiors, their own financial need, and the expectations of the persons whom they supervise, discipline or organize (Bryant 183). The latter line of thought, which Bryant describes as a systemic explanation, shows how attentive late medieval English society is to the effects of administrative arrangements on individual activity, and it shows how texts can excuse certain abuses as an "understandable reaction of individuals to financial hardship" (183). Both summoners discussed in this text can thus, as Bryant's systemic explanation suggests, be under pressure themselves to perform in their work, and the abuse is partly caused by their superiors (183).

The focus on bad summoners, or rather, corrupted officials, is one of the issues highlighted in the *Friar's Tale* and the *General Prologue*. The lengthy start of the *Friar's Tale* involves a discussion of summoners' position and character, and this discussion elucidates the context in which the Tale was written. The discourse of Chaucer's time regularly targeted lower-level ecclesiastical officers in charge of day-to-day observation of lay morals. These officers could often be members of the archdeacons' courts, and they often became targets because official corruption had "left its traces in numerous satirical poems, parliamentary petitions, and legal enactments" (Bryant 181). The relation between the

Summoner in the *General Prologue* and the summoner in the *Friar's Tale* is thus that both of them are corrupted officials, where summoner in the *Friar's Tale* serves as the double of the Summoner pilgrim. However, the Summoner pilgrim in the *General Prologue* seems fairly successful at his job, while the *Friar's* summoner character fails miserably, demonstrating how summoners are the victims of the *Friar's* satirical joke.

In the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer uses satire and parody to emphasize negative attitudes towards summoners in order to mock and criticize a visibly diseased ecclesiastical institution: summoners and the judicial-pastoral court. He does this through the horrific appearance and morally questionable actions of the Summoner discussed mostly in the *General Prologue*, and through the actions of the summoner character presented in the *Friar's Tale*, where both summoners share many similarities. In contrast to the *Friar* and *Pardoner*, who also abuse their offices, the Summoner's appearance is portrayed as rough and violent, while the *Friar* is described as smooth and subtle, and the *Pardoner* is characterized with an ambiguously gendered look. Chaucer uses these characteristics to counterbalance the interesting features that all of the characters display as a critique directed against the Church, especially the Summoner's appalling appearance. It is through this depiction and in the representation of obviously visible corruption that Chaucer encourages his readers' critical thinking on ecclesiastical roles and their function in the late fourteenth century.

The Summoner's Portrait: Appearance and Actions

The Summoner is first introduced in the *General Prologue* together with the band of rogues consisting of the *Reve*, the *Miller*, the *Manciple* and the *Pardoner*, who are all described as charlatans and swindlers. The Summoner, however, is one of only two characters in the *General Prologue* whose hideous appearance is described to such extent, the other character

being the Pardoner. The narrator, Chaucer the pilgrim, continues his introduction of the pilgrims:

A Somonour was there with us in that place, That hadde a fyr-reed cherubynnes face, For saucefleem he was, with eyen narwe. As hoot he was and lecherous as a sparwe, With scalled browes blake and piled berd.	<i>summoner</i> <i>fire-red, cherub's</i> <i>pimpled, swollen eyelids</i> <i>infected with the scall, with hair</i> <i>falling out</i>
Of his visage children were aferd. (I: l. 623-28)	

In this passage, the Summoner's looks are described meticulously. The satire Chaucer employs is already present when the Summoner's face is described as the virtuous look of a red-faced 'cherubynne'. The image of a biblical angel, a cherub, who is usually described as a brilliant being with four faces and several pairs of wings, and who protected the Garden of Eden, is subverted in the next line when the continuation of the description of the Summoner's face is then described as 'saucfleem', meaning pimpled, and with narrow eyes. Being pimpled, with such a swollen face that makes your eyes narrow, implies the satire being used by Chaucer to mock the Summoner by first introducing him as virtuous-looking as an angelic being, and then turning this description into something hellish. To add insult to injury, Chaucer continues his physical description with 'scalled' brows, meaning "infected with the scall" (I: l. 627) which indicates a skin disease, and 'piled' beard, meaning that the Summoner's beard is falling out (I: l. 672). These descriptions indicate a skin infection which makes his appearance far from angelic.

To emphasize the Summoner's ugliness, and as a satirical device, Chaucer's use of medical words describing his horrific character has several layers. The 'scalled browes', and 'piled' beard is associated with forms of leprosy (Cooper 57). The description 'Scalled browes blake' (I: l. 627) is listed by Arnaldus de Villa Nova as a symptom of alopecia, while the black brows are associated with lecherousness (Benson 822; Pace 418). 'Scalled' has multiple meanings connected to the Summoner's disfigurement: it can mean inflammation of

the skin, but also that a body part has been immersed in hot liquid to remove the skin by scalding, or burning the hair off by holding it close to a fire, or by applying hot coal near the area (MED). Having a word hold several meanings which are connected to each other by means of inflamed skin and disfigurement serves to emphasize the ugliness and corruption of the Summoner that Chaucer is trying to convey to his readers. As Bridget Wearty puts it: “His ‘welkes white [I: l. 632] ... summon up a larger iconographic tradition of leprosy displayed in spotty white marks marching across the leper’s face” (207). The comparison of the divine and the leper carries a contradiction of biblical connotations in which a divine being and a leper never can be reconciled, and it creates a disturbing image.

The descriptions continue the perversion of a heavenly being to such a degree that the image of a cherub no longer applies. The Summoner’s acne-marked and bloated face also paints the image of an individual who indulges in excessive drinking of alcohol, which is confirmed later: ‘Wel loved he garleek, oynons, and eek lekes. / And for to drynken strong wyn, reed as blood’ (I: l. 634-36). In medieval times, members of the *Allium* genus such as onions, garlic, and leeks were thought to be aphrodisiacs, but they were also thought to aggravate certain diseases such as skin conditions (Cooper 57). One can assume that the Summoner was aware of the aggravating properties of leeks and onions, but, due to his gluttony, continues to consume them.

Walter Curry argues that because of the Summoner’s description, “[he] is afflicted with a species of *morphea* known as *gutta rosacea*, which has already been allowed to develop into that kind of leprosy called alopecia” (395). Thomas Garbaty analyses the data even further and concludes with a diagnosis of “rosacea-like secondary syphiloderm with meningeal neurosyphilitic involvement, with chronic alcoholism playing an important part” (357). Both of these diagnoses account for the Summoner’s physical appearance, while Garbaty’s diagnosis in layman’s terms means inflammation of the nervous system and brain

cortex caused by syphilis, would explain his erratic, “*wood*” (crazy) behavior, which is discussed later. It is ironic that a man who represents a morally superior institution suffers from a venereal disease, which stems from his lechery being promoted by excessive consumption of foul-smelling foods and alcohol. Helen Cooper mentions that the image of the onions may be an intertextual reference to Numbers 11:5, which serves a symbol for the distance between Israelites and God, including their rejection of God (7). The biblical passage states: “We remember the Ash we ate in Egypt [at] free cost: the cucumber come into our mind, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic.” The passage alludes to the Summoner in that the leeks are a symbol for his distance and rejection of God, which accounts for some of the severe consequences the Summoner faces as a result of severe moral corruption. While the Friar is to some degree disconnected from his professional duties, and God, the Summoner portrays an even stronger spiritual disconnection, which is represented in this intertextual reference where the Summoner’s relationship with this type of food separates him from God.

Susan Hill discusses attitudes towards excessive eating in the Middle Ages, and uses the general notion of a series of sermons called *Jacob’s Well*, written in the fifteenth century, to articulate that “gluttony results in the inappropriate use of food that leads to a rift between humans and God” (60-61). Parts of *Jacob’s Well* discuss that gluttony destroys both body and soul, but also what is good within an individual (Hill 61). As Dennis Biggins puts it: “because of the lust they occasion, [the onions] imperil not only his physical health, but also his spiritual well-being” (48). The Summoner does not seem concerned by the challenge that his gluttony poses to maintaining a balance between his need for food and drinks, and his desire for them. His misuse of food not only hurts himself, and his own journey in life, but it also hurts his own community in that bad morals spread, and that, as Hill states based on the notions in *Jacob’s Well*, “eating too much aligns one with Satan, and transforms a human

being into an animal” (67). This alignment as a result of the lack of balance between need and desire for food, is physically and spiritually hurtful because the metaphorical transformation from man into animal signifies distance and disconnectedness from God.

Analogously, the Summoner’s insatiable appetite for food and parrot-like Latin language can be traced to the summoner in the *Friar’s Tale*, where the Friar compares the Summoner to a devil, but his, insultingly, his own summoner appears less intelligent than the fiend he meets. Although no one becomes a literal animal, the Summoner is however reduced to a comparison to a devil, and a parrot or jay. The “animalistic” tendencies are connected with food, as it diverts thought and attention away from God. The summoner character’s lack of intelligence in the *Friar’s Tale* also stems from a voracious craving for material wealth which distances this summoner from God as well. The Friar’s summoner being an extension of the Summoner pilgrim, indicates however that gluttony hurts him both physically and spiritually, while also removing what is good within him.

The Summoner has, however unsuccessfully, tried to remedy these damages, indicating that he still cares about his appearance to some extent:

Ther nas quyck-silver, lytarge, ne brymstoon,	<i>mercury, lead monoxide, sulphur</i>
Boras, ceruce, ne oille of tartre nook,	<i>borax, white lead, cream of tartar</i>
Ne oynement that wolde clense and byte,	<i>ointment, burn</i>
That hym myghte helpen of his welkes white,	<i>pustules</i>
Nor of the knobbes sittynge on his chekes.	<i>swellings</i>

(I: l. 629-33)

The Summoner’s use of these remedies such as mercury, lead monoxide, sulphur, borax and ‘ceruce’ as in white lead, as well as different oils, which all were used in medieval medicine, seems to be inefficient in alleviating his condition. This inefficiency of curing or relieving the Summoner’s ailments by scientific means suggests that there is a spiritual aspect in the Summoner’s disease. By this, I mean that the outward incurable physical corruption also represents corruption within the Summoner. Since the Summoner seems to reject God, or at least distances himself from God with his hedonistic lifestyle and immoral actions, the

Summoner has become corrupted within, which has then manifested as a physical disease. This notion may also be turned around in that the Summoner's focus on material wealth and earthly pleasure is so dominating that there is no room for the Summoner to give any importance his spiritual wellbeing. Instead, the absence, or distance from God, combined with his nefarious behavior, results in the Summoner's physical disease being aggravated by his dietary preferences, which attests to a stronger, more serious satirical criticism from Chaucer's part.

Either way, I argue that the Summoner's physical and moral corruption serves by extension as a picture of the disease within the Church, both physical and spiritual. The decadent life the Summoner lives, symbolizes a corrupting force that applies to the Church with a focus on material wealth rather than spiritual care. To stress how corrupted the Summoner is, and the Church, Chaucer elaborates on the Summoner's actions after he has drunk his strong, red wine:

Thanne wolde he speke and crie as he were wood.	<i>crazy</i>
And what he wel drunken hadde the wyn,	
Thanne wolde he speke no word but Latyn.	
A fewe termes hadde he, two or thre,	<i>technical terms</i>
That he had lerned out of som decree –	<i>decretal, text of ecclesiastical law</i>
No wonder is, he herde it al the day;	
And eek ye knowen wel how that a jay	
Kan clepen “Watte” as wel as kan the pope.	<i>say “Walter”</i>
But whoso koude in oother thyng hym grope,	<i>examine</i>
Thanne hadde he spent al his philosophie;	
Ay “ <i>Questio quid iuris</i> ” wolde he crie.	<i>“The question is, what point of the</i>
(I: l. 636-46)	<i>law (applies)?”</i>

After drinking a fair amount of wine, the Summoner, in his drunken state, acts and shouts like he is ‘wood’, crazy. And like a parrot or a ‘jay’, he would scream out unintelligible phrases in Latin, repeating what he has picked up from his visits in court. The Summoner, like the parrot, is capable of repeating phrases and words, but is unable to comprehend the meaning of what he says. Mann argues that this is a “metaphor for which medieval, and earlier, writers automatically reached when they wanted to satirise, for example, the uncomprehending

repetition of church services by ignorant clerics or layfolk, or minstrels who recite the literary creation of others” (143). This line of argument is supported by the findings in the passage where Chaucer’s incorporation of ‘ye knowen wel’ in line 642, which is an inquiry from Chaucer to the readers that this kind of phenomena is recognizable and possibly typical. The limitations of the Summoner’s understandings of what he actually speaks are also strengthened by lines 644-45 (I) which states: ‘But whoso koude in oother thyng hym grope, / Thanne hadde he spent al his philosophie’. If one were to ‘grope’, or examine, the Summoner’s knowledge further, one would realize he had already ‘spent’ what he already knows, and is unable to elaborate upon what he is actually saying. Chaucer has to some degree metaphorically reduced the Summoner to a parrot or jay, emphasizing that he mechanically repeats what he has heard.

If any inquiries are made against the Summoner, he does not let the lack of knowledge and comprehension stop himself from arguing his point of view. If someone engages the Summoner in debate, and he then runs out of expressions he has picked up from the courtroom, the Summoner “would fall back upon the pronouncement which he recalled tended to clinch all disputes”, namely “the question is, what point of the law (applies)?” (Gershfield 60). The phrase ‘*Questio quid iuris*’ (I: l. 646) shows the Summoner’s lack of skills in debating, and his lacking ability to process information and to form his own arguments, which weakens his authority. As an effort to try to regain this authority as a member of the judicial court, he uses the phrase to silence his debater as a way to “win” the discussion. The Summoner does this by having the burden of proof lie with the people who argue against him. If the Summoner even knows the meaning of the Latin phrase, his use of ‘*Questio quid iuris*’ requires his debaters to prove or disprove that what the Summoner claims is true or false, while the Summoner does not have to prove anything because he believes himself to be right. If he does not know the meaning, he is certainly using it correctly for his

specific purposes, which is to muzzle his debaters. The likelihood of someone actually disproving the Summoner is thus rather small.

When the Summoner poses the question to avoid further discussion, it can signify an arrogance and disdain towards others. Even though delving into his judicial knowledge proves that he knows only as much as the people around him, the Summoner uses the authority his office possesses to dismiss other people's opinions while thinking it strengthens his own societal position. Instead, this arrogance is used by Chaucer to satirize the office of summoners and the authority they claim to possess. On account of summoners often being lay-people, they had no schooling in judicial matters, except for their own function. This indicates that besides being a morally upright citizen, no other credentials for being a summoner was needed. This meant that summoners were not in need of being learned men like friars had to be, which the example of the Summoner's way of silencing his debaters proves. Chaucer satirizes the function of summoners and their abilities by mocking the Summoner's inability to engage in meaningful debates, as well as by his corrupted looks and drunken self, and thus reduces both his credibility and authority. Chaucer also connects the Summoner's inebriation to his daily work, in that the power of alcohol effects his ability to speak and think. While it reduces the Summoner's mental capacities, it enhances his ability to speak with a loose tongue which also may be a way of Chaucer discrediting the institution summoners belonged to.

The Summoner's corrupting behavior is further described:

He was a gentil harlot and a kynde; A bettre felawe sholde men noght fynde.	<i>buffoon/jester</i>
He would suffre for a quart of wyn A good felawe to have his concubyn	<i>allow</i>
A twelf month, and excuse him atte fulle; Ful prively a finch eek koude he pulle.	<i>completely</i> <i>secretly/discreetly, swindle</i>
(I: l. 647-52)	<i>someone</i>

A 'gentil harlot' carries several meanings. 'Gentil' refers to being noble, indicating a character that is courteous, polite, graceful and even handsome (MED). 'Harlot' on the other hand, carries even more meanings where it can mean a professional male entertainer such as a jester, but also more negative meaning such as scoundrel, trifler, and male lecher (MED). Combined with the noun, the adjective is used ironically in this context, because of what the readers already know about the Summoner. 'Gentil' is thus used ironically because 'harlot' describes a man who is everything but courteous and handsome, but instead is a lecher and scoundrel. The same can be said of the comment 'a bettre felawe sholde men noght fynde' (I: l. 648), which states that the Summoner is a better man than most. Chaucer seems to subvert the meaning of the word 'bette' through ironic praise, where he ironically praises the Summoner's abuses. If the Summoner is a better man than most, he is better than most in abusing the authority and responsibility of his office rather than anything virtuous. This abuse is exemplified in the next lines where it states the Summoner would let another 'good felawe to have his concubyn' (I: l. 650) for the small price of a 'quart of wyn'. By letting himself be bribed with alcohol, the Summoner will allow a man to engage in extramarital affairs with a prostitute without reporting him to the archdeacon. This 'good felawe' is also described similarly to the Summoner as an indication of ironic praise to emphasize the fellow's corruption, with the exception that the Summoner is described as 'bette', indicating that the Summoner's level of corruption and capability to abuse his own office exceeds the other man's sexual abuses.

Sexual abuse connected to the Summoner is also hinted at in the last line: 'Ful prively a finch eek koude he pulle' (I: l. 652), where Mann argues that the idea of "pulling finches" is an idiom of sexual boasting (144). This interpretation coincides with the topic of sexual misconduct to which the passage above addresses, and with previous descriptions describing the Summoner as 'hoot' and 'lecherous as a sparwe' (I: l. 626), which reinforces the idea of

the Summoner being a lecherous man. To add to the Summoner's descriptive layers, in regard to "pulling" or "plucking finches", it can also mean to 'prively', or discreetly swindle someone, to cheat them (MED).

Like an onion, the Summoner is a character with several layers, and Chaucer creates a fuller image of who the Summoner really is. He uses ironic praise to mock the Summoner's capabilities by inverting a virtuous profession where the Summoner's abuses reflect the very points in the oath mentioned earlier as a way of questioning the judicial institution of the Church. The last line of the *General Prologue* passage carries an ambiguous meaning, where it, on one hand, fits the topic of sexual impropriety, while on the other hand deals with tricking someone financially. It serves as a link between the passage above and the next passage which deals with monetary swindling:

And if he found owher a good felawe,	<i>anywhere</i>
He wolde techen him to have noon awe	
In swich caas of the ercedekenes curs,	<i>case, excommunication</i>
But if a mannes soule were in his purs;	<i>unless</i>
For in his purs he sholde ypunysshed be.	
"Purs is the ercedekenes helle," seyde he.	
But wel I woot he lyed right in dede;	<i>woot</i>
Of cursyng oghte ech gilty man drede,	<i>excommunication, be afraid</i>
For curs wol slee right as assoillyng savith,	<i>will slay, absolution</i>
And also war hym of a <i>Significavit</i> .	<i>let him beware of an order of</i>
(I: l. 653-62)	<i>imprisonment</i>

The Summoner's depravity is expanded upon when the narrator tells the readers 'but wel I woot [knew] he lyed' (I: l. 659). Chaucer informs the readers that the Summoner did indeed lie about the Archdeacon's curse which the Summoner claims to be a financial penalty. If the Summoner found a 'good felawe', meaning that this fellow is rich in vices and not virtues, the Summoner informs him that the penance required for the trespasses made is a financial sacrifice. In the Summoner's mind, the financial sacrifice ought to be paid directly to him, as a middle man for the archdeacon. The notion that "Purs is the ercedekenes helle" (I. l. 658) indicates that economic compensation functions as the Archdeacon's preferred spiritual

penance of sinners, but that the Summoner instead pockets the money for himself. The Summoner uses the threat of this ‘curs’ to frighten the ‘gilty man drede’, rendering him afraid of his soul unless he pays up because the curse ‘wol slee’, would slay, just at ‘assoilyng’, absolution, saves.

The Summoner preys on the spiritual lives of immoral individuals by indicating that paying the fine to the Summoner personally will absolve them of their sins. If they decline to pay him, the Summoner uses the laity’s fear for their soul to bully them into giving in. The Summoner strives to be bribed because it is more financially lucrative than getting commission for reporting someone to the archdeacon. A corrupt, over-zealous summoner who reported an unusually high number of villagers was bound to be investigated eventually, especially when villagers were reported for either minor offenses or reported on false grounds. With this in mind, the Summoner seems capable of balancing bribery and reporting, which is reflected in his more-than-adequate ability to consume alcohol and possibly indulge in sexual misconduct as is mentioned above with the Summoner being ‘hoot’ and ‘lecherous’ (I: l. 626), which enhances the image of his inner and outer corruption. However, what makes the description of the Summoner so absurd is what follows:

In daunger hadde he at his owene gise	<i>in (his) control, as he pleased</i>
The yonge girles of the diocese,	<i>young women or young people</i>
And knew hir conseil, and was al hir reed.	<i>secrets, adviser of them all</i>
A gerland hadde he set upon his heed,	<i>wreath</i>
As greet as it were for an ale-stake.	<i>sign of an alehouse</i>
A bokeler hadde he maad hym of a cake.	<i>loaf of bread</i>

(I: l. 663-68)

The first description of the Summoner indicates that he has ‘daunger’, control, over the young women or young people in his diocese and with this control, he knew their ‘conseil’, secrets, and could do with there as he pleased, ‘owene gise’. In combination of line 628 which states: ‘Of his visage children were aferd’ (I), which is stated after the initial description of his hideous physical appearance, these descriptions indicate that the Summoner must be a

particularly ugly individual who controls and frightens children and young people. As a way to emphasize the Summoner's corrupt disposition both physically and of his malfeasances, there is a juxtaposition between his corrupt self, and the image of the innocent and youthful (Mann 141). This juxtaposition has further implications resulting in darker motives than first suggested. The Middle English word 'girles' has an ambiguous meaning which can indicate young women or girls, or young people (Davis 66). One implication of reading these lines is that "young people" can also suggest the inclusion of "young men", thus these lines can imply homosexual tendencies. This line of argument is also reinforced by how the Summoner rides and sings with the Pardoner, who himself is a sexually ambiguous character, as his 'freend and compeer' (I: l. 670). Chaucer might have done this as a way of mocking the Summoner by questioning his masculinity despite his malicious behavior towards the 'girles' but still maintaining the notion that both of them exploit, control and cheat innocent villagers which is indicated by the song they sing: "Com hider, love, to me" (I. l. 672).

Another interpretation these lines offer, is that the Summoner is an individual who exploits girls or young women for his own pleasure and benefits, which can indicate sexual offenses. If this is the case, the incriminating clues about the Summoner shed light on a much darker situation. Morton Bloomfield points to the benefits for the Summoner of "keeping [the loose women of the diocese] under control, learning their secrets and advising them" (504). By keeping tabs on the women, the Summoner would be able to extract information about the women's customers and blackmail women and men alike by either receiving bribes or reporting them to the archdeacon, to which Chaucer mocks the Summoner's lecherous behavior.

Chaucer might have hinted at clergymen's both general and sexual abuse towards the laity to address actual societal issues. However, as a way to make the notion of rape more palatable, Chaucer introduces an absurd and possibly comic relief of dressing the Summoner

in an unusual attire to lighten the mood. In the second description, by having the Summoner appear with a 'gerland', a wreath, on his head and a 'cake', a loaf of bread, which is used as a buckler, a shield, Chaucer has the Summoner appear as a parody of knights with their swords and armor, but instead with food and flowers. Both the garland and the 'cake' share ties with the common contemporary ale-houses. The loaf of bread was a common artifact in such establishments (Hodges 252). The garland's size, however, which resembles the sign of said ale-house stated in: 'As greet as it were for an ale-stake' (I: l. 667) may be a device used by Chaucer to emphasize the absurdity of the situation. In connection with the absurd image of the Summoner prancing around in his unusual attire, a loaf of bread could not, contrary to a steel sword, fend off anything but hunger, or at least satisfy appetites temporarily.

Both the garland and the 'cake', as well as the Summoner's love of wine, indicates that he is an avid consumer of the goods that the taverns provide, and that the size of the garland and the 'cake' can symbolize his excessive greed and appetite (Hodges 253). The Summoner is not alone in this, where the Pardoner, who in line 322 (VI) claims he 'wole both drinke and eten of a cake'. The visual images of greed and corruption of the Summoner and Pardoner are as I argue, by extension an image of the Church Chaucer wants to criticize. The function and order of summoners, which is the main focus in this chapter, are mocked and satirized by Chaucer through the abuses performed by the Summoner.

These abuses are also reflected in the Summoner's physical appearance with him being portrayed as a physically and morally rotten figure who cannot be healed. Whether is it deliberate or not, it is certainly ironic that Chaucer presents the Summoner as a character who at first seems like a repulsive simple-minded *apparitor* barely able to answer for himself in debates, but at the same time shows a fully adequate mindset for scheming, tricking, abusing people, and an excessive consumption of foods and alcoholic beverages. The Summoner, who can be bribed and who blackmails, is great at performing immoral and illegal actions, but fails

to recognize that his spiritual well-being, as well as physical well-being, has deteriorated, perhaps, as I have argued, as a result of the Summoner distancing himself from God, while also continuing an unhealthy diet. The corruption that surrounds the Summoner, as a member of the pastoral-judicial institution, is reflected within the institution itself, while it also critiques the members of the laity that plays a part in facilitating for ecclesiastical abuse. There will always be unknowing victims of the abuse of powerful institutions, and there will always be those who deliberately bribe, or spread untrue rumors to assist the system of abuse. Because of the abuses that this branch of church government has carried out, and the especially low regard of the authority of summoners by the common people, Chaucer, I argue, encourages critical thinking on the role and function of this institution from his readers.

By displaying the Summoner in such a manner, and thus the Church, that actively engage in abuses to advance in material wealth, Chaucer's representations also signify the Summoner's and the Church's material focus as a force that distances them from the most crucial spiritual aspect of medieval Catholicism, namely salvation through contrition, confession, and penance. Instead, the driving forces of penance become illusory, meaning that reparation is based on false premises, pretending to be spiritual. It is instead based on the carnal need for money, sex, and alcohol. Chaucer satirizes this part of the Church and its abuses by facilitating an oscillation between disgust and amusement for the readers, in order to create a response, be it critical thinking about summoners' function in medieval society, or emphasize his own view of this particular institution.

One cannot know Chaucer's unequivocal goal of writing, but as I have argued, I interpret Chaucer's goal by pointing out obvious ecclesiastical abuse rooted in contemporary attitudes towards Summoners, to prevent his audience of being tricked by Church officials. By having the audience's best interests at heart, which it seems Chaucer has, he points out clerical abuse. Keeping in line with the public function satire has, to expose and unmask

social injustice, one can hope to believe that change is indeed possible. Even to a small extent, where Chaucer's writing stimulates even a single mind to think differently, could have a large impact on society.

The Summoner in the Friar's *Tale*

This type of critical thinking which I argue is intended to target the role and function of summoners and the ecclesiastical court systems is also encouraged by the display of the summoner's abusive actions in the Friar's *Tale*. The Friar tells a tale about an archdeacon who condemns all kinds of sin, be it 'wicchecraft' or 'diffamacioun' (III: l. 1305-06), but his 'grettest wo' of these sins (III: l. 1310) was lechers, whom the archdeacon punished the most severely. To find these lechers so that they could be punished, the archdeacon had a summoner ready at his 'hond' (III: l. 1321). This summoner is described as 'a slyer boye nas noon in Engelond' (III: l. 1322), and that the summoner has contacts in the form of 'espiallie' (III: l. 1323), a network of spies. The summoner uses this network to find and blackmail lawbreakers in order to make a personal financial profit and by deliberately failing to report such trespasses to the archdeacon. The Friar describes this character as a 'theef, and eek a sumnour, and a baude' (III: l. 1354), meaning thief, summoner and pimp, as a way to emphasize the summoner's immoral self-indulgence in the *Tale*.

The summoner in the *Tale* meets a bailiff, an officer responsible for executing orders of the court, and poses as one himself. They get along well and swear that they will be brothers until the very end. While traveling together, the two discuss how they make ends meet, when they reveal that they both resort to extortion in order to make a living because both serve such hard masters. They agree to share whatever earnings they collect. The bailiff even confesses that he is, in fact, a fiend from Hell, who takes souls instead of money. Even though the fiend has revealed his true nature and reveals knowledge of how fiends can make

their way on the surface world, the summoner still insists that they are sworn brothers, which indicates that he still expects them both to hold up their end of the agreement. The first person they meet is a man who curses his stuck carriage and horses to hell. The summoner asks the fiend why he does not take the carriage and horses to Hell, since the man swore it. The fiend informs the summoner that there has to be a true intention in their curses before the fiend can do anything about it. Since the fiend failed to get what the summoner thought was rightfully the fiend's possessions now, he decides to show the fiend how to succeed in such lines of work. The summoner knocks on the gate of a sick, old widow, and tries to blackmail her for twelve pence by threatening to report her to the archdeacon and to take away her new frying pan. After verbally abusing the widow, calling her names like 'virytrate' (III: l. 1582), meaning hag, and 'stot' (III: l. 1630), meaning cow, the summoner fails to collect money on false grounds. The widow becomes severely distressed and tells the summoner to go to Hell, and to take her new frying pan with him, which the fiend asks if this is her true intention. When she repeats her condemning words, adding that if the summoner would repent, she would retract them, to which the summoner refuses. The fiend now proclaims that the summoner and the frying pan now belong to the fiend by right.

The tale ends with the fiend dragging the summoner, body and soul, with him to hell, and the Friar's end note is that summoners ought to repent their sins, to prevent the devil from taking them to hell. While the Summoner in his tale has Friar John act out what is mentioned in the Friar's portrait, such as lechery and greed, Huberd does not do this against the Summoner, possibly because as an attempt to "maintain a pose of pious concern with the sins of a general class, not an individual" (Ridley 165). The Friar never directly mentions or mocks the Summoner's love for wine and spicy food, probable homosexuality, and lechery, but instead he provides an extension of the Summoner's corrupted actions which represents summoners in general.

In the dialogue between the fiend and the summoner, there are parallels to hagiographies, saint's lives, which are inverted and parodied. In the story of a saint's life, "[t]hese dialogues between saint and devil contain a subtle but important narrative movement indicating the saint's increasing mastery over the devil who is unmasked, overpowered, and forced to confess quite against his will" (Berlin 5). These same steps happen between the summoner and the fiend, where the summoner, is tempted by his desire for 'great profit' by the fiend, and asks the general "who are you, and where do you come from" questions which signify the saint's spiritual strength that derives from God (Berlin 6). However, as Gail Ivy Berlin points out, the *Friar's Tale* "contains an inversion or parody of this pattern which takes the summoner through the same steps [as in a hagiography], but with a disastrous result" (5). When the summoner asks the same questions, his reaction reveals how deeply he is trapped by the fiend. Since the summoner has shown neither devotion to God, nor great intellect, the fiend sees no risk in answering all of the summoner's questions. Berlin argues that this is because "the summoner possesses no qualities likely to intimidate a fiend" (7). By portraying the summoner as being dumb and greedy, the *Friar's Tale* can, as a whole, not only be seen as the Friar's satire on summoners, but also as "Chaucer's satire on blind and violent greed" in general (Havely 16). The rivalry between the Friar and Summoner is illustrated in the degeneration of the storytelling into quarreling. Instead of outdoing each other with literary skills, the rivalry takes the form of insulting each other on both a personal and a professional level.

Besides fueling the conflict between the Friar and the Summoner, which was discussed in the first chapter, the *Friar's Tale* serves to strengthen Chaucer's critique of summoners. He does this by having the summoner's actions appear as examples of professional malpractice, in greater detail than what the readers are informed of by general actions of the Summoner we meet in the *General Prologue*. The Summoner's gruesome

appearance is reflected not only in his own actions, but also in the brutal actions of the summoner in the Friar's *Tale*. The summoner threatens to take off with the widow's 'panne' (III: l. 1616), which ambiguously can imply both a frying pan, and skull or head (Davis 107). The ambiguity of such a word balances the situation between the absurd and the highly unpleasant; either the summoner falsely claims her frying pan as collateral, or she will be beheaded if she continues to refuse to pay the summoner. J. D. Thayer suggests a third alternative to the meaning of the Middle English word 'panne': Editors such as Robert A. Pratt has glossed the word as "cloth; garment," and Thayer claims that the derivation from the Old French *pane*, which can refer to fur, especially fur used as lining on cloth, gives another meaning to the phrase "I wolde I hadde thy smok and every clooth!" (III: l. 1633) (Thayer 206). This means that the summoner would have all of her clothes, and not just the new fur, which Thayer suggests is the meaning of 'panne'. Thayer also concludes with that if the widow met the summoner at the gate "wearing such a garment, he could see that she has something of value and that it looks new", because it would seem more likely that the summoner would recognize a fairly new garment, rather than the widow having acquired a new cooking pan (207).

Regardless of the meaning of 'panne', the summoner still seeks to exert force over the widow to falsely acquire goods and money. This kind of violence is also reflected in the suggestion discussed above where the Summoner in the *General Prologue* steps into another level of violence if he were to sexually exploit young women. This stands in serious contrast to the Friar, who compared to the sexually exploitative Summoner, seduces women by his charming appearance and gifts, and only succeeds by the women's own volition. However, Chaucer seems to leave such dark allegations against the Summoner and focus on the bizarreness of the situation by making fun of summoners and have them appear as the focal point of satire which is exemplified by the juxtaposition of the ironic praise of the Summoner

pilgrim: ‘A bettre felawe sholde men nocht fynde’ (I: l. 648), and the notion of the summoner in the Friar’s *Tale* being ‘a slyer boye nas noon in Engelond’ (III: l. 1322) which indicates that both of them are the best at being particularly bad and immoral summoners.

The summoner in the *Friar’s Tale* is described as a “dogge for the bowe” (III: l. 1369), meaning a dog trained to hunt with an archer, which confirms an intermediate position where the summoner answers to a higher power, which in this case is the archdeacon who is described as having a summoner “redy to his hond” (III: l. 1321). Like a hunter having a hunting dog ready to fetch wounded or dead preys, the archdeacon displays behavior that suits the “systemic explanation” in that he strives for monetary gains, especially through lechers who were described as “his grettest wo” (III: l. 1310), and that no one could escape his “pecunyal payne” (III: l. 1314). While the systemic explanation explains why both summoners may be abusing their offices as a means to live up to the standards of their superiors, while also maintaining a personal economy, it does not account for the fact that both summoners also cheat their archdeacons.

The Summoner in the *General Prologue* lies about the archdeacon’s financial repercussions to trespassers (I: l. 659). The summoner in the *Friar’s Tale* is compared to Judas (III: l. 1350), while the Friar telling the tale also claims that the summoner’s “Maister hadde but half his duetee” (III: l. 1352), referring to the summoner withholding money due the archdeacon. When the summoner deliberately withholds money that is collected for the diocese, it indicates that the summoner does function without a higher power to answer to. Instead, the office of archdeacons can be used as excuses for summoners to abuse their office with official texts that acquit them of these actions, because it is deemed necessary to uphold the function of summoners or other officials. The summoner, together with the bailiff/fiend, also describes himself as overworked and underpaid, as a reason for why they resort to extortion: ‘My wages been ful streite and ful smale’ (III: l. 1426).

In regard to the summoner and the fiend, there are a number of similarities between them which include that they both pretend to be bailiffs (III: l. 1387-95), both of them serve hard masters (III: l. 1300-20 & l. 1427), both of them work by means of trickery and sometimes violence, and they are both seen as hunters: the summoner hunts for money, while the fiend hunts for souls (Havelly 13). The satirical point of the relationship between the summoner and the fiend is that they share all these qualities, which Chaucer, through the Friar, indicates that the differences between summoners and devils are indeed minimal. By relating summoners and devils through a humorous comparison, Chaucer criticizes an institution which no longer represents a virtuous, good Christian society, but is instead affiliated with the opposite of what this institution is trying to achieve. This juxtaposition between fiend and summoner enhances the notion of a visibly corrupt affliction that the Church suffers from which divides the spiritual and material duties of the Church, where both aspects suffer from abuse.

To satirize summoners and their institution even further, the clear difference between the summoner and the fiend is that the fiend is more clever and cunning than the summoner. The summoner's stupidity, or stubbornness, or perhaps innate evil, prevent him from backing down when the fiend reveals its true nature. He still insists in fulfilling his agreement on sharing revenue despite the fact that there is a possibility of the fiend turning on him. As discussed above, the Summoner's limited spiritual capacity that we see in the *General Prologue*, is caused by his hedonistic lifestyle with a focus on earthly pleasures. This also applies to the summoner in the Friar's *Tale* because they are each other's doubles. The summoner's carelessness is reflected in his covetousness, which is depicted in the summoner lusting for money, carthorses and frying pans, which all are material objects. The focus on material goods clouds the Summoner's ability to think beyond this materialism. The fiend, on the other hand, is on the hunt for souls, and it shows a great understanding for the immaterial

world which is reflected in the fiend's ability to see the bigger picture of material and immaterial perspectives, which is that money and frying pans are temporary, while souls are forever. The notion that the summoner seems incapable of understanding immaterial matters such as the revealing lecture on demonology, is strengthened when the summoner inquires "Make ye yow newe bodies thus alway / Of elementz?" (III: l. 1505-06). When the summoner asks about what fiends' material bodies consist of, he circles the discussion back to the fiend's body which is a topic the summoner can see and understand (Berlin 10). This part, I argue, foreshadows the Pardoner's inability to grasp abstract concepts, where the summoner presses the fiend for information he can understand, while it also serves as a parallel to the Pardoner's tale of killing Death. The summoner's inability to understand matters beyond the empirical world is what in the end damns him when he literally tries to pull the clothes off the widow's back: 'I wolde I hadde thy smok and every cloth!' (III: l. 1633) and refuses to repent, to which the fiend responds with by dragging him and his soul to hell as part of its rightfully earned proceeds.

While the fiend seems to grasp the soul's immanence and the immaterial world, both the pilgrim-Summoner and the summoner in the Friar's *Tale* are portrayed as materialistic characters who live immoral lives without any spiritual concerns. This immoral behavior, as I have argued, is reflected in the Summoner's physical disfigurement and skin disease, and both summoners' dishonest actions. The meeting with the fiend also holds a sort of honesty, where the fiend reveals its true identity, and "has been diligent in teaching, warning, and advising the summoner" (Berlin 10). It is ironic that a demon tells the truth, and does not encroach on his office, which is shown when the fiend asks the widow to confirm her wish of damning the summoner and her pan to the devil. Contrary to the summoner, the fiend in his treatment of her is mild and polite: "Now, Mabely, myn ownene mooder deere, / Is this youre wyl in earnest that ye seye?" (III: l. 1626-27). While Chaucer shows how similar to devils summoners are,

Chaucer through the Friar depicts summoners as even worse beings than devils by having the fiend portrayed with a kind of demonic moral code. This moral code applies to the fiends of Hell, while the summoner seems to lack any moral code whatsoever, whether it is of this world or another.

It is possible that a life of virtue and focus on God could redeem both characters, both physically and spiritually. However, since Chaucer portrays both summoners with a mix of disgust and humor, they can operate as a metaphor of the corruption within the pastoral-judicial institution within the Church. Chaucer uses the summoners to reveal the metaphorical disease with which the ecclesiastical court is infected with. Chaucer does this by showing how little professional depth of knowledge concerning their own office the summoners have, and how little spiritual insight they have compared to the fiend. Even a wicked creature such as the fiend knows what immaterial goods are at stake, as it may “act only against those who willingly accept his offerings” (Raybin 99). The fiend may know this, perhaps because he already belongs to a spiritual sphere and shows loyalty to his master, Satan, while the Church has strayed from the path of God, caring more for money and sex than spiritual welfare. As I have tried to prove and argue in this chapter, Chaucer’s satirical depiction of the Summoner is physically and morally worse than how the Friar was depicted. Though the joking and amusing *Friar’s Tale* maintained the Friar’s intelligent and witty humor to portray contemporary attitudes towards summoners, it also reflects the satirical seriousness connected to the Summoner. The portrait of the Summoner shows that he is more corrupted than the Friar, and thus more strongly critiqued.

This level of moral corruption is also displayed in the *Friar’s Tale*, where the stakes and consequences for the Summoner’s portrait and the *Friar’s Tale* are higher than what can be said of the Friar’s stakes. Even though the tales are told by rivaling pilgrims, the *Friar’s Tale’s* severity and stakes are, as stated in the previous chapter, reflected in the Summoner’s

portrait, while the opposite can be said of the *Summoner's Tale* and the Friar's portrait. The physical manifestation of corruption which is visible on the Summoner's body may risk his own well-being on earth. The loss of dignity, which happens to both pilgrims, seems in this case as merely a trifle compared to physical agony, which can be extended to spiritual agony, in the sense of going to Hell, if the Summoner does not redeem himself. He is given the opportunity by the Friar, but does not seem to take it, and instead focuses on revenging his hurt pride. Chaucer's satirical display of the Summoner through disgust, astonishment, absurdness, and bizarreness, as I have tried to argue, is a heavy critique of the Summoner, and in a stronger degree than the critique of the Friar. The satirical display also shows how the Church, as the extension of the Summoner, may lose its spiritual potency and competence it is supposed to possess if it is not reformed, and therefore foreshadows the *Pardoner's Tale*. These satirical comments also question, I argue, the function summoners have in Chaucer's contemporary society as they encourage his readers to think critically about this function.

While the satiric mood surrounding the Summoner is more deplorable than what surrounds the Friar, and their stakes seem somewhat serious, they can hardly compare to the Pardoner's stakes, whose physical appearance and inability to distinguish between the literal and figurative can result in a completely spiritually bankrupt Church. The discussion on the Summoner has shown that he is corrupt both inwardly and outwardly, but with a chance to redeem himself if he so wishes. The Pardoner on the other hand, as the last chapter will show, possesses no such choice, where the satirical display turns darker, and with higher stakes, than what has been encountered in the discussions concerning the Friar and the Summoner.

Chapter 3

‘Unbokele Anon Thy Purs!’: Deceitfulness and Avarice in the Pardoner’s Portrait, *Prologue* and *Tale*

I wolde I hadde thy coillons in myn hond
In stide of relikes or of seintuarie.
Lat kutte hem of, I wol helpe them carie;
They shul be shryned in an hogges toord!
(VI: l. 952-955)

This is how the Host, Harry Bailly, reacts to the Pardoner’s audacity and selfish liberties he takes on his quest to fill his pockets by mean of lies and forgery. Like his two corrupt ecclesiastical brethren, the Friar and the Summoner, the Pardoner goes out of his way to scam people to make a profit. He does this by selling fake pardons and fake relics, preying on the spiritual lives of the good people of the town. The Pardoner is the last pilgrim described in the *Canterbury Tales*, and like many of the other pilgrims, he puts money above God. By drawing on contemporary attitudes towards pardoners, stereotyping them, Chaucer portrays a pardoner with no moral code, and who abuses his office to the highest degree. Chaucer uses satire, as he has done with both the Friar and Summoner, to ridicule the Pardoner’s pursuit of material wealth, not just at the cost of his spiritual well-being, but instead a complete sacrifice of his spirituality which severs the connection between the Pardoner and God. Compared to the two other pilgrims in this thesis who are given the chance to redeem themselves, the Pardoner is not given this chance. The Pardoner, instead of being a morally superior and devout character, preys on the spiritual lives of the laity, and shows off his high level of hypocrisy. Compared to both the Friar and Summoner, the Pardoner, as I have argued, is the most criticized character of the three, possibly of the whole *Canterbury Tales* because his severe lack of moral backbone. Through his confession-like prologue and

sermon-like tale, the Pardoner preaches against the sins of avarice and greed in others, while simultaneously embracing these vices himself.

Chaucer satirizes the Pardoner's immoral actions by portraying them as overexaggerated, and he satirizes the Pardoner's look by portraying a male character as feminine, indicating sexual deviancy. By making a satirical point of the Pardoner's unmanliness, his avarice and venality, I argue that Chaucer presents the corrupt Pardoner as a metonymy to the Church he works for and represents to show how the Church has lost its potency, becoming sterile. Chaucer does this, I argue, through the characterization of the Pardoner's physical make-up, how the Old Man is presented in the Pardoner's Tale, and through the Pardoner's inability to distinguish between the material and immaterial, which is apparent from the quest in his *Tale* to kill Death. The consequences of this characterization show that compared to the other pilgrims, the loss of dignity and loss of physical well-being, are much lower than what is at stake for the Pardoner: the fate of his own soul, and by extension representing the Church, the fate of everyone's souls. In this final chapter, I will discuss how Chaucer employs satire to the Pardoner who is an example of ultimate moral corruption. The satire has evolved from light-hearted fart jokes, dim-wittedness, and stubbornness, to the death of three men in the *Pardoner's Tale*. I will also briefly discuss how Chaucer presents the Host as an exemplar whom the audience can relate with. I will start the chapter introducing pardoners' historical function and background. The main part of the chapter will address the Pardoner's description in the portrait and end on a discussion of the Pardoner's *Tale*.

Pardoners' Historical Function and Background

A pardoner's function within the Church during the fifteenth century was to deliver indulgences which reduced time in Purgatory earned by sin. They were originally respectable

servants of the Church and collected money for special occasions by appealing to people's generosity and devotion in the congregation they stood before (Moseley 33). Originally named *questor*, they became known as "pardoners" to the general mass of people due to how they were regarded, and what was perceived as their chief function, as pardoners of sins (Moseley 34). No pardoner had the authority or privilege to sell the indulgences he was given, nor act as a preacher (Haselmayer & Kellogg 252). Pardoners were only given authority to visit parishes to collect money on the behalf of certain institutional branches and hand out indulgences, or pardons that were personally addressed to those who already had proved that they had confessed and had done their penance in form of a financial offering to the Church. Indulgences sold from the Catholic Church were pardons that when bought, would reduce purgatorial punishment, often as a part of the sacrament of reconciliation. Pardoners' roles were thus limited to messengers and charity workers for the institution they represented.

Because of serious social and political upheavals during the fourteenth century, there were those that sought to abuse the power of the Church, and sometimes, these abusers posed as pardoners who illegitimately claimed authority and financial help for a cause, but instead pocketed the money. The fact that people could not know which pardoner was real or not, is a reason why there were such low opinions of pardoners among the people (Moseley 33). This negative opinion towards pardoners was not helped, but rather reinforced, by the open scandal concerning the Hospital of St Mary Rouncival where abuses of the sale of indulgences became officially and publicly known in both 1379 and 1387 (Cooper 58). The Pardoner in the *Canterbury Tales* reveals through his prologue that he refuses to follow the limited position granted by the Church by pocketing the money that he collects for himself, and scamming people to whom he offers his fake relics. While he scolds other pilgrims for their own greed and covetousness, but still tries to sell indulgences and pass off his fake relics as real, the Pardoner clearly shows how hypocritical he is.

Chaucer uses the image of the obviously corrupt Pardoner and his fraudulent practices to point out the malpractice of the Church and its agents. The practices involve selling fake indulgences, receiving alms and offers for his counterfeit relics, and trespassing into clerical offices where the Pardoner has no jurisdiction. To present this corruption, Chaucer's satirical critique against the Pardoner may invoke reactions, such as laughter, but also an awareness of clerical malpractice. By criticizing the Church through the Pardoner, is it also possible that Chaucer also indirectly criticizes the people who believe the Pardoner and in the Church. However, there is no proof that people fall for the Pardoner's scams, except according to the Pardoner's own words. Instead, Chaucer has the Host act as an exemplum to show that they should not fall victims of ecclesiastical malpractice. This notion will be discussed later.

The Pardoner's Portrait

The Pardoner in the *General Prologue* is first mentioned briefly together in the group of the Reeve, the Miller, and the Summoner, and after the introduction of these, the Pardoner is presented last. Because the Pardoner is presented second to last, many of the portraits, with the exception of Harry Bailly, are already known to the reader. The Pardoner is placed in a group with members that raise certain moral objections in their attitudes and actions, which emphasize the Pardoner's moral corruption. The previous chapter already accounted for the Summoner, whose moral code is lacking. A closer look at the other characters' descriptions before getting to the Pardoner is also a sign that the Pardoner is grouped with scoundrels and con-men. One of the Miller's skills is described as: 'wel koude he stelen corn and tollen thries' (I: l. 560), and with a 'thombe of gold' (I: l. 563), referring to a proverb that there are no honest millers. The virtuous descriptions of the rest of the crowd do not become any better with the Manciple's sense for finance, and the Reeve's acquaintances being 'adrad [afraid] of hym as of the deeth' (I: l. 605).

Chaucer's description of the Pardoner is some 45 lines long, and he describes his rapacious character extensively in so few lines. Riding from the hospital of Charing Cross in Rouncesvale with the Summoner, he is full of song and there 'was nevere trompe of half so greet a soun' (I: l. 674), suggesting that he is not good at it, as a trumpet creates an ear-shattering sound. This first description of the Pardoner indicates already that he might be a false man because his discordant voice is reflected in his behavior and that he naturally will try to deceive his fellow pilgrims. This criticism of corruption is reinforced with the Pardoner's accomplice, the Summoner, who is clearly aware of the scams and ought to arrest the Pardoner but is instead described as his 'freend and compeer' (I: l. 670). Chaucer might have been attacking them both for the connivance between church authorities "in the abuse of selling pardons," but before discussing the Pardoner's trespasses, I will address the issue of the Pardoner's looks and what the descriptions represent (Mann 147). In his physical description, the Pardoner is described in this way:

This Pardoner hadde heer as yelow as wex, But smothe it heeng as dooth a strike of flex; By ounces henge his lokkes that he hadde, And therwith he his shuldres overspradde; But thynne it lay, by colpons oon and oon. But hood, for jolitee, wered he noon, For it was trussed up in his walet. Hym thought he rood al of the newe jet;	<i>hair, wax clump, flax small strands</i>
Dischevelee, save his cappe, re rood al bare. Swiche glarynge eyen hadde he as an hare. I: l. 675-84	<i>strands, one by one to make an attractive appearance packed, pouch/knapsack it seemed to him, in the very latest fashion with hair unbound, except staring eyes</i>

Using medieval physiognomy, which is the science of understandings how one's nature is reflected in one's appearance, Chaucer employs a *blazon*, starting with the description of the Pardoner's hair. A blazon is a satiric verse where a part of a man's or a woman's body is described and either praised or blamed through a detailed list of its attributes. The blazon starts with the Pardoner's hair, which illustrates some kind of sexual deviancy (Cooper 59).

The Pardoner's physical appearance deviates from any other descriptions of men in the *Canterbury Tales*, which suggests satirical criticism. The Pardoner seems proud of his luscious hair spread out over his shoulders with the cape of his hood pulled down in order to show it off, but it suggests that the attention to how his hair is laid out, can be a sign of effeminacy (Mann 148). His hair is described as 'thynne' (I: l. 679), hanging strand by strand around his head, suggests that it can be perceived like that of a woman's, which is a form for satire which mocks the Pardoner's masculinity. His 'glarynge eyen' (I: l.684), could in the Middle Ages be recognized as impudence, while the comparison to a hare stems from a medieval belief that the animal was hermaphroditic and lecherous (Mann 146). This strong suggestion of the Pardoner's effeminacy is then emphasized even further in the lines below:

A voys he hadde as small as has a goot.	<i>voice, high, goat</i>
No berd hadde he, ne nevere shoulde have;	
As smothe it was as it were late shave.	
I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare.	<i>believe, a eunuch or homosexual</i>
I: l. 688-91	

Chaucer targets the Pardoner's feminine voice and smooth face, which always seems to be freshly shaven, 'late shave' (I: l. 690). The voice of a goat was not only considered effeminate, but a medieval belief was that the goat was a lecherous animal (Moseley 40), making the description even more insulting. The last line, where the narrator's belief of the Pardoner being a castrated horse, a "geldyng", or a female horse, a "mare", reinforces the belief that the Pardoner represents a sexual deviancy in the Middle Ages. This detail has proven hard to interpret in the analysis of the Pardoner's sexual make-up. Critics, in their analyses, do not agree on what this line is supposed to represent. While Jill Mann and Monica McAlpine argue that the descriptions of the Pardoner indicate that he is a homosexual, Robert Miller and Diana Palmer argue that these descriptions suggest that the Pardoner may be a eunuch (Mann 145-46; McAlpine 8; R. Miller 180; Palmer iv). Jeffrey Myers even argues that these descriptions mean that the Pardoner is a female eunuch (54).

Without depreciating critics for their argumentation that the Pardoner may be a homosexual or a eunuch, I argue that Chaucer's main satirical depiction of the Pardoner is not primarily a statement about his sexual orientation or identity, but that the emphasis on the Pardoner's feminine aspects is used to represent a Church that is no longer virile in the sense of losing power. I argue that this insult has a more important interpretation in relation to the Church, in that it serves as a satirical critique of it. Much like a man or a male animal loses its virility, liveliness, and masculine aggressiveness at the lost production of testosterone, the same can be said of the Church in a spiritual manner. The "testosterone" in this case comes in the form of spiritual power and authority. Emasculation of the Pardoner is partly supported by Alastair Minnis, who argues that the Pardoner's physical make-up is *supposed* to be insulting (156). Without stating it explicitly, but instead using 'I trowe' (I: l. 691), Chaucer's mocking and suggestive accusation of the Pardoner, representing the Church, of "lacking balls," is an easy way of emasculating both the individual and the institution. The distance between accusation and fact is however long, as mocking possible physical traits are (such as the lack of testicles), by my own opinion, the easiest form of satirical insult. Without knowing whether they are true or not, the insults of comparing him to a 'geldyng' or a 'mare' can still evoke the ideas of a pardoner and a Church who has lost its potency and are no longer capable of fulfilling its purpose. The mere spark of such an idea indicates that if these insults are believed, even if they are not true, the insults become better and stronger (Minnis 156).

However, Chaucer not only satirizes the Church through the Pardoner, but also satirizes him as an individual and as a representative of other pardoners. Chaucer does this by further mocking his manliness and physical appearance. Minnis argues that much like Absolon from the *Miller's Tale*, in addition to his physical appearance, Chaucer satirizes the Pardoner's chance at love by reducing his masculinity (150-54). This might indicate that the Pardoner and all other pardoners whom he represents fall under the idea that they are unmanly

in how they conduct themselves which is used as a satirical point to reduce masculinity. Claiming he '[has] a joly wenche in every toun.' (VI: l. 455), that he plans to one day marry (III: l. 167), and that he asks the Wife of Bath for advice to 'teche us yonge men of youre praktike' (III: l. 187), indicates that he might have some interest in women after all, and thus seem to restore some of his masculinity. Chaucer, I argue, only *wants* his readers to believe otherwise, as the sexually ambiguous appearance symbolizes a critique towards a spiritually sterile Church. The Pardoner is however considered unmanly in respect to his failed sexual performance (Minnis 151). While the insult of calling the Pardoner a 'geldyng' or a 'mare' is supposed to elicit laughter and shock from the audience and pilgrims, the implications of the Church being spiritually sterile and that they are losing followers are severe. The same can be said of failed sexual performance and small luck in love, where the Church's spiritual sterility results in not being able to produce more spiritual offspring in the form of more members of the Church. This severity is stronger than what is encountered with either the Friar and the Summoner, to which adds further evidence that the Pardoner is the most criticized pilgrim with the most severe consequences attached to him when it comes to his physical appearance.

Chaucer's extensive energy input into the details of the Pardoner's sexual makeup might be a precursor to his corrupt behavior, as it is presented before the readers are aware of his deceitful professional practices, which is elaborated in his *Prologue* (Mann 147). The focus on appearance might also have been done to soften the blow of his upcoming fraudulent actions, or so that the audience's reaction "is ensured by the use of items of appearance familiar from the satiric tradition on foppery" (Mann 147-8). This tradition entails satirizing fashionable clothing and derives from an old literary custom. St. Bernard, for example, used it in a knightly context to distinguish worldly knights from ascetic Templars, as is seen with the description of the Squire and his 'lokkes crulle' (I: l. 81) and his floral embroidered clothes (I: l. 89) in contrast to the Knight, who is described by his merits and accomplishments rather

than looks: ‘he loved chivalrie, / Trouthe and honour, fredom and curtesie. / Ful worthy was he in his lords werre.’ (I: l. 45-7) (Mann 119).

Chaucer uses this tradition to emphasize the Pardoner’s spiritual disconnection which is exemplified in his possessions:

A vernycle hadde he sowed upon his cappe.	<i>Veronica badge</i>
His valet, biforn hym in his lappe,	<i>wallet, large pocket</i>
Bretful of pardoun comen from Rome al hoot.	<i>Brimful, papal indulgences</i>
(I: l. 685-88)	

The ‘vernycle’, which is a medal with the representation of St. Veronica’s veil, sewn into his cape, implies where he has been. Because this kind of medal was the badge of the pilgrimage to Rome, this is likely the place he claims he got his pardons and the religious “trinkets” which he claims to have belonged to saints and other persons of holiness. Chaucer satirizes the false relics the Pardoner has brought with him by making them ridiculously important in the history of Christianity. His claims that he is in the possession of the veil of Mary, and a piece of the sail of Saint Peter (I: l. 965-967), from where Jesus walked on water and saved him and the fishermen from the ravages of the storm (Matt 14:22-33), sound over-exaggerated in the ears of the audience, because Chaucer informs the audience that it is a simply a ‘pilwe beer’ (I: l. 694), a pillow case. The Pardoner is not the first to have claimed he is in possession of the Virgin’s Veil. In fact, it was also claimed to be in possession of Chartres Cathedral during the Middle Ages making it a popular destination for pilgrims, and also claimed to be in Aachen Cathedral in Germany (Fassler ix; Lutz). For the Pardoner, as an individual, to be in possession of items of such great spiritual value, seems decidedly unlikely.

With this exaggeration, neither Chaucer nor the Pardoner bothers to try to fool their audience with the divine treasures the Pardoner is carrying, perhaps to draw specific attention to his blatant deceitful actions, which could have been overshadowed by his physical appearance. The obvious fraudulence is evident with the rest of his knickknacks: ‘croys of latoun ful of stones, / and in a glas he hadde pigges bones’ (l. 699-700). This time, Chaucer

does not even try to pass a stone inlaid cross with a brass alloy, that is supposed to resemble gold, but has neither the properties gold has when it comes to value or durability. It is simply a cross not worth more than what it is made of. The same goes for the glass of pig's bones. The Pardoner is likely to try to sell off these relics, or more likely, receive alms for their beneficial qualities from poor peasants, claiming they belonged to a departed saint. Chaucer satirizes these relics first by revealing their true, worthless nature, by identifying them as 'pigges bones' (I: l. 700) and then lets the Pardoner abuse the system established for relics by illegitimately authorizing them as real relics by the decree of his fake seals and bulls. By revealing the fake relics' nature, Chaucer knows that the audience would never fall for the Pardoner's scams, and through this Chaucer critiques through satire the black market of relics, and the practices of the Church.

Relics had a central place in both religious and secular spheres in the Middle Ages. They were desired equipment for the altars in the churches, and necessary for oath-taking in the court of law, as well as on the battlefield where they lifted the men's morale and helped bring victory (Geary 3). A relic is defined as "corpses of important Christians or artefacts associated with their lives, including well-known figures such as Mary and Jesus together with lesser known evangelists, apostles, saints and martyrs", and a part of a relic's identification is the sign of holiness that is able to blur out the lines between immanence and transcendence (Brazinski & Fryxell 1; Malo 88). These divine properties played a major factor in the black market for relics, which Chaucer indirectly criticizes, because it grew bigger in accordance with different burial practices. The black market for relics in Europe had a peak between the seventh and eleventh century, where especially the Englishmen were infamous for their notorious stealing and selling of relics at a high rate, while the practice of travelling with relics to raise money for construction and renovation arose in the tenth century (Brazinski & Fryxell 5; Geary 14). This last notion of tradition makes it easier to honor saints

anywhere through their relics, and not just at their tombs. The relic tradition can also function as a legitimate reason for the Pardoner to travel around on behalf of the Charing Cross Hospital in Runcesvale, in that he instead keeps the money for himself. However, relics' most important function was their divine properties.

A part of the divine mystery of relics is their beneficial powers because they act as a link between the material and immaterial world, the sacred and the profane. Because of this supposed supernatural power, relics believed to be authentic, were often occluded in opaque shrines cased within a number of frames and reliquaries making them difficult and sometimes impossible to see. This way, the Church or monastery who controlled the relic could control access to it. Controlling access to the relic is certainly paradoxical in that the obscurity and inaccessibility of the relic are a few of the factors contributing to its holiness and authenticity; they are hiding the object as a mean to empower it (Malo 88).

In the case of the Pardoner, Roby Malo in his article "The Pardoner's Relics (and Why They Matter the Most)" (2008), argues that Chaucer does not obscure or hide his relics physically at all but proclaims and shows proudly which relics he has to offer, but instead he hides them in the words he uses. Though very much likely fake, the Pardoner possesses non-notable relics which he shrouds by means of rhetoric instead of material occlusion (Malo 90). This satiric analogy that problematizes physical concealment challenges the authority and authenticity held by the relics. By reaching into his 'male' (I: l. 694), a word that can mean bag or saddle, reliquary *and* memory, the Pardoner reinforces the authenticity of his fake relics (Malo 92). He does this by pulling bulls out from his bag, the relics themselves out from his reliquary, *and* strengthen his credibility by reaching into the metaphorical storehouse of his memory to mystify these artifacts rhetorically, Malo points out (92). The material objects of the relics themselves are insignificant because it is merely the symbolism around them that defines what they are, but with the Pardoner's rhetorical occlusion, he dictates and

controls the access to these relics (Geary 4). The issue of a corrupt Pardoner who possesses fake relics also raises the notion that fake relics are far from divine. Instead, as real relics represent the link between the immaterial and material, the fake relics in the hands of the Pardoner emphasizes the spiritual disconnection he and the Church suffer from. The relics, though clouded in rhetoric to make them seem authentic, represents only earthly ideals where wealth is a focal point, while the spiritual ideals of saints and God are forsaken.

With the Pardoner's claim that he earns money by obscuring his relics, Chaucer critiques the Church's malpractice, and he critiques how prone to abuse the system concerning relics and pardoners was. For so cunning the Pardoner is, that 'with feyned flatterye and japes, / He made the person [*parson*] and the peple his apes' (I: l. 705-6). Not only did he fool the common man, but also other clerics, who were his brethren and colleagues (I: l. 706), which supports the notion that the Pardoner is criticized to the strongest degree of the pilgrims. The criticism serves as a warning for his cunning abuses can be. This is a reflection of both the Pardoner's charismatic abilities and also of how gullible his contemporaries were despite his obvious arrogance, blind hypocrisy, and falseness when he claims that 'Upon a day he gat hym moore moneye / Than that the person gat in monthes tweye' (I: l. 703-4).

Only the Host, Harry Bailly, at the end of the *Tale*, loses his patience and starts swearing when the Pardoner tries to sell off his pardons and relics, advising the Host to start first by opening his purse. What seems to make the Pardoner at a loss for words, is the vulgar insulting comeback Harry Bailly throws in his face, where he exclaims:

<p>“Lat be,” quod he, “it shal nat be, so theeche! Thou woldest make me kisse thyn olde breech, And swere it were a relyk of a seint, Though it were with thy fundament depeint! But, by the croys which that Seint Eleyne fond, I wolde I hadde thy coillions in myn hond In stide of relikes or of seintuarie. Lat kutte hem of, I wol helpe them carie;</p>	<p><i>I swear underpants anus, stained cross, St. Helen testicles sanctuary/box of relics</i></p>
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They shul be shryned in an hogges toord!
(VI: l. 950-955)

enshrined, turd

The Host's reaction might be part bewilderment that the Pardoner could be so presumptuous about his trade, and part anger on the account of claiming that the Host 'is moost envoluped in synne' (VI: l. 942). The reason for this is the Pardoner's *Tale's* foundation (which I will examine in the next section): the presumption that the tavern is a spawning ground for the cardinal sins of 'homycide', 'wikkednesse', 'hasardrye', 'luxurye' (VI: l. 896-7) and what seems to be the worst: 'glotonye' (IV: l. 498, 897) which are all known collectively as "tavern sins". The Host might have taken a personal offence for the Pardoner indicating that the tavern, which was Harry Bailly's livelihood, is the church of the Devil on the basis of all the sins that are connected to the tavern (Minnis 105). There is a certain irony in Harry Bailly's outburst when he suggests that he should kiss the Pardoner's soiled breeches: the breeches of St. Thomas, filthy and unchanged over the years as a part of the mortification process of the flesh, was seen as one of the most prized relics of the shrine which they are visiting in Canterbury (Cooper 271). The comment also captures what Morrison states about the use of scatological humor, that it is an important part of humor to use excrement as a tool to humiliate an individual or institution if the target being "filthed" has little or no sympathy from the audience (67-68). In this case, the otherwise violent threat of the Host is softened because of the humorous image of the Pardoner being associated with filth. The parodic comment Harry Bailly made can also be damaging to the relic's holiness, and in turn the whole idea of relics, in that it is reduced from something spiritual to material which the Pardoner has done from the very beginning, turning the sacred into the profane. Harry Bailly calls the Pardoner on his lies about what he can do for the other pilgrims, and when the Pardoner is unsuccessful in scamming the Host, Harry Bailly represents those who can see through the Pardoner's thick layer of hypocrisy.

But what *is* beneath the thick hypocritical layer? In the sense of his manner and nature, the Pardoner describes himself as both a dove and a snake: ‘As dooth a dowwe sittynge on a berne’ (VI: l. 397) and like a snake he ‘spitte (...) out my venom under hewe’ (VI: l. 420). These images seem to be a parody of the biblical passage of Matthew 10:16, saying: “Behold I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves. Be ye therefore wise as serpents and simple as doves.” The Pardoner, making money by tricking people, tells of how great ‘peyne’ (VI: l. 395) he takes when he stretches his neck east and west like a dove on a barn. Chaucer has twisted the otherwise virtuous symbol of the dove as the Holy Ghost, which was considered to be an innocent and loyal animal, into a creature which embraces the animal’s vices of excessive curiosity and circumspection (Minnis 125). The same can be said about the snake, which in the Middle Ages was a symbol of prudence with its ability to control its venom, signifying the people leaving their malice and evil thoughts outside before entering the church – they could control what they would say and how they acted (Minnis 125). The Pardoner may be able to control himself and hold his tongue, but he is not a symbol of prudence. Rather, if anyone argues or disagree with the Pardoner, he claims that ‘Thus spitte I out my venom under hewe / Of hoolynesse, to semen hooly and trewe’ (VI: l. 420-21). The Pardoner releases his venom in the form of a rebuke, under the appearance, ‘hewe’, of seeming holy and ‘trewe’ to his critics. These attributes ascribed to the Pardoner show that he possesses neither the shrewdness of the snake, nor the innocence of the dove. The way he preys on innocent people, and does not even hide it, indicates that the Pardoner is nothing less than a wolf, although in sheep’s clothing.

Of the Pardoner’s other abilities, the Narrator is true in his statement: ‘Ne was ther swich another pardoner’ (I: l. 693), meaning that there were no other pardoners like this one. For not only does the Pardoner infringe on his own profession by abusing the privileges granted to him by the Church, he also trespasses into other clerical functions to which he has

no right such as the offices of the relic custodians and preachers. Firstly, the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, canon 62 states: “we ordain by this present decree that henceforth ancient relics shall not be displayed outside a reliquary or be put up for sale” (EWTN, Web). The relics were supposed to be watched over by relic custodians staying in their reliquaries, to which the Pardoner pays no heed as states in the *Prologue*, selling them off as fast as he can manage and creating new “relics” as he goes.

Secondly, the Lateran Council also forbade “the recognition of alms-collectors, some of whom deceive other people by proposing various errors in their preaching, unless they show authentic letters from the apostolic see or from the diocesan bishop” (EWTN, Web). There can be no mistake in that the Pardoner knows that what he is doing is wrong, but he still sacrifices his moral objections, if he ever had any, so that he can line his pockets. Fake alms-collectors seem to have been a problem in the Middle Ages, where in the 1380s there were issued arrest warrants on people claiming to collect alms for the Runcesvale Hospital (Minnis 102). It might be that such a warrant was for a pardoner just like Chaucer’s Pardoner, where the situation is satirized to bring attention to the social problems of fraud and peoples’ gullibility.

Thirdly, the Pardoner usurps the offices of the preacher, the clerk, and the relic custodian. In the office of the preacher, the function of the indulgences was to reduce divine temporal punishment after the sacraments of confession and absolution. This comes from the notion that the burden of sin can be paid by someone else, just like Christ did when he sacrificed himself on the cross for the sake of humanity. This kind of sentiment of Christian solidarity and compassion seems lost in the Pardoner, who only preaches to desire earthly gain. The Pardoner has no right to sell off indulgences and relics in the first place, but claims to the people he sells them to, that he can absolve them as well: ‘And I assoille him by the auctoritee / Which that by bulle ygraunted was to me.’ (VI: l. 387-88). The issue here is that

pardoners did not have the power or authority to absolve anyone, as it was reserved for priests and friars, and the supposed real credentials the Pardoner possesses do not authorize him to act as one either. This indicates how far into the priestly territory he trespasses.

The other encroachments of offices, the clerk, and the relic custodian, seem to share similar traits. Whereas a clerk in the Middle Ages was a civil servant, who worked in various administrative offices and maintained written record and documents, a relic custodian cared for the remains of the saints by guarding, regulating and controlling the relics and those who could access them. The relic custodian system was crucial to the practice of religious cults and was a well-established tradition (Malo 84). Both of these offices were of a scholarly position, each representing their profession. The Pardoner claims that:

I stonde lyk a clerk in my pulpet,	
And whan the lewed peple is doun yset,	<i>ignorant/simple</i>
I preche so as ye han herd bifoore	
And telle and hundred false japes moore.	<i>tricks</i>
(VI: l. 391-94)	

The Pardoner stands in his pulpit, acting like a learned man, ‘a clerk’ (VI: l. 391), showing that he is well-versed in the Bible and in storytelling with a silver tongue, and no sense of human compassion, telling the seated church-goers a hundred lies or ‘japes’ (VI: l. 394). The same goes for his parodic relic custodian position. By controlling the relic, the controllers served as gateways to God’s divine grace for the pilgrim. The Pardoner capitalizes on his allure and his ability to reach out to uneducated, ‘lewed’ (VI: l. 392) people, showing that he is an intelligent man who knows his sermon, exemplum, and audience, which he uses to amass wealth.

In his prologue, the Pardoner introduces the topic of his confession, the tale, which is ‘Radix malorum est cupitas,’ meaning “greed is the root of [all] evil,” referencing 1 Timothy 6:10 which states: “For the desire of money is the root of all evils; which some coveting have erred from the faith and have entangled themselves in many sorrows.” I established earlier

that the Pardoner builds trustworthiness by shrouding his relics using rhetorical devices. He shows off his ‘bulles’ (VI: l. 336) with ‘Oure lige lords seel on my patente’ (VI: l. 337), ensuring that no one will question his intentions because he bears the (probably fake) papal seal, speaks a few words of Latin to give his sermon some spice and flavor as though it were a meal, and then pulls out his relics with their supposed mysterious background and properties. The absurdity that the ‘mitayn’ (VI: l. 374), an oven mitt, he is in possession of, will multiply the grain harvest of the bearer is hilariously incredible and serves as an absurd, but important satirical critique of the Church’s malpractice, and a reminder for people to think critically about clerics and relics.

The Pardoner safeguards himself and ensures that his pockets will fill up with the promise that the relics will not work if the buyer or user have not offered, or paid enough, to remove the burden of the sin they are carrying, and that the sin ought not to hinder them in doing so. Followed by an unwarranted absolution, the Pardoner is the symbol of avarice, and he plainly confesses to the sins he commits: ‘For myn entente [*intention*] is not but for to wyne, / And nothing for correccioun of synne’ (VI: l. 403-4). His carelessness of other people, and selfishness is reflected in the common practice of medieval clerics to include luxury and squandering in their preaching in order to benefit financially from it (Minnis 102).

With brilliant ability to ‘affile his tonge’ (I: l. 712), the Pardoner has usurped the positions of the priest and preacher, the clerk, and relic custodian illegitimately and immorally. He is a hypocrite, doing exactly what he preaches against, symbolizing the critique directed towards the authority in possession of the institutional Church. This authority and power of the Church and its agents, which is supposed to embrace the virtues of modesty, compassion, and honesty, is twisted through satire, by the scholastic bizarreness of the Pardoner’s sinful actions, into their corresponding vices of greed, animosity, and lies. Chaucer may have done this to invoke laughter and at the same time more revulsion from the readers,

but also to raise awareness and perhaps instigate action, like a modern understanding of satire calls for. The action Chaucer may be going for, is the action of not buying into the corrupted practices of the Church of selling invalid or useless indulgences, or its financial gain on relics.

The Pardoner's Tale

The *Pardoner's Tale* serves as an elaboration on the notion that the Pardoner is disconnected from God as it portrays his inability to distinguish the material from the immaterial. This disconnectedness is foreshadowed in the Friar's singing of ballads, and the Summoner's gluttonous behavior which distances them from God. The *Pardoner's Tale* shares similar traits with a sermon with features like an indictment of sin, and an illustrative exemplum as the main story that can apply to the congregation or other pilgrims with a concluding prayer. A sermon's purpose was to nourish the different dimensions in the relationship between the divine, God, and humans (Troeger 1242). These dimensions included adoration, confession, lament, and thanksgiving, and the preacher used them by means of rhetorical devices to teach, to move and to delight his audience to conversion (Troeger 1242). The effects the sermon was supposed to elicit could be achieved by targeting the dangers of paganism, teaching Christian beliefs and refuting heresy orally. In the Middle Ages, sermons delivered orally in the vernacular were often more loosely constructed than their Latin versions (Cooper 264). The sermon is in nature an oral performance, while a sermon that is written down, belongs to a different genre. A written sermon, unlike the oral sermon, is bound by rhetorical rules, and although our only sources are written sermons, they reflect a rich tradition of preaching (Scheepsma & Johnson 28).

It was not unlikely that a preacher could address his congregation in the vernacular, using notes written in Latin, and thus create a significant difference between written and oral delivered sermons, and after revising his notes to a more literary form, it was recorded. A

written sermon can scarcely shed enough light on the performative aspects of a sermon performed in front of an unruly crowd. These differences between the delivery of a written and an oral sermon might reflect on the Pardoner's sermon. With a dominating exemplum whose sole function was to line his pockets, rather than the substance of the tale, the exemplum's subject was the people's renouncement of the 'tavern sins' and to shun avarice. Through his hypocrisy, however, the Pardoner shows that the function of the tale he tells, is solely to benefit financially, while it also contributes to his lack of abstract understanding. The Pardoner explains in the *Prologue* how he introduces his topic of greed in his sermon, and then goes into detail on how he uses his relics to fool people, and how he tells stories to enthrall people (VI: l. 329-455). Then the Pardoner introduces his *Tale*, where he gulps down a draught of ale, another sign of his greed and hypocrisy that undermines his supposed virtuous position, and says: 'for though myself be a ful vicious man, / A moral tale yet I yow telle kan' (VI: l. 459-60).

In the tale, the audience is introduced to a tavern setting in Flanders, and it describes the Pardoner's company being prone to debauchery, dicing and frequently visiting brothels. The Pardoner further elaborates upon what happens in this 'develes temple' (VI: l. 470) with an exceptional focus on gluttony in the form of excessive drinking and eating. Falling into one of the cardinal sins, such as gluttony, could mean that one would also fall into the other sins of pride, lechery, wrath, lust, envy, avarice and sloth, because the Seven Deadly Sins were all interrelated (Moseley 35). With this in mind, the Pardoner tells the story of himself in this tavern telling a story of three rioters in a similar setting. Already, after having expanded upon the evils of drinking, the Pardoner shows off his hypocrisy by doing the same exact thing, creating a story-within-a-story kind of frame.

After a night of heavy drinking, the rioters are, made aware of a coffin passing by their tavern. Inside is the body of a friend of theirs. They are told by a boy that a 'privee theef men

clepeth [*named*] Deeth' (VI: l. 675) was the slayer of their drunken friend. Indeed, Death kills *everyone* – by the thousands. The rioters are appalled, and as brothers they vow to kill this Death figure, avenging everyone Death has ever killed. 'Deeth shal be deed' (VI: l. 710), they exclaim. By vowing to kill Death, the rioters fail to recognize the absurdity of ridding the universe of an abstract principle. In a biblical sense, which is what a normal sermon usually derives from, death is something only God has control over. Though God never "kills" death, because it is a necessary evil, God shows a power to reach beyond the barrier of the underworld to reverse the effects of death for his believers as stated in Hosea 13:14: "I will deliver them out of the hand of death. I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy death." Instead of meaning it literally, the biblical passage refers to the metaphorical allusion of God saving their souls, while their corporal body dies. It is ironic that the unholy trinity the rioters represent, claim a power that is only shown by God, and then they are themselves taken by that power when they die as a result of committing the 'tavern sins'.

On their way to kill Death, they encounter an old man who greets them humbly with a Lord's blessing to which the proudest of the rioters answer insultingly: "“What, carl, with sory grace! / Why artow [*are you*] al forwrapped save thy face? / Why lyvestow [*do you live*] so longe in so great greet age?”" (VI: l. 717-19). Wishing him bad luck, 'sory grace' (VI: l. 717), the oldest rioter inquires why the wrinkled Old Man has come to live so long. The Old Man reveals that he cannot die, for Death will not take him, but that he knows where Death is: under an oak tree not far from where they are. Finally, by the oak tree, the rioters find a large amount of gold scattered around its trunk. They agree to split it evenly, bringing it back to one of the rioter's houses in the night so as to not draw unwanted attention to it. They draw lots to decide which one of them will run back to the village to bring back wine and bread as supplies for them to feast on, until they can move unseen in the cover of night. When the youngest one draws the shortest straw, he runs back to the village for supplies. Meanwhile,

the two rioters left by the tree agree to kill the youngest one, and to divide the treasure between themselves, while the youngest one poisons the wine, so he can take the whole treasure by himself. The story ends with the older rioters killing the youngest one, while they themselves die from the poisoned wine, no one getting the treasure, but all are taken by Death.

The *Tale* is an emphasis on how the power of evil, can bring about destruction. It also displays Chaucer's serious and dark satirical comments on the Pardoner. The treasure works as a catalyst for the powers of evil and destructive forces within the rioters, exemplified with the 'tavern sins' they, and the Pardoner, are committing. The *Tale* is a moral tale that, without any knowledge of the teller itself, would serve to encourage its listeners to steer away from committing such sins. In this regard, Jean de Meun argues that evil-intentioned preaching may bring salvation to the listeners provided that they are ignorant of the preacher's sin (Minnis 126). Archbishop William Courtenay, on the other hand, argued on the Blackfriars council of 1382, that a bishop or a priest may not act as a civil magistrate nor ordain, consecrate or baptize while he is still in mortal sin, and can only do so after receiving absolution by the sacrament of penance that involves contrition and confession (Minnis 132). Courtenay's stance is also supported by a standard scholastic critique that involves the notion that being aware of sinful actions of the preacher will hurt the spiritual welfare of the flock, while it will also gain more attention than the preaching itself, thus destroying it and its purpose (Minnis 131). Since the readers already know the background of the corrupted Pardoner, revealed in his portrait and *Prologue*, the readers are now faced with the issue of an immoral man, telling a moral tale. Since the Pardoner's moral *Tale* in is truth a revelation of his own vices, where he drinks voraciously in the tavern, confessing his love for money, and at the same time condemns these vices, I argue that the *Tale* then becomes immoral for those who are aware of the Pardoner's malpractice, but not for the people who are not aware of it.

Because the Pardoner has spent his *Prologue* revealing to the readers and the other pilgrims how he scams people, this knowledge makes his tale immoral and it shows how unscrupulous he is in his endeavors. The Pardoner shows on several occasions that he has fallen from God's grace, enveloped in the Seven Deadly sins: gluttony, with his excessive fondness for wine; wrath, his reaction to Harry Bailly's comments at line 957 (VI); lechery, his boasting about wenches and other doubtful sexual practices; pride, for his contempt for God, other people, and his hair; envy, for his backbiting and defamation at line 415 (VI); sloth, for his spiritual deadness; and avarice, which was seen as the worst sin by a number of moralists in the later Middle Ages (Cooper 271).

The *Tale* is a morally abhorrent one, and it can be an image of how one ought *not* to live, and compared to the two other pilgrims, the stakes are much higher, with the first apparent one being death, which is emphasized by the serious tone of absurdity when the rioters try to kill Death. The high stakes connected to the Pardoner's spiritual sterility, are depicted on numerous occasions as shown when the rioters disrespect the Old Man (VI: l. 716-19), when the two oldest rioters scheme to kill the youngest one and take the gold for themselves (VI: l. 805-36) and when the youngest rioter decides to poison the wine he is bringing (VI: l. 837-88) with no concern for the consequences, and finally, when all three of them die as a result of selfishness and greed (VI: l. 891-94). The *Tale* exemplifies what is sinful, however, since the readers are aware of the Pardoner's professional abuse, it fails to guide them towards a good moral path as it ought to be, because of the Pardoner's hypocrisy. The Pardoner, telling the tale, chooses to exploit the good, rather than to embrace it and live by it with the full knowledge and intention of committing evil actions. With this knowledge, the Pardoner seems to be unable to ever attain some sort of religious redemption, which is most pilgrims' goal on a pilgrimage. This may be because the way Chaucer suggests that he is a eunuch or a woman, Chaucer wants to point out that by suggesting physical sterility, the

Pardoner is actually spiritually sterile, unable to connect with God and achieve grace. By the Pardoner's resentment he shows towards those he preaches to, and his inability to change his corrupted ways, it may be of his own conviction that he cannot achieve grace.

The indication of his spiritual sterility given through medieval physiognomy makes his labor in seducing both the women he claims to intimately know in a romantic way, and the other pilgrims through his sermons, metaphorically fruitless. This notion of physical sterility may also extend to the way the Church supposedly fails to gain more followers. There is an irony in that the true repentance that the Pardoner indirectly may induce in others, and that he himself despises, is also closed to him because of this spiritual sterility. The Pardoner gives a verbal form to the graphic allegory of death, reducing the spiritual to the physical, making the quest to kill Death a material one. His spiritual inability is reflected in his *Tale*, where the idea of killing Death as a physical being, rather than an abstract principle, indicates that the Pardoner is unable to grasp the spiritual aspects of death, and of God, outside of the material sphere in which he lives and worships.

A character who seems to grasp the spiritual aspect of life and death is the Old Man. In truth, the Old Man is an ambiguous character whose function is cause for many scholarly debates. He appears as a keeper of wisdom from a well-known story frame found in Italian literary works from the thirteenth century, and even from the Roman poet Maximian's version from the sixth century, advising the three younger men in their endeavors (Richardson 324). The Old Man has been identified over time with diverse roles and representations varying from the Wandering Jew and Judas Iscariot, and due to his longevity, compared to Noah and Odin (Beidler 250; Braswell 305; Bushnell 450; Hatcher 246). He has also been identified as 'Fals Semblant' in *Roman de la Rose*, as the personification of old age, the 'Harbinger of Death', and even the Devil himself (Hamilton 571; Olsen 67; Pearsall 360).

There are lots of conflicting ways to interpret the Old Man because metaphors have several meanings. However, for the point of my argument that the Pardoner represents a spiritually infertile Church, the Old Man is a symbol for the Pardoner's "unredeemable" soul, in the sense that he believes he cannot be spiritually redeemed. Working with the little information Chaucer gives his readers, the Old Man states: 'And on the ground, which is my moodres gate, / I knobbe with my staf, bothe erly and late, / And seye 'Leeve mooder, leet me in!'' (VI: l. 729-31). The 'Mother Earth' figure, mentioned in this passage, that the Old Man wishes to return to, may stem from an Anglo-Saxon belief of "eorthan moder" and Roman belief of Ceres, protectress of agricultural production and human fertility (Richardson 325).

Gudrun Richardson suggests that Chaucer chose the 'Mother Earth' figure due to her liminal status between life and death. It distances the Old Man from God and the Virgin Mary (who is connected to fertility and life, but not death) based on the Church's association of death as a punishment, where the spiritual punishment people might face carries connotations to sin (327). Nature goddesses instead typify the link between life and death, removing the notion of punishment and sin. The 'Mother Earth' figure can therefore reinforce the commonly held belief in pre-Christian societies, that one comes from the earth, and one shall return to the earth without there being any notion of sin connected to it, which can be seen when the Old Man is knocking on 'Mother Nature's' door and seeks to return to her womb (VI: l. 729).

The connection to nature makes death more positive because it is a natural part of the circle of life. Chaucer may have done this as a criticism of the Church and Christianity's central message of redemption: live a virtuous life, devoting it to God, rather than a life full of sin. The effects of living a morally good life were the eventual ascension to Heaven after one's death. This ascension was only achieved when the soul was cleansed, hence the notion of Purgatory burning sins away. Living a life without God, however, or living willfully in sin,

would condemn one's soul to Hell. Since sin and death in the Middle Ages were closely connected, and death was not very much desired, it could be seen by people as a punishment for them, but it was also undesirable because of the graphic imagery of ugliness and decrepitude (Richardson 329).

However, Chaucer shows that death is a necessary part of life because not having death would be unnatural and impractical. In the relationship between the Old Man and his creator, the Pardoner, the Old Man may be vocalizing the Pardoner's despair and desire for death. For the Pardoner, in his spiritual disconnectedness, it does not matter how many sins he commits because he believes he can no longer be redeemed (Richardson 331). In this state, the Pardoner rejects God and distances himself from the Virgin Mary, where instead, Mother Earth might serve as a positive pagan force that extends beyond Christianity (Richardson 331). Richardson also argues that if the Pardoner had no emotional involvement with the issue of redemption, his sermons would not be so extreme and vicious (331). The contempt the Pardoner shows for believers in his prologue and tale may also be an outlet for his frustration over his spiritual sterility where he mocks the ones who can gain grace while he cannot (Richardson 331).

From this notion, Richardson argues that the Old Man represents the soul of the Pardoner, where the Pardoner no longer believes in the possibility of grace, and thus separating himself from God (Richardson 333). The Old Man, representing the soul, has not left the Pardoner's body. Like the Pardoner's inability to have faith, and of being redeemed, the Old Man appeals to the 'Mother Earth' figure, rather than Virgin Mary with the result of 'Mother Earth' refusing the Old Man to leave the body of the Pardoner, which leaves the Old Man's desires of death inaccessible (Richardson 333). The image of the Old Man and the Pardoner as a tightly knit soul and body, unable to die and find grace, may be a representation of the corrupted part of the Church, which is then satirized by Chaucer. The Pardoner feels

disconnected from God, and so he continues his voracious behavior filling his spiritual void with earthly goods. His behavior is shown through the extreme actions he takes toward the people he tries to scam, and how he detests the people he associates with because he believes he is unable to achieve atonement, while they can. The corrupted part of the Church can be perceived the same way; the Church has lost its morally good and divine path and replaced it with a stronger focus than before on material wealth and power, rather than spiritual wealth. This focus is satirized by Chaucer by ridiculing the idea of selling indulgences and relics, while at the same time warns his readers to not fall in the traps of corrupt clerics. The symbol of the Old Man is not only the lost soul of the Pardoner, but also the corrupted parts of the Church that have disconnected its link with the divine, unable to or unwilling to return to God's grace.

This disconnect may pertain to the Pardoner's spiritual sterility, and then by extension to the Church as well. If the suggestion of the Pardoner being a 'geldying' (I: l. 691), implies that he is physically sterile because of his physical appearance, then as I have argued, he is spiritually sterile because of his own belief that he cannot achieve grace and his life in continuous sin. Then the Church which has abused its power has also lost its divine connection, making their malpractice materially fruitful, but spiritually infertile. As mentioned, if the preacher's sins are known when he delivers his sermons, the knowledge would take the attention away from the content of what is preached, which results in the sermons being useless. By pointing out the misconduct of the Church and revealing its nature, Chaucer's illumination of these abuses results in the Church losing credibility, becoming unable to reach out to people due to spiritual sterility. Chaucer's criticism of the Church serves to benefit his audience by portraying the Pardoner as a corrupt image of the Church.

The extremeness of the Church's malpractices can therefore be reflected in the extreme behavior of the Pardoner. Chaucer used this behavior to make a point, and through

ironic praise, raises awareness of these malpractices. Chaucer may try to invoke these decisions in his audience and not merely by emotions, which is the purpose of tragedies and comedies, but by his satiric works. However, Chaucer's critique is not only of the Church, but it is also, as mentioned above, a critique the people who are letting themselves be exploited. In an era where the Church was a powerful transnational institution, and where Christendom was a natural part of everyday lives, people bought into these practices of relic worship and sale of indulgences because the Church was the only key to heaven. The option of not participating, to their knowledge, was to burn in hell. The Church's capitalization of the divine led people to be voluntarily subjugated, bullied and be taken advantage of. The Church did this by claiming monopoly of grace, in a system that could easily be abused. This abuse is evident when Chaucer parodies the Pardoner when he would falsely 'assoille' (VI: l. 387), absolve, the people who buy his fake relics by 'the auctoritee' (VI: l. 387), the authority, that is granted to him by his fake 'bulle' (VI: l. 388).

By identifying this abuse, to which the common people and the Church probably already were aware of, Chaucer urges his readers to not fall victims to it, and he uses satire's emotionally unresolving features, mentioned in the introduction, to drive the point home. For those who became victims of such abuse, this raises the issue of the validity of the absolution granted by Church officials versus corrupted Church officials who abused the system, including those who impersonated clergymen. Even though the absolution was granted on false premises, it might be valid for an individual who was convinced he was doing the right, Christian thing. The absolution might then become invalid if the abuse is revealed, but at the financial and spiritual cost of that individual who initially fell for the scam.

To say that everyone would fall for the Pardoner's scams would be misleading, because there is no evidence for anyone buying into them except by the word of the Pardoner. The only other character to speak up against him is the Host, Harry Bailly. He almost

becomes a victim of the clerical abuse, and serves as an exemplar for the readers, to not become victims of the Church's malpractice. The people's attitude towards pardoners, were not great, as is established in the introduction because of a greedy reputation, and the fact that some of them were not even hired by an institution within the Church or a parish to collect money, making them fake pardoners. Harry Bailly counteracts the Pardoner's insistence of him unbuckling, his 'purs' immediately (VI: l. 945). With a violent and vulgar comeback, already mentioned above, that involves kissing soiled breeches and cutting off the Pardoners testicles so that they can be put in a reliquary on a pile of feces (VI: l. 946-55).

The aggression may stem from a modern notion of satire where the literary text does not redeem unsettling feelings, but rather incite the readers' decisions. Medieval satire usually has a didactic or moral function for corrupt clergymen, while modern satire often evokes decisions and actions in the readers. Chaucer might use the Pardoner as an example for other clerics of how not to live, and incite unresolvable feelings with his readers to urge them to distance themselves from the corrupted parts of the Church. By displaying the Pardoner as spiritually sterile, representing an institution who is no longer "virile" in the sense not being able to care for the spiritual lives of themselves or other, Chaucer critiques not only the Church's malpractice severely, but he also critiques the people who fall for the scams of the corrupt Church. The critique also extends to the Friar and the Summoner, where the Friar manipulates the wealthy for money but does not pray for them in return, and the Summoner who accepts bribes and blackmails people, however to a lesser degree than the criticism of the Pardoner.

Chaucer based his Pardoner on contemporary attitudes towards this clerical institution, and the clear malpractice concerning relics and indulgences. He shows the Pardoner uses words to obscure them to make them seem more divine, which are tools to show the audience clearly through satire, that they are fools for believing him. In this chapter, I have tried to

prove that Chaucer has portrayed the Pardoner to be the most criticized pilgrim of them all, with the Friar and Summoner right behind him. Based on the high stakes posed by the Pardoner's spiritual disconnect poses, and his inability to redeem himself in the eyes of God, he jeopardizes the fate of his own and everyone else's souls on the account of the Pardoner representing the Church. This, I argue, is suggested through his perverted physical appearance which can signify sterility, through the image of the Old Man as the Pardoner's unredeemed soul, and the viciousness he possesses and contempt he has for other people. While the Pardoner's incredulous description seems to superficially trigger laughter or a wry smile, the issues concerning this pilgrim are highly serious as they point to social issues Chaucer wants to educate or instruct his readers about.

Conclusion

My goal with this thesis was to explore and address how Chaucer used satire in the descriptions of the Friar, the Summoner and the Pardoner in the *Canterbury Tales* to highlight clerical abuse. I analyzed the pilgrims' descriptions through medieval and modern understandings of satire. By examining the pilgrims individually, collectively, and as representations of different parts of the Church, I use satire theory to illuminate the degree of satirical criticism which have been applied to each of the characters. As I stated in the introduction, the degree of criticism, as I have found in this analysis, ranges from the least criticized Friar, to the most criticized Pardoner, with the Summoner somewhere in between, although they are all heavily criticized. In this concluding part of the thesis I will review my findings of the pilgrims and their tales, and address how one might understand satire in relation to these pilgrims and what they represent.

The Friar is described as being pleasant-looking but is in truth corrupt, because of his willful neglect to provide spiritual guidance and care for the poor and sick. Instead he surrounds himself with members of a high social class because they are more profitable than the ones who are in dire need for spiritual care. Chaucer employs typical features of anti-mendicant satire, such as a persuasive tongue and a skilled mind, to depict how corrupt the Friar is through ironic praise. The stakes connected to the Friar are evident in his fictional double, Friar John from the Summoner's Tale, where Friar John only loses his dignity while his soul's salvation is not explicitly at risk. The light-hearted satire attached to the Friar in the *General Prologue* and in the *Summoner's Tale* is a practical joke. The satirical pay-off comes delivered in the form of the fart, where it emphasizes the sermons to have the same value as broken wind. Where the two other pilgrims' physical appearances are described as sick or abnormal, the Friar's pleasant appearance does not indicate inner moral corruption, which may signify that at this point, even though the Church's spiritual health is declining, it is not

yet completely obvious. As there is not any evidence for the Friar literally stealing, blackmailing or hurting people other than avoiding praying for them, even though they give him money and gifts, the Friar is the least corrupt and least criticized character of the three.

The satirical critique intensifies in the description of the Summoner, where his sickly physical appearance is reflected in his immoral actions, and his fictional double 'the summoner' in the *Friar's Tale* emphasizes this corruption. Chaucer's knowledge of the quarrel between secular and regular clergy, and friars, enabled him to criticize both friars and summoners by having his pilgrims engage in a conflict, where the Summoner tries to portray the Friar in the most corrupt way possible, while the Friar only engages in witty banter as to not appear obscene, maintaining his seemingly pious exterior and "lesser" corruption (Ridely 165). Contrary to the Friar, whose brilliant choice of words could be used to lure women to bed and to trick wealthy people into giving him money, Chaucer plays on the fact that summoners could be lay people, without any particular schooling. Chaucer does this by characterizing the Summoner as less intelligent than what can be understood of both the Friar and the Pardoner. Chaucer mocks the Summoner's inability to debate by portraying him as a bird who can only repeat what he has heard. Chaucer also reflects on this matter in the *Friar's Tale*, where the summoner character is depicted as unable to match the fiend's level of cleverness, although they are depicted as similar. The stakes the Summoner faces, are more than a loss of dignity. Due to his diseased appearance, which reflects his inner immorality, the Summoner risks his own well-being on earth. By continuing to eat foods that aggravate his physical symptoms, the Summoner also risks lifelong pain. By representing the Church, the Summoner's disease in relation to this representation will continue to fester, and in the end will come to a point where it cannot be saved unless the Church changes its ways. The Summoner's visible sickness and inner corruption signify a further decline in the spiritual health of the Church. Due to the Summoner's vile actions of blackmailing, possible sexual

exploits and general abuse of his office, he is more heavily criticized than the Friar, but has less at stake than the Pardoner.

The last pilgrim, the Pardoner, seems unable to change his way due to his inability to distinguish between the material and immaterial, because the suggested physical eunuchry instead represents a spiritual disconnect that leaves him unable to receive God's grace. Based on a material approach to his existence, with high stakes such as the loss of his own soul and by extension, everyone's souls, the Pardoner is the most heavily critiqued pilgrim. This criticism is foreshadowed by both the Friar and Summoner, where the Friar's love of singing ballads distracts him from God, and in his *Tale* where the summoner character can only understand the literalness and materialistic explanations of the fiend. The Summoner's inability to debate outside of his learned Latin phrases is a part of the foreshadowing, where his excessive gluttonous behavior emphasizes the distraction from God, that it may cause. The spiritual disconnectedness becomes wholly apparent in the *Pardoner's Tale* where the physical quest to kill Death serves as an example of the Pardoner's inability to distinguish between the literal and figurative and serves thus as a strong critique which addresses the way the Church has changed its focus to a materialistic one from a spiritual one. As the strongest criticized pilgrim, the Pardoner's perverted appearance and inner corruption signifies an even more drastic decline of spiritual health within the Church as a result of a change of focus, evident in the decline shown through the depictions of both the Friar and the Summoner.

Although Chaucer's topic of anti-clerical satire was not radical or revolutionary, his way of portraying the pilgrims through satirical criticism, exposes corruption and educates people. By letting his readers identify with the would-be victims of clerical abuse, Chaucer uses the lay people as models so that the readers can think critically about the functions of these pilgrims, so that they themselves do not become victim of clerical malpractice. In the *Summoner's Tale*, we meet old Thomas who refuses to budge for the friar's incessant

financial queries, and the Lord of the manor who lets his squire provide a solution for Friar John. In the *Friar's Tale* we meet the old woman who rejects the summoner's demands for her belongings, which result in him getting dragged to Hell. Finally, in the end of the *Pardoner's Tale*, the Host speaks up when the Pardoner tries to sell him fake relics. These three lay people serve in their own ways as examples for Chaucer's readers to understand that they should not be tricked by corrupt clerics. Although the pilgrims are the best in being the most morally despicable representatives for their offices, as I have tried to argue in this thesis, each of the pilgrims reflects contemporary attitudes towards these particular offices. Chaucer has portrayed them through ironic praise to emphasize their venality in order to both educate his audience and to be didactic for other clergymen.

The main purpose of medieval literature, which may be both abstract and allegorical, is, through addressing an audience whose behavior is being criticized, to correct vices (Kendrick 53). A didactic purpose might however have been more directed to the clergy had the text been written in Latin, as it was considered a charitable action, rather than intention to hurt anyone (Kendrick 54). By using medieval satire theory and estates satire to analyze these characters, I am addressing how they fail in performing their professional duties in light of a social ideal. Chaucer's way of manipulating estates satire makes his characters seem like realistic individuals, instead of representing an institution. The multifaceted aspects surrounding each pilgrim, which makes them seem more realistic, can have a deeper impact on the readers in terms of identifying with the victimized lay people in the *Canterbury Tales*, than if a typical pattern of estates satire was followed. By letting the characters seem more realistic, and less like stick figures, the issues they represent resonate stronger with the audience, making the stories more appealing. While I have found medieval satire theory insufficient in explaining what Chaucer does, modern satire theory can elaborate on how satire in this part of the *Canterbury Tales* operates.

Highet's notion of the satirist speaking behind a mask could be applied to Chaucer who criticizes the Church by speaking through a narrator and other pilgrims. The different masks Chaucer uses to express dissent allow him to bend the limitations of satire, where he can address sensitive topics by the power of his words. While satire tends to be an exaggeration presented in a fictional world that represents issues in the real world, I am using Quintero's quote to explain that Chaucer's realistic portrayal shakes "us from our complacency and indifference" to realize its ridiculousness (Quintero 4). Modern satire highlights the connection between the potential victims reading the *Canterbury Tales*, and the lay people in the *Tales* who are potential victims of the pilgrims' scams. Chaucer exposes clerical malpractice, and through a modern understanding of satire, it reflects the contemporary readers themselves, as they could potential victims for clerical abuse. The portrayal comes with a clear moral standard where Chaucer does not punish his malefactors, like in typical medieval satire, but instead exposes abuse through a public function in hope that it can change the world.

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