

The Medieval Period, Day Thirteen



“Killing Death”

What happens in the Pardoner's Tale?

- 463-482 On the foolish young people of Flanders
- 483-578 On the evils of gluttony/drunkenness
- 579-628 On the evils of gambling
- 629-659 On the evils of cursing
- 660-894 On...with the tale. The characters are three riotous men, a corpse, a servant boy, a tavern keeper, an old man, a pharmacist... and Death?
- 895-903 On the evils of all the sins
- 905-945 The Pardoner's sales pitch
- 946-959 The Host responds
- 960-968 The Knight makes peace

“Tavern Sins”

- False oaths
 - Gambling
 - Gluttony/Drunkenness
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- How does this tale refer back to the *General Prologue* and affect the way you understand the tale?



The Pardoner's Tale

- Is the tale a 'moral' tale? Does the Pardoner's preceding self-presentation enter into the tale at all?
- Look at the rhetorical style of the preaching:
 - Biblical and Historical citations
 - Apostrophe
 - Onomatopoeia
 - Metaphor, simile
 - Direct audience address
 - Markers of progress through speech

What is Death?

- Look closely at lines 692-738 and compare the different attitudes towards death exhibited by the rioters and the old man.
- How does the style of this tale compare with the style of the prologues to the tales? What creates a 'realistic' feel? What makes a story seem 'symbolic'?

Who is the Old Man?

- A realistic individualized character, reflecting contemporary plague situations?
- A reflection of God's mercy and justice?
- A representation of fallen mankind?
- The devil?
- A personification of old age? Of death?

Why does the Pardoner attempt to sell relics at the end of his tale?

- An insult to the pilgrims, attempting to reduce the pilgrimage to nonsense?
- An elaborate joke?
- Mere forgetfulness?
- A ‘paroxysm of agonized sincerity’ (Kittredge)?

How does the conclusion of the tale and pilgrims’ response affect your reading of the tale itself?

Next Class: Chaucer on Chaucer!

- Read the two tales (and relevant prologues) attributed to the narrating character named Chaucer within the *Canterbury Tales*—the incomplete *Tale of Sir Topas* and the extract from the *Tale of Melibee*. Think about how the narrating character Chaucer compares to the Pardoner in his style of story-telling and his reception by his fellow pilgrims.
- Read the short extract by the modern theorist Barthes on the nature of text/author relation—posted on our course website's **Resources** page.
- Think about how the depiction of the relationship between authors and texts and audiences within the *Canterbury Tales* relates to Barthes's argument that texts should not be analyzed in terms of authors.