THE PARDONER'S CONSOLATION: READING THE PARDONER'S FATE THROUGH CHAUCER'S BOETHIAN SOURCE

By

Tracy Bauer

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Tracy Bauer

Thesis Approved:

M Brick — 4.23.2021

Dr. Martin Brick
Associate Professor of English
Director, Master of Arts in English

Date

4/21/2021

Professor Jeremy Glazier
Associate Professor of English
Thesis Advisor

Date

M Brick — 4.23.2021

Dr. Martin Brick
Associate Professor of English
Reader

Date

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Introduction

Today, Geoffrey Chaucer is best known for *The Canterbury Tales* and its importance in establishing English as a prominent language. Even though the *Tales* circulated in the late 1300s, there is a vast body of modern effervescent scholarly commentary that continues to ebb and flow, transcending time and space. Much like the *Tales*, certain scholarly contributions have left grander waves than others, propelling continued conversation of a tale from long ago which remains universally relevant.

G. L. Kittredge created one of the biggest waves in Chaucer scholarship. He published numerous articles and essays, coining terms like "roadside drama" and "the Marriage Group." He also published *Chaucer and His Poetry* in 1915, which included six lectures previously delivered at Johns Hopkins University in 1914. His lecture topics include *The Man and His Times*, *The Book of the Duchess*, *The House of Fame*, and two lectures on the *Tales.* This was a vital contribution to Chaucer scholarship and was noted, shortly after its publication, as "a literary art almost unsurpassed…a series of highly original contributions" (Knott 61). Kittredge has been referred to by many as a father of recent Chaucer studies; notable scholars following Kittredge have learned a great deal from his insights. Kittredge's scholarship has propelled conversations—some have poked holes in his theories while others have tried to fill in gaps. One influential contribution was his development of Dramatic Theory. While it is evident, genre-wise, *The Canterbury Tales* is not a literary drama, it is certainly dramatic characteristically speaking. Kittredge's Dramatic Theory also proclaimed the tales reflected the tellers and vice versa and suggested readers avoid isolating the tales, but rather, view them as a whole like one would do for scenes in a drama. It is clear Kittredge left a significant and admirable mark on Chaucer studies in the early 20th century.

Furthermore, G. L. Kittredge's insights have propelled additional conversations about marriage, feminism, and gender. Walter Clyde Curry cites *Chaucer and His Poetry* in *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences* and in his well-known article "The Secret of Chaucer's Pardoner," Kittredge appears in Jill Mann's *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* more than a dozen times, and Elaine Tuttle Hansen cites Kittredge's views concerning The Wife of Bath in *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender.* His grand wave of insight caused quite the ripple effect, and yet there is still more to discuss, not only about Chaucer's *Tales*, but also about Kittredge's assertions.

Thomas A. Knott's review of *Chaucer and His Poetry* notes Kittredge's special "attention to striking themes" in the *Tales* and suggests Kittredge's "comprehension of medieval thought…[has] given us a model for the treatment of similar problems" in medieval poetry (Knott 63). Knott asserts one of the most admirable traits of Kittredge's book is his thorough consideration of source material and the following pertinent guiding questions:

> How did he modify the structure of the material which he borrowed? How did these affect his art? How thoroughly has he assimilated and mastered his borrowings? How intensely has he visualized and vitalized them in his own treatment? How do the differences between source and writer exhibit the power of the latter? (Knott 62)

It is with consideration to these guiding questions that one might further investigate an assumption from Kittredge's essay "Chaucer's Pardoner," published in *The Atlantic Monthly* where he writes, "There is no question of repentance or reformation, for the Pardoner is a lost soul" (832). Amid all of his insightful Chaucer scholarship, he has also left a fetid assumption about the Pardoner that fails to consider the very guiding principles for which Thomas A. Knott gives praise. As a result, his assumption inadvertently created two distinct views of the Pardoner:

one of the Pardoner as a villain capable of inspiring Shakespeare's most notorious characters and the other, which includes more sympathy and hope. Therefore, G. L. Kittredge's assumption of the Pardoner deserves further investigation. However, unlike an exegetical lens (like that used by D. W. Robertson) and unlike an allegorical lens[1], this paper uses a medieval philosophical lens—the same medieval philosophy Chaucer translated and was inspired by. By making an assumption about the Pardoner, Kittredge is devaluing Chaucer's contribution to literary medieval philosophy, and by working through the same questions Kittredge applied, this thesis will ascertain a more comprehensive view of the Pardoner as well as Chaucer's *Tales* as a whole. In order to reach an alternate view of the Pardoner, I argue in this paper that one must begin with the long-standing debate of reason and faith, then move more specifically to Boethius' *Consolation* before turning to additional Pardoner scholarship, leading to a more plausible consideration of the Pardoner's character.

[1] See for example: Roberston, D. W. Jr. *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives*. Princeton, Princeton UP, 1962.

Chapter 1: Boethius' *Consolation* and its Impact on Chaucer

Harold Bloom notes that Chaucer was inspired by Dante, but unlike Dante and Augustine, who Bloom writes, "knew the truth," and unlike Vergil and Lucretius who wrote with Epicurean ideals, Chaucer "does not trust absolutes" regarding moral judgements, and likely used moral judgements to provoke Boccaccio inspired irony (*Genius* 104, 109, 104). This irony, however, does not remove Chaucer's *Tales* from being a valuable medieval philosophical text. In fact, if anything, it functions as an additional medieval philosophical comment. Often, discussions of source material center on more apparent, and valuable, structural elements. For example, Chaucer the poet creates a character called Chaucer the pilgrim similar to the way Dante the poet created Dante the pilgrim. In both cases, the poet and the pilgrim embody separate characterizations. Other, common structural comments focus on The Pardoner's Tale frame structure and open admission of hypocrisy from False Seeming's Speech in Jean de Meun's *The Romance of the Rose,* or the tale itself from *The Hermit, Death, and the Robbers.* And while such conversations add enriching layers to one's comprehension, one larger overarching enduring understanding has been underemphasized or entirely removed from the conversation: Chaucer's philosophical source material.

Chaucer's most profound philosophical source material for The Pardoner's Tale was Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy.* Donald Howard affirms, "Chaucer always names Plato with respect, mentions platonistic Alain de Lille with reverence, [and] is forever mindful of platonistic Boethius" (*His Life* 33). Medieval education was saturated with Boethius' ideas and writing. From the quadrivium which inspired the trivium to *De institiutione musica* and *De arithmetica* which "were considered indispensable textbooks for many centuries" (Goins and Wyman xii), Boethius' translations and commentaries on Plato and Aristotle as well as *De*

differentiis topicis, *Opuscula sacra*, *De fide catholica* and *De disciplina scholarium* prior to the *Consolation* speak to his authority and influence. Still, it is widely accepted the *Consolation* was his "most influential work" and "Lorenzo Valla was truly right to call Boethius the '[l]ast of the Romans, first of the scholastics'" (Goins and Wyman xii-xiii). Based on his contributions to education, his impact on Dante, Jean de Meun and Boccacio, and Chaucer's translation *Boece*, Boethius "is widely recognized as a major influence on Chaucer" (Goins and Wyman xiii).

In order to understand how Chaucer used the *Consolation* as a philosophical source, one must examine Boethius' text. One particularly intriguing element of the *Consolation* is genre. Boethius' *Consolation* deviates from a *consolatio*, but instead of comforting the bereaved, the victim receives comfort. Book I of the *Consolation* introduces the problem, where Boethius, a prisoner awaiting execution, laments unfairness when "Death passes by the wretched" (I.i). He notes a "Cruel Life" and "inconstant Fortune" (I.i) which appear to prevent happiness. Lady Philosophy arrives to outline and offer a cure, to "wipe his eyes that are clouded with a mist of mortal things" (I.ii), so that he might remember himself again and where he came from in order to alter his perception and set his mind and soul free.

Book II warns against desiring Fortune's gifts and explains the wheel of Fortune. Lady Philosophy begins to impart her wisdom to lift the veil that has blinded Boethius from himself and from true happiness. She explains that knowing Fortune's instability brings enlightenment and notes Fortune's earthly blessings are fleeting "and can give no perfect satisfaction" (II.iv). Satisfaction and healing the mind from misery occurs when one can see Fortune for what it is instead of being lured "far from the true good" (II.viii), for a person who loses "self-knowledge" from chasing earthly possessions "is brought lower than the beasts" (II.v). Lady Philosophy exclaims, "riches have often hurt those that possessed them, since the worst of men, who are all

the more covetous by reason of their wickedness, think none but themselves worthy to possess all the gold and gems the world contains" (II.v). Yet, Book II notes that wicked men are too often rewarded with earthly gifts like wealth, rank, and power. Lady Philosophy reminds Boethius, "honour cometh not to virtue from rank," and "wealth cannot extinguish insatiable greed" (II.vi). Therefore, in order to achieve happiness, Lady Philosophy tells Boethius to forget wickedness, "seek heaven" and release "earthly bonds" which include Fortune's gifts (II.iv). After all, "the souls of men certainly die not with them" (II.iv).

Philosophy's cures continue in Book III where she focuses on the difference between true and false happiness. She explains that all humans seek true happiness but "error leads [many]…aside out of the way in pursuit of the false" (III.i). Often those who seek out and find riches, power, and fame are corrupted by the very things they've obtained. Lady Philosophy also notes, "All the world in ordered ways" (III.ii)—the "true end of happiness," that "true good" which all mankind seeks, is not found on earth but higher in the Chain of Being, with God (III.iii).

Book IV questions the existence of evil in a world where God exists. Lady Philosophy explains that although it appears the wicked have found favor on earth, they are ultimately powerless and unhappy even with their earthly blessings. She emphasizes that virtue is more powerful than wickedness, and those who are wicked "are happier in undergoing punishment than if no penalty of justice chasten them…the wicked are more unfortunate when they go unpunished" (IV.iv). By avoiding punishment in the short-term, they are actually driven further into wickedness. This is reminiscent of Gorgias who specifically address the same Boethian paradoxes relatable to all humankind in literary form. First that "the wicked are unhappier in attaining their ends than in failing them"; second, "that the wicked are less unhappy when

punished than when not"; and third, "that those who do wrong are unhappier than those who suffer it" (Magee 198). Lady Philosophy also notes God says no wickedness will go unpunished and addresses Providence, which ultimately demonstrates any Fortune, "welcome or unwelcome," may be viewed as good because unwelcome Fortune is an opportunity to move closer to virtue and true happiness and welcomed Fortune leads people further from virtue (IV.vi).

Book V address free will and the contradiction between an individual's free will and Divine Providence. Philosophy notes that a person's limited human knowledge (i.e., the inability to understand the way God knows time: past, present, and future all at once) might make things appear to be happening at random, but Providence is at work. She concludes, noting these truths can be driving forces of awareness and change: "the freedom of man's will remains unshaken," but they have to know it and exert free will to act more virtuously, or they will not find true happiness after death (V.vi). Ultimately, this text exudes hope for all humankind, despite individual circumstances, with comfort in the Chain of Being and the man's free will—"Our hopes and prayers…are not fixed on God in vain, and when they are rightly directed cannot fail" (V.vi).

The Consolation of Philosophy was a quintessential scholarly text of the Middle Ages and its influence continued for centuries as shown through the number of translations, references, and evidence of source material for literary artists. Although it was written in the early sixth century, it clearly still resonated with Chaucer 800 years later (and continues to find modern readers) due to the fundamental quandaries that continue to plague humanity, such as blindness and an emphasis on earthly possessions. It also closely aligns with Christian doctrine, but there is some contemporary debate about whether or not it is a Christian work. Even so, many who read

the *Consolation* have developed strong assertions about its place in Christianity based on its topics and knowledge of Boethius' life and the circumstances of his execution.

Boethius' execution, as John M. Riddle indicates, was fueled by both religious and political tensions that were often one in the same. Henry Chadwick affirms this outcome was not unusual, as "Politics and religion were not such separate entities in the sixth century, either for Justinian or for Theodoric" and "everything in his [Boethius'] senatorial background made him sympathetic to the political link with the East Roman empire" (Chadwick 68). To summarize, "Byzantine emperor, Justin I (r. 518-527)…encouraged intrigue against Theodoric by getting several Roman senators to conspire with him to remove the king and reestablish Byzantine Roman rule in Italy" (Riddle 77). This quarrel was both politically and religiously motivated. Many believe that Boethius was an Orthodox Christian, like Justin I, and Theodoric an Arian. One of the most notable disagreements between the Orthodox and Arian beliefs centered on Jesus' divinity—a conflict that was cycling for years and one reason for the Nicene Creed. Romanus Cessario cites Boethius' "active role in promoting the Nicene faith and its creed against the encroachments of heterodox Arianism," as well as his impatience with unclear "doctrinal matters" in *De daubus naturis contra Eutychen et Nestorivm* (55, 58). Therefore, when Orthodox Justin I threatened to take over Theodoric's rule, Boethius was likely in favor of Justin I's Orthodox rule, and "When Theodoric accused Albinus, a senator, of treason [that is, in favor of Theodoric being overthrown by Justin I], Boethius…said that if Albinus was guilty, all Roman senators were equally guilty. Theodoric took his word for it" (Riddle 77). Ultimately, Boethius sought "to shape a common understanding of several issues of vital importance in the development of Western Civilization" (Cessario 54), and many believe he sought to unify rather than to divide, but his views were not politically advantageous at the time. As a result, "…his

death was seen by his contemporaries as a crucial incident in a conflict between Gothic Italy and the East Roman precipitated by a religious disagreement" (Chadwick 68).

Though his end was not ideal, Boethius used his condition to leave a valuable philosophical and influential religious text for his contemporaries. Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus, one of Boethius' contemporaries, who wrote biographical information about Boethius, explains there is a "religious atmosphere of the 'Consolation of Philosophy'" even though "the name of Christ is never once mentioned" (Cassiodorus). Then, why did Boethius leave the word Christ out of the *Consolation*? Simply put, it is not a purely theological work; it is a philosophical work. In "Literary Design in the *De Consolatione Philosophiae.*" Anna Crabbe asserts the impetus of the *Consolation* is to "learn indifference in order to return to his former philosophical state," which is also spiritually and religiously advantageous (242). Boethius creates an "identical nature of his physical and spiritual situation and the long struggle to establish the unreality of the physical prison and escape the reality of the mental chains" (Crabbe 242). Boethius combines various branches of philosophy (i.e., ethics, metaphysics, and logic) along with a dash of theology by grounding the *Consolation* in the conviction that God exists. Louis Markos claims, "Boethius was not a pagan philosopher writing pagan philosophy but a Christian philosopher writing in pagan mode" (230). Including Christ or his mother Mary would alter the genre, and although the *Consolation* is profoundly religious and Christian in many ways, and Boethius is

> …undoubtedly professing himself a Christian, and about to die in full communion with the Catholic Church, [he] turned for comfort in his dungeon to the philosophical studies of his youth, especially to the ethical writings of Plato and Aristotle. (Cassiodorus)

Furthermore, because of this philosophical and religious overlap, "both Stoic philosophy and Neoplatonism were incorporated within Christian thinking" (Riddle 55), and it was a welcomed bridge across "a disordered Christian society" (Howard, *Idea* 115) of the time. Anna Crabbe suggests Boethius viewed Christianity and organized religion as an abstract challenge that remained "for the exercise of a powerful intellect" (Crabbe 262). She also claims Boethius' purpose for writing was to preserve and refine reason "whatever its sphere" (263). This was especially in the forefront during Chaucer's time. Romanus Cessario emphasizes Boethius' impact on Christian philosophy, which was at "its peak in the 12th century," with "his definition of person…[having] a special impact on the high scholasticism of the 13th century" (59). These ideas still played a vital role in Chaucer's 14th century education, and there were still plenty of unsolved abstract religious challenges to sort out. Chaucer was also familiar with literary interpretations of such philosophical, spiritual, and religious matters.

Similar questions about free will and one's outcome intrigued authors before Chaucer. As previously mentioned, Dante and Boccaccio also curated literary treatments of philosophical questions and the problems that arise with wicked choices in *The Divine Comedy* and *The Decameron*. Like Dante's *Comedy,* Boccaccio's *Decameron* also takes place in medias res but "without the urge to transcendence" (Rebhorn XV). Although Boccaccio takes a different approach than Dante in more ways than one, *The Decameron* still wrestles with fortune, free will, and one's outcome: it "could be pictured as a wheel—Fortune's wheel, the wheel of life—on which the *brigata* turns, coming back transformed to the point of departure" (Barolini 416). Over time, philosophical texts have provided monumental impact on literary work, and the literature provides a comment, an additional philosophical inquiry into the topics, which is appropriate considering literature is "an evolution of philosophy" (McInery 3).

Dante's opening line in the *Inferno* is "Midway through the journey of our life, / I found myself in a dark wood, / for I had strayed from the straight pathway to this tangled ground" (I,1-3). *The Divine Comedy* is a pilgrimage, traveling from hell through Purgatory to Paradise and to God. It demonstrates "a key moment when he finds himself in between his own sinful past and his redeemed future" (Rebhorn xv). Chaucer sets his pilgrimage in a more realistic time and place for his audience.

Dante and Chaucer utilized similar source material. Dante, however, applied it differently to literature than Chaucer. To understand how Dante and Chaucer might have arrived at different conclusions using similar philosophy, one might also consider Aquinas' view of truth, which was another influential philosophical force (for Dante more than Chaucer) and is a source that also branches off the *Consolation*—Aquinas also read and commented on two of Boethius' writings. Aquinas sought to connect faith and reason as the two paths to man's search for ultimate truth. He comments on Boethian ideas, using logic to arrive at his conclusions. Ralph McInery notes in "Jacques Maritain Center: St. Thomas Aquinas" that Boethius' themes of "the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom" received a "precise and clear treatment" in Aquinas' hands. Aquinas, who provided vital contributions to the Catholic Church, however different from Dante, confirmed their doctrine through his use of logic and also propelled further philosophical inquiry, encouraging others to seek truth. Like Boethius and Dante, Aquinas also focuses on the individual man, inquiring further about why man is what he is and about how his free will affects one's outcome. Dante was inspired by Aquinas, he looked to him (and Aristotle) for the answers to philosophical questions, and he believed that one's individual life impacts one's final outcome with or without Paradise—religion is the path to comfort and truth, and he demonstrates this in

theological, literary form grounded in philosophical questions. Chaucer looked to Boethius but kept Christianity and religion in the background.

However, no one, not even religious leaders, are exempt from a significant degree of separation from God in Dante's *Inferno* if they so choose distance by exercising free will and participating in wickedness. This is evident when Dante includes Pope Celestine V at the entrance of hell, demonstrating overt judgement of cowardice[2]: "I saw the shade of him whose cowardice made him make the great refusal" (III, 59-60). However, Pope Celestine V aside, Dante ultimately explains that without faith (in Christ) there is no purity from purgatory, which is why Virgil stays behind. When Dante enters Paradise, he sees Aquinas, Bernard, Jerome, Augustine, Saints, martyrs, and church fathers. He also learns about the cosmos structure, which reaffirms the Chain of Being. Achieving closeness to God, or the Prime Mover according to Aristotle, depends on one's individual human life. Aquinas agrees—he also views philosophical matters theologically. Both Dante and Aquinas took Boethius for a Christian whose philosophical work was primarily theological. Chaucer, on the other hand, uses this philosophical source material, carries over the theological convictions but gives Boethian themes philosophical treatment to arrive at a more accurate theological treatment, ironically with a Pardoner. There are two ways to God through this Christian lens: faith and reason. If Dante was a source for Chaucer (philosophical, theological or otherwise), Chaucer corrected Dante's example by leaving an unknown outcome and the pilgrimage unfinished. After all, who was Chaucer to judge?

[2] Dante places Pope Celestine V in hell because he resigned as Pope. Pope Celestine V feared he would not be able to adequately lead the church or adequately care for his soul. After resigning, Pope Celestine V attempted to escape back to the hermitage he enjoyed before being Pope but was captured, sent back to Bonafice, and imprisoned until his death.

Chaucer ultimately enters the conversation about free will and one's individual outcome in The Pardoner's Tale. His Pardoner lacks reason concerning ultimate truth and his faith is accessed internally, however briefly. Like Dante, Chaucer questions all individuals including those associated with religion, but unlike Dante and Kittredge, his purpose is not to damn and close the book, but to inspire a philosophical dialogue that promotes the questions instead of the answers. Harold Bloom would add, Chaucer moves away from absolutes to paint a clearer picture of reality and "to discredit those who are too gifted at damning others" (*Genius* 109). Furthermore, it is plausible to believe Chaucer had plenty of unanswered questions of his own which might have inspired the way he read Boethius. Donald Howard considers Chaucer's *Consolation* translation in light of the Black Death because it is "a work that seeks to show how one should bear misfortune in patience" (*His Life* 16). Witnessing misfortune was common in Chaucer's time. Paul Strohm illustrates a view of Aldgate which included "royal and religious processions, spectacles of public humiliation, expelled convicts and sanctuary seekers…all the rest of a busy city's shifting populace" (49). Through Chaucer's life, themes of Fortune, fate, providence, free will, and misfortune were extraordinarily relevant, and philosophical concepts were a notable guiding force. Chaucer also knew he was subject to Fortune's wheel. He too was "subject to the whims and schemes of powerful and headstrong men, a petitioner and recipient rather than an architect of favor" (Strohm 202). The topics and questions Chaucer presents in his *Tales,* even ironically, shine a light on individual human choice and the common questions Boethius the prisoner asks while awaiting execution.

Chaucer incorporates such challenges, also attempting to refine reason, using literary illustrations to prompt his audience into philosophical and religious inquiry. However, unlike Dante (and, later, Kittredge), Chaucer does not assume outcomes, but rather provides additional

questions. As Paul G. Ruggiers points out in *The Art of The Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer's *Tales* are not exempt from "exploring various states of spiritual experience"—a common topic amongst "Chaucer's agents" which he explains as Chaucer's "reaction to his time" (11). This reaction is a spiritual concern that weighs "God's goodness with the existence of evil…and the moral freedom of human beings" (Ruggiers 11). Such religious and spiritual concerns have not escaped Chaucer's "artistic process" (11), especially in The Pardoner's Tale, and he uses Boethian philosophy as his guide. Furthermore, Both Boethius and Chaucer act as faith-driven philosophers, grounded in theological convictions, in the *Consolation* and in The Pardoner's Tale. However, unlike a purely theological view, Boethius and Chaucer incorporate philosophy where one can find comfort in discomfort, as Boethius demonstrates. Chaucer also provides this idea in The Pardoner's Tale, and it is through this unknowing that readers can find hope on their journey. Hope for change, hope for a path to God, hope for an outcome other than damnation through philosophical questions.

Chapter 2: The Effects of Boethius' *Consolation* on The Pardoner's Tale

Geoffrey Chaucer translated Boethius' *Consolation* ca. 1380 before writing The Knight's Tale, *Troilus and Criseyde,* and the rest of *The Canterbury Tales.* Donald Howard notes in "The Worst of Times—the 1380s" from *His Life, His Works, His World,* "the *Consolation* was a solace [from hard times], reason enough for Chaucer's translation" (379). Solace from a chaotic world was a much needed respite given the Hundred Years War and recent Black Death during which Saint Augustine's popular words, "Nothing is more certain than death, nothing less so than the hour of its coming" were never more relevant[3] (qtd. in Brett and Campbell 174). Society reacted with *momento mori* and although images of death were present before Chaucer's time, their presence became satirical. Concurrently, treatises and other texts showing a disdainful worldview were popular. In addition to translating the *Consolation*, Chaucer translated *On the Misery of the Human Condition* by Pope Innocent III. While *On the Misery of the Human Condition* exudes a doom-eager tone, focusing on wretchedness, adversities and the damned, the *Consolation,* albeit written and set in a tragic moment, exudes hope by focusing on the internal parts of man and the possibility of positive ascent. The focus on an individual's free will also manifested with the Peasants' Revolt in 1381, which Chaucer witnessed. Ultimately, Chaucer's life experience affected not only his view of the *Consolation* as he translated it but also his Pardoner's Tale, which was written in the mid-1390s and viewed as a "floating" tale, encompassing the larger theme of *The Canterbury Tales.* Therefore, The Pardoner's Tale enables readers to feel a sense of completeness in an otherwise unfinished work.

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[3] See for example Augustine's quote in three texts between 1361 and 1365, which also include more about the philosophy of death: Vol. 1, Nos. 385, 659; Vol. 2, Nos. 1430, 1441; Vol. 1, No. 711 from *Les Statuts et privilèges des universités françaises depuis leur fondation jusqu'en 1789* by M. Fournier.

Although Chaucer's *Tales* were not finished, readers can still get a sense for a complete story when considering life as a pilgrimage. This philosophical implication permits readers to explore Chaucer's irony in a new way. Instead of the *Tales* focusing on an external pilgrimage, Chaucer leaves out historical and geographical details to display individual characters, not "horses or sights or places, but…the heart of the individual pilgrim," promoting the "exploration of people's inner worlds into a framework which is ultimately metaphoric and Christian" (Howard, *Idea* 162). The unfinished nature of *The Canterbury Tales* is not relevant to Chaucer's writing career, but instead it is, as Donald Howard suggests, "a feature of its form" (*Idea* 162).

Like the *Tales*, the pilgrims' inner realities remain unfinished as well, and by considering the *Consolation* as Chaucer's philosophical source material, one might consider how philosophical comforts and cures might leave room for favorable final judgement. For example, the medieval meditative ascent, noted by Robert McMahon, is present in Boethius' *Consolation*, structurally, as "a 'linear' progress that ascends 'circularly' back to our Origin" (264). This "literary and philosophical genre" helps guide readers to experience a greater philosophical experience, encouraging readers to consider the benefits of characters who "turn…inward with the mind" (McMahon 14, 10). By including Boethius' awakening in the *Consolation*, Boethius provides a potential cure not only for his predicament but for the wicked as well since all have the ability to exercise free will in an effort to move closer to God. After Boethius the prisoner receives philosophical cures, the following philosophical question remains: what are the potential outcomes of the wicked? Chaucer picks up his pen to write the answer in The Pardoner's Tale.

Chaucer's General Prologue provides a vivid description of the Pardoner. It is clear from the beginning that the Pardoner is wicked because he uses cunning language and false relics to

make “the peple his apes” (708). The Pardoner has fallen into avarice; he is an example of the type of wickedness described in the *Consolation*. See, for example, the following passage of Boethius’ *Consolation* translated by Chaucer:

> …And al be it so þat
> god receyueþ gladly her p*ra*yers *and* ȝeueþ hem as ful
> large muche golde *and* app*ar*aileþ coueytous folk wiþ
> noble or clere hono*ur*s. ȝit semeþ hem haue I-gete noþing.
> but alwey her cruel ravyne deuourynge al þat þei
> han geten shewiþ oþer gapinges. þat is to seye gapen
> *and* desiren ȝit after moo rycchesse[4] (905-911)

Like the wicked described here, the Pardoner still yearns for more earthly possessions regardless of what he has gained, and his behavior begs the question: “…What brideles myȝten wiþholde to any certeyne ende þe desordene coueitise of men”? (911-913). In other words, what can keep the wicked men like the Pardoner from behaving so avariciously? As Book I of the *Consolation* suggests, the Pardoner is blind to true happiness. As Chaucer translated, “what blisful fortune may þer be in þe / blyndenesse of ignorau*n*ce”? (1130-1131). Chaucer’s Pardoner is consumed with earthly blessings, and he, too, must remember himself again in order to alter his perception and set his mind and soul free from wickedness.

The Pardoner’s wickedness is more severe when he demonstrates he is aware of his sins and openly admits he uses knowledge of avarice, which fuels his own avarice:

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[4] H. R. James translates, “Nay, though God, all-bounteous, give / Gold at man's desire— / Honours, rank, and fame—content / Not a whit is nigher; / But an all-devouring greed / Yawns with ever-widening need” (II.ii). Richard Morris paraphrases, “Though Heaven may grant every desire, they will still cry for more.”

Of avarice and of swich cursednesse

Is al my prechyng, for to make hem free

To yeven hir pens' and namely, unto me!

For myn entente is nat but for to mynne,

And no thing for correccioun of synne (Prologue 114-118)

His open admission and catchphrase, *Radix malorum est Cupiditas*, is evidence that the Pardoner is on a path to self-destruction and is (to use a expression Chaucer himself translated from Boethius) "fer fro þe soþe of science" (4516-17), or true knowledge which leads to happiness. While the Pardoner, as Kittredge notes, likely began his occupation "with no bad aims" ("Chaucer's Pardoner" 833), it is clear the Pardoner has fallen into errors, which have lead him away from goodness. Chaucer translates, "But þe myswandryng erro*ur* mysleḍiþ hem in to fals[e] goodes" [5] (1768-69). When a person sinks below virtue, the *Consolation* notes, in Chaucer's translation, they are "brouȝt byneþen alle beestes" [6] (1295), and Chaucer accompanies this beastly behavior with physical descriptions of the Pardoner having "A vois…as smal as hath a goot" (688).

The irony of Chaucer's Pardoner is that, as the *Consolation* explains, happiness is achieved through "true good" (III.iii) which is not found in the Pardoner's riches but at the top of the Chain of Being with God. By making this character a Pardoner, Chaucer has put the answer to the question, what are the potential outcomes of the wicked, in plain sight. One's free will determines their ability to be far away or close to God and virtue—both are in reach. Yet, many readers, and many people, are fixated on vices. While it is true, pardoners were often suspect of

[5] Translated by H. R. James: "only error leads them aside out of the way in pursuit of the false."
[6] Translated by H.R. James: "brought lower than the beasts."

questionable moral principles, like the Pardoner, many knew the truth and made deliberate decisions about whether or not to act on truth or lies.

The tale the Pardoner tells is evidence that he is aware of truth. The Pardoner exclaims, "A moral tale yet I you telle kan" (Chaucer 460) and begins with an exemplum including three men who attempt to destroy death: "And we wol sleen this false traitour Deeth! / He shal be slain, he that so manye sleeth" (699-700). Their position mimics Boethius' feeling of injustice toward premature death at the beginning of the *Consolation*. The three men also question unjust death: "he hath slain this yer, / Henne over a mile, withinne a greet village / Bothe man and woman, child, and hine, and page" (686-688). The men do not enlist philosophy to come to terms with unfortunate death as Lady Philosophy suggests was advantageous for Socrates to gain "victorie of vnryȝtful deeþ" [7] (185). However, unlike Boethius who uses philosophy to cure blindness, the men continue on a path to destruction. Had the men applied philosophy, they might have been able to embrace and comprehend that ill fortune is the path to enlightenment and true joy. It is not the wicked who are free, but those who are not bound to earthly pleasures, including mortal life itself.

The men in the Pardoner's exemplum are attempting to control fate—attempting to elevate their station in the Chain of Being. However, they are unsuccessful, and through their selfish motives, there is only one possible outcome when considering the *Consolation*: punishment. For, as Chaucer translates, "In þis sheweþ it wel þat to good folk ne / lakkeþ neuer mo hir medes. ne shrewes ne lakken / neuer mo to*ur*mentis" [8] (3380-3382). Like the wicked man's fate in the *Consolation,* the rioters do not escape punishment and by sinking into avarice,

[7] Translated by Richard Morris: "Triumph over an unjust death."
[8] Translated by Richard Morris: "This is a proof that good folks do not go unrewarded, nor do the evil-doers escape punishment."

they are punished with death. Therefore, even through telling the tale for his own advantage, the Pardoner is aware that if he continues on a similar path, he will have a similar outcome. Their blasphemous attempt to play God and control Fortune leads them further from goodness and evil makes them weak and vulnerable to despair and a permanent place away from God's grace. Through this exemplum, the Pardoner demonstrates he knows the truth: sinful behavior leads to despair and punishment. He demonstrates his understanding of fortune leading to wickedness. And although some argue that the Pardoner is living death because he follows similar cause, unlike his tale, the Pardoner has not finished his pilgrimage in life, and will demonstrate a glimpse of potential change.

While he is aware of truth and there is still hope for the Pardoner's transfiguration, he struggles to break through his blindness, which is why he shows this as an exemplum in fictitious form, commenting on his "false japes" (Prologue 108). However, his story is not false. It represents the truth Boethius spoke about in the *Consolation,* which further exemplifies Chaucer's philosophical source material. Ultimately, knowing the truth, consciously accessing the truth, and acting on the truth require different levels of enlightenment. Like Boethius the prisoner, the Pardoner needs to use his knowledge of truth and act with free will to ascend to his origin in a positive way; thus, determining his fate.

As the Pardoner begins the tale about the rioters, he has a profound moment—a moment that contrasts from the Tales' previous simple poetic style, demonstrating more emotionally charged rhetoric. He exclaims:

> O glotonye, ful of cursednesse!
>
> O cause first of oure confusioun!
>
> O original of oure dampnacioun

Til Crist hadde boght us with his blood agayn!

Lo, how deere, shortly for to sayn,

Aboght was thilke cursed vileynye! (212-217)

Helen Cooper may argue that the Pardoner's style here "shamelessly calls attention to itself" (273), but Chaucer is calling attention to the Pardoner's truthful acknowledgment of mankind's evil origin, condemning it, while implicitly condemning himself, naming God's saving grace which gives hope at the end of one's meditative ascent. This is the Pardoner's second astonishing admission. First, he admits to his wickedness. Second, he shows he knows the truth. The *Consolation* maintains hope for those who can internally meditate to see. The style, if it is excessive, is only excessive because it is a profound moment for the Pardoner who is momentarily swept into a truth he knows but struggles to follow.

In this moment, he has subconsciously traveled internally through his tale and although this rhetoric does not conform to medieval strictures on preaching, it is an authentic, yet brief, awakening. The emotional rhetoric illustrates the Pardoner's fleeting meditation during which he mourns for his evil and longs for something more, but he must dwell internally, using philosophy, to regain himself. This pre-exemplum moment foreshadows the end of the exemplum where, the Pardoner behaves again in a way that shows his longing to "be whole" (Shoaf 152). Not only does he demonstrate another glimpse of goodness, but also longs to be "*their pardoner*" (Shoaf 165). The wealth he has acquired is not enough. As the *Consolation* states, those who are bound by earthly possessions are unhappy and unfulfilled prisoners:

O Comeþ alle to-gidre now ȝe þat ben ycauȝt *and*

ybounde wiþ wicked[e] cheines by þe deceiuable

delit of erþely þinges inhabytynge in ȝoure þouȝt[9] (2637-2639)

Another pitfall of wealth, which is also shown in The Pardoner's Tale, is the knowledge that "his riches go not with him. / When his eyes are closed in death" (Boethius III.iii). The Host's punishment at the end of the Tale is also represents the Boethius' point that the wicked "are happier in undergoing punishment than if no penalty of justice chasten them…the wicked are more unfortunate when they go unpunished" (IV.iv). This gives another glimmer of hope for the Pardoner because it might foreshadow his ascent toward goodness with time, through his journey that readers do not see at its end. Punishment helps redirect the wicked.

This is a glimpse into the middle of the Pardoner's journey, set in the middle of a pilgrimage. While it is true the Pardoner shifts between "truth and lies" (Shoaf 140), had he only displayed lies, one might ascertain with a small degree of confidence the Pardoner is merely a symbol of sin: living death. Instead, after the exemplum, he remarks,

And Jesu Crist, that is oure soules leche,
So graunte yow his pardoun to receive,
For that is best, I wol yow nat deceive. (916-918)

Because he goes between the two, there is hope he will one day use philosophy, truth, and free will to deliver himself from evil through God's grace, which has been with him on his ascent from the beginning. As Donald Howard notes, the heart of "Truth" is didactic: "don't be enslaved by the world [and its gifts of Fortune], but rely on God, and 'truth' will deliver you" (*His Life* 382). Reading The Pardoner's Tale with the *Consolation's* philosophical themes creates

[9] Translated by Richard Morris: "Come hither, all ye that are captives—bound and fettered with the chains of earthly desires;—come to this source of goodness, where you shall find rest and security."

hope for the Pardoner despite his despicable condition—a condition that has been debated by numerous scholars.

The Pardoner represents a scene from humanity's constant cycle, where many attempt to move closer to virtue, while being a subject of fate who lacks Divine truth through spiritual blindness. This is not to say that the Pardoner intends to move closer to virtue during this Tale, but that his current condition in the Tale is part of a process that may or may not determine his fate. While it is easy to concur with Kittredge's assessment of the Pardoner's traits and with his idea that Chaucer produces "a beautiful story…put into the mouth of a vulgar, prating rascal," he provides a constricting assessment of the Pardoner's fate, where "There is no question of repentance or reformation, for the Pardoner is a lost soul" ("Chaucer's Pardoner" 830, 832). While it is likely that Chaucer is not attempting to reform the Pardoner in the Tale, one cannot reasonably deem him a lost soul after considering Chaucer's philosophical source material.

Donald Howard more clearly articulates the medieval religious view in his essay, "'Modernizing' Chaucer." Instead of creating a character based solely on the character's vices, as Kittredge implies, Howard thoroughly examines a medieval idea of grief and separates the Pardoner from his action. His analysis grounded in the Augustinian principle that separates the sinner's character from the sin, making redemption possible. Howard notes, "Repentance is always a possibility until a secret moment the scale is tipped" ("'Modernizing'" 51). Although it is clear the Pardoner is a likely victim of "guilt" and "torment," generated by the "misconduct" Howard mentions, it is only "at a certain secret point, irreversible" (51). Even though there is evidence of horrific evil through a "chain of cause and effect" (Howard, "'Modernizing'" 51), and the Pardoner is not held to any consequence—he even admits to his

vices—there is not enough evidence in The Pardoner's Tale, or the General Prologue, or his interruptions during The Wife of Bath's Tale to damn him without question—to say there is no hope.

It would have been more philosophically accurate to say *if* the Pardoner's life continued as demonstrated in The Pardoner's Tale, he is a "lost soul" (Kittredge, "Chaucer's Pardoner" 832). Howard explains, "Despair (*acedia)* is the failure of hope, and hope—the expectation of God's mercy—essential to the Christian life" but also essential to a positive philosophical ascent ("'Modernizing'" 51). Kittredge makes a religious assessment of the Pardoner's soul, removing hope, without including a complete portrait of Chaucer's source material. Lee Patterson also disagrees with Kittredge: "Simply to write him off as an impenitent sinner, and to confine criticism to the task of categorizing and measuring his sinfulness, is to preempt understanding" (397). This generates a series of questions. Who is to say the Pardoner has or has not reached his internal tipping point at the end of the Tale? If not, can't he be cynical and still be eligible for redemption if he exercises free will to break out of his spiritual prison? Can anyone conclude with certainty that he lacks hope—that he is doom-eager? Chaucer's source material dictates this is not the only way to view the Pardoner. The Pardoner, although most likely in a state of "Despair" (Howard, "'Modernizing'" 51) and internally imprisoned by his own accord, is not necessarily a "lost soul" (Kittredge, "Chaucer's Pardoner" 832).

Despite obvious condemnation of the Pardoner's avarice through the Boethian lens, there is still hope for those who have sunk below virtue. Here, it appears Pardoner has "not yet been moulded to any exquisite refinement by the perfection of the virtues" (Boethius V.vii). If the Pardoner so chooses, for "the freedom of man's will stands unshaken" (Boethius V.vi), the

Pardoner can "withstand vice, practice virtue, lift up...souls to right hopes, [and] offer humble prayers to Heaven" (Boethius V.xi). Again, when this is done properly, it "cannot fail" (Boethius V.xi). Therefore, although the Pardoner does not demonstrate any direct redemptive qualities, including valid contrition, it is possible his Tale offers insight into "Despair" (Howard, "'Modernizing'" 51), which might be a phase on the road to sacramental contrition and redemption through God's grace. Perhaps he will return to goodness. It is also possible the Pardoner will remain spiritually blind and continue his vices. The point is that his fate is unclear, and either way, his character shows a frightening condition that is so repulsive, it will likely promote change in others—a good reason for giving a villain "one of the most beautiful as well as one of the best told tales in the whole collection" (Kittredge, "Chaucer's Pardoner" 833). Like "The Former Age," The Pardoner's Tale is an influential force capable of exciting "pessimism about the world…[to] waken the desire to reform it" (Howard, *His Life* 381). Like Kittredge argued, Chaucer did not reform the Pardoner, but he did not have to. The Pardoner's character brilliantly called for reform without explicit reformation during the Tale. Yet, there is still scholarly disagreement.

Chapter 3: Understanding the Pardoner's Audience and Character with Genre

Returning to Thomas A. Knott's final guiding question—"How do the differences between source and writer exhibit the power of the latter?" (62)—one might begin to weigh the impact Boethius' *Consolation* on The Pardoner's Tale. Where Boethius' writing was well known and widely applied to education and religion, The Pardoner's Tale indicates Chaucer's powerful use of the *Consolation*, which, when applied to analysis, directs a reader's understanding of the Pardoner's sermon audience, thus characterizing the Pardoner. Chaucer demonstrates this literary application of the *Consolation* especially toward the end of The Pardoner's Tale. After the exemplum of the three rioters ends with "thise homycides two" (893) and "empoisonere also" (894), the rioter's sins become the Pardoner's sins:

> O cursed sinne of alle cursednesse!
>
> O traitours homicide, O wikkednesse!
>
> O glotonye, luxurye, and hasardrye! (895-897)

After this exclamation, the Pardoner works his way into momentary self-awareness and remorse:

> Thou blasphemour of Crist with vileinye
>
> And othes grete, of usage and of pride!
>
> Allas, mankinde, how may it bitide
>
> That to thy Creatour, which that thee wroghte,
>
> And with his precious herte-blood thee boghte,
>
> Thou art so fals and so unkinde, allas (898-903)

This brief realization, which echoes Boethius' writing, demonstrating "deepened sadness, with downcast eyes, and blushes that confessed their shame" (I.i). It places the Pardoner in position to be receptive to philosophy's comfort, which includes a cure from his "blind driving…error"

(Boethius I.iii). His words also come after the exemplum of the sermon and before the "application of the story to the congregation" (Cooper 263), indicating a personal, meditative moment that hints at the beginning of "The Upward Look" (Boethius V.v). Lines 904 through the first half of line 915 shift to the fictitious audience in The Pardoner's Tale. His line, mid 915, "And lo, sires, thus I preche" is merely an aside to his current listeners to boast. Lines 916 through 918 shift back to his fictitious pilgrim audience, and just when he is about to conclude, he recalls, "'But sires, o word forgat I in my tale" (919) and launches once again back to his fictitious audience to demonstrate how he would sell relics and pardons. This is a continuation of the sermon structure, "application of the story to the congregation" (Cooper 263), which ends with "That may assoille yow, bothe moore and lasse, / Whan that the soule shal fro the body passe" (939-940). What follows, "I rede that oure Hooste shal biginne" (941), indicates the Pardoner has returned fully to his pilgrim teller audience, in jest after realizing he has shown more of his inner workings that he intended, which is also reminiscent of Boethius' need to remember himself again (I.ii). Though a number of critics have disagreed with this argument and proposed that he in fact hasn't fully returned to his pilgrim audience[10], my proposed reading demonstrates Chaucer's powerful use of philosophical source material, which is discovered through one's understanding of the Pardoner's audience. The Pardoner, as a result of audience, helps readers to discover what is known—a truth that sets people free (Boethius I.i)—a truth that is also accessible to the Pardoner.

The Host's response from lines 946 to 949 offers a rebuttal to the Pardoner's joke, also as a joke. Line 950, "Thogh it were with thy fundement depeint!" takes the anecdote further, and lines 951-955 takes the joke too far by referencing the Pardoner's "coilons" (952). This series of

[10] Helen Cooper, G. L. Kittredge, Robert P. Merrix, and R. A. Schoaf

insults upsets the Pardoner. Noticing this, the Host exclaims, "'Now,' quod oure Hoost, 'I wol no lenger pleye / With thee…" (958-959). As the Host stops joking, the Knight steps in to conclude the tale, the tone shifts to include an air of authority, similar to the authoritative tone present in the *Consolation* with Lady Philosophy, and Chaucer's power shines through the theme, returning readers to Chaucer's Boethian question: what is the fate of the wicked?

The Knight beseeches the Host to "kisse the pardoner" (965). Chaucer did not write for the Pardoner to kiss the Host. The Knight's instruction for the Host to kiss the Pardoner is followed by an instruction for the Pardoner to "drawe thee [the Host] neer" (966) and accept the comfort similar to the way Lady Philosophy offers comfort to Boethius the prisoner. This is a physical manifestation of what the Pardoner must do to positively ascend: receive comfort just as Boethius must receive comfort and philosophical cures from Lady Philosophy to achieve enlightenment. By emphasizing the Host's gesture of goodwill, the end of the Tale emphasizes the importance of providing comfort and not hostility for the wicked, grace and even love for the wicked despite their condition. This further demonstrates Chaucer's power, embodying his ability to not only integrate topics from the *Consolation,* but to also balance a *consolatio* with a sermon, and the Knight is the perfect character to intervene and conclude the *consolatio*.

Not only has Chaucer written the Knight as a symbol of authority by way of estate, his tale is also rife with Boethian principles and represents humanity's constant cycle, attempting to move closer to virtue while being subjects of fate who lack Divine truth. Arcite might demand, "What is this world? What asketh men to have?" (Chaucer 2777), but Theseus's character provides the best answer. He acknowledges philosophy might criticize "the blindness of men" (Cooper 69) in the story of Palamon and Arcite, but through Theseus, readers are encouraged to acknowledge their humanity and see as best they can. Similar to the *Consolation,* The Knight's

Tale combines paganism, Neoplatonism, and elements of Christianity. Paul G. Ruggiers declares Chaucer knew how to strike a chord between all readers, regardless of their beliefs, by dramatizing "The toils of this world [which] are the tests and trials by which man's spirit acquires virtue and thus achieves its purer form" ("Some Philosophical Aspects" 302). Charles Muscatine notes in *The French Tradition* that Theseus addresses "the values of human experience…against eternity" (131-132). The Knight addresses the same Boethian topics in his tale, and the Knight nods to such topics at the end of The Pardoner's Tale. Like his Tale, which encourages positive meditative ascent, the last line of The Pardoner's Tale concludes with the Host and the Pardoner's embrace. They "kiste, and riden forth hir weye" (968). The Host extends grace, and the Pardoner receives comfort; thus, indicating a parallel—there is hope for not only the Pardoner but for humankind as well. Chaucer has constructed a powerful message that is clear through applied knowledge of consolation and sermon genre and by careful examination of the Pardoner's audience as a result.

By blending two genres together, Chaucer creates room for genre mutability, which work to drive home a philosophical Boethian-inspired message. For example, although The Pardoner's Tale includes many elements of the genre of sermon commonly associated with the tale (i.e., Biblical reference, condemnation of sin, exemplum, exemplum applied to the congregation, and prayer), The Pardoner's Tale is a chaotic representation of ancient or even scholastic medieval sermon structure [11]. Robert P. Merrix concludes that The Pardoner's Tale does portray a medieval sermon based upon "general design, the relation of the parts to the whole,…the methods of developing those parts… [and] the relation of theme to form" (136). However, many readers do

[11] See for example the scholastic sermon structure noted in *Midieval* Artes Praedicandi*: A Synthesis of Scholastic Sermon Structure* by Siegfried Wenzel.

not consider The Pardoner's Tale as a mixed genre, using medieval sermon structure to arrive at consolation. Instead, they focus on the sermon structure flaws. This understandably gives readers pause when what they expect from a medieval sermon is disrupted by the frame of the *Tales* and by the order of sermon elements. For example, the "biblical text proceeds the Prologue, not the exemplum" (Cooper 264). Therefore, the sermon structure in The Pardoner's Tale is chaotic, but as such, it paves the way for Boethian themes and the consolation genre. Chaucer's power is validated once again when the Pardoner explicates those themes with his sermon inside of the frame.

As previously stated, one's view of the Pardoner's audience, which depends on one's view of genre and sermon structure, either directs readers to Chaucer's Boethian source, leaves room for philosophical source material, or side-steps it entirely. The result is a debate about the Pardoner's character. A good number of scholars comment about sermon structure. Many claim there is ambiguity, even confusion, about where the sermon starts and ends. Those who view the Pardoner as damned without hope (Helen Cooper, G. L. Kittredge, Robert P. Merrix, and R. A. Schoaf) tend to view the tale as a flawed medieval sermon. As Merrix points out, some use the structure deviation from an ancient medieval sermon "to argue lack of formal structure or homiletic function in the Pardoner's Tale" (127). However, this analysis falls short. There is homiletic function in The Pardoner's Tale, but not because it applies a theological lens. Instead, it pairs a theological sermon with the philosophical consolation genre. This was not the first time Chaucer considered the shortcomings of organized religion lead by individuals who were capable of corruption. Circling back to Chaucer's moral ballads, "The Former Age," which Chaucer translated and modified the poem from Book II, Meter V of the *Consolation,* demonstrates he was well aware of the medieval understanding of the Fall of Man and its

implications moving forward. Like Boethius, Chaucer does not deny Christianity in The Pardoner's Tale, and through "The Former Age," readers understand that "men had to use the arts of civilization to improve on fallen nature, but in doing so they became more corrupt and greedy" (Howard, *His Life* 381). This condition, or dilemma, is not easily remedied with theology or religion alone; instead, it is remedied by also considering philosophy. The final stanza in Chaucer's "The Former Age" mentions the very heart of the Pardoner's condition, which is also written into in his sermon exemplum in The Pardoner's Tale:

> Allas, allas! now may men wepe and crye!
> For in our dayes nis but covetyse
> [And] doublenesse, and tresoun and envye,
> Poysoun, manslauhtre, and mordre in sondry wyse. (61-64)

This is reminiscent of the rioters' story and the *Consolation's* direct reference to avarice, condemning such vices, noting, "the worst of men, who are all the more covetous by reason of their wickedness" (Boethius II.v). It also demonstrates the pitfalls of wealth and chasing wealth. For example, wealth "cannot make its possessor independent and free from all want" (Boethius III.iii), and public recognition cannot acquire virtue (Boethius III.iv). The Pardoner's Tale, scholastic medieval sermon included, emphasizes his condition, locked inside an internal prison, while seeking positive recognition from the pilgrims.

Many scholars find the sermon structure in The Pardoner's Tale puzzling because the "inset" of the Pardoner explaining his preaching paired with the sermon inside of his tale, along with the rioter story as exemplum inside of that sermon which is also a part of his life is problematic without fully examining Chaucer's source material manifesting in genre form (Cooper 266). However, as previously suggested, this outwardly chaotic structure parallels

Chaucer's philosophical source material and creates a need for comfort rather than simply characterizing the Pardoner as a doomed sinner. Chaucer, by creating what Helen Cooper calls "Chinese box" structure, illuminates the way his source material extends not only to the Pardoner's individual meditation, looking inward, but also to the way his Boethian source material extends infinitely to humankind: all are on a journey to their final ascent and wickedness will continue to exist in a world with God, however chaotically. Divine providence still leaves room for free will even though it stems from "our inner, moral worlds" (Howard, *His Life* 60). People like the Pardoner will lose their way until they choose to redirect themselves.

Those who have side-stepped Chaucer's powerful use of Boethius' *Consolation* view the Pardoner as more wicked, without hope, seem to focus more on the negative points (i.e., his parallel with False Seeming and his open admission of guilt). While it is common to judge character from action (i.e., gluttony, lies, avarice, etc.), it is more comprehensive to consider what is at work under the surface of such actions. Furthermore, scholars who view the Pardoner as being unredeemable assume the Pardoner's sermon audience ends with line 915: "And lo, sires, thus I preche." This interpretation assumes the Pardoner is addressing his fellow pilgrims when he attempts to sell relics and pardons. As a result, this makes the Pardoner appear more evil and his comment toward the Host more menacing. It assumes the sermon chaos mimics the Pardoner's wickedness, thus discounting Chaucer's source material.

Helen Cooper, for example, interprets a dual audience after line 915. This ambiguity indicates the Pardoner is speaking to both the pilgrims telling tales and the Pardoner's fictitious audience. She claims the Pardoner "has confused the two audiences" which only adds to "his illusion of sincerity" (Cooper 267, 266). One's audience interpretation also colors

the interchange between the Pilgrim and the Host at the end of the Tale. Helen Cooper, Robert P. Merrix, and R. A. Schoaf interpret the Pardoner selling relics to the tale-telling pilgrims beginning at line 915 view the Host's comments are angry. They believe the Pardoner deserves this scolding, but not for the sake of reform. The scolding is for the sake of naming and shaming wickedness, giving the audience a sense of justice. Helen Cooper attributes the Host's conflict as a representation of *Roman de la Rose* source material instead of also considering philosophical source material (265). However, justice is not the purpose of The Pardoner's Tale. Justice deviates from the theme by indicating eternal consequence—again, removing philosophical source material. Readers cannot ascertain the Pardoner's outcome with certainty. In Helen Cooper, Robert P. Merrix, and R. A. Schoaf's reading, the Pardoner is addressing the pilgrims when attempting to sell relics, which makes him more evil, following his confession—his comment toward the Host is more menacing. This results in characterizing the Pardoner as less capable of redemption because it places him further from virtue. There is no room for positive meditative ascent as Boethius would have readers believe.

Other scholars acknowledge the Pardoner's blatant avarice but leave room for philosophical questions by way of modern psychology and even sociology, looking inward nonetheless. Scholars that look inward typically assert that the sermon ends with "Whan that the soule shal fro the body passe" (940) and the Pardoner addressing his usual, fictitious peasant audience which makes him less malicious and more humorous (ending with a joke for the Host). Bertrand H. Bronson constructs an argument by explaining G. L. Kittredge and G. H. Gerould's arguments about the Pardoner's confession lack "dramatic appeal" because they "rest on assumed intention—of psychological realism" (17). He adds the General Prologue is essential

to one's understanding of the relationship between the Pardoner and the Host. Part of Bronson's argument claims the Pardoner is "enlisted on the side of good" (20), his references to "relics and pardons" (21) are directed toward "an imaginary audience of humble folk, good men and wives" (21), and his accusation toward the Host is a "jibe" (18) based on common knowledge of Innkeepers and "itching palm[s]" (18). Similarly, John Halverson notes a problem area: assumptions that are loosely based on explicit detail and the Pardoner's characterization. He argues the Pardoner preaches to a "peasant audience," not the pilgrim audience, when offering relics for pardons (188). Later, he describes the Pardoner as someone who makes a fool of others, as self-aware, and as using his confession for sport (196). Halverson claims the Pardoner's comment about "widows and orphans" is not serious, and his comment toward the Host is a "joke" (197, 199). He argues, the Pardoner is not evil, "but that he is somehow deadly" within this "Christian *memento mori*" by demonstrating "the human impulse toward death" which governs the theme of his exemplum but not necessarily his life (200, 201, 202).

Another angle that arrives at a similar conclusion and leaves room for philosophical source material while addressing audience comes from Michaela Paasche Grudin. She explains the Pardoner's structural technique of moving between speaker and listener and then to performer and audience contributes to "the dynamics of discourse as social interaction" (1157). She asserts the Pardoner refers to his fictitious "peasant audience as a means of engaging the pilgrims as well" (1163). The Pardoner denies closure when he "forgat" part of his Tale, which adds to the "psychological complexity" that further characterizes the Pardoner with "bottomless cynicism or misplaced humor" (Grudin 919, 1163, 1163). Grudin's analysis is an example of the modern sociological and psychological lens that is reminiscent of the philosophical lens. She looks inward on the Pardoner and does not damn him with certainty. She leverages the chaotic

sermon to draw conclusions about the Pardoner's audience and leaves room for Boethian-like hope.

Ralph W. V. Elliot also argues the Pardoner's "sample sermon" (24) demonstrates hypocrisy but is presented as a "performance" (24), similar to Michaela Paasche Grudin. Like Bertrand H. Bronson, Ralph W. V. Elliot asserts the Pardoner's singles out the Host as a "final joke" in the "grand finale of his act" (24). Elliot argues the Pardoner is addressing his "imaginary audience" when he is referencing selling relics (27). Elliot explains the Pardoner does not address the pilgrims until he says, "And lo, sires, thus I preche," and is sincere about Christ's pardon, but does not have a moment of regret for his avarice (Chaucer 917). Instead, his argument sums up the Pardoner's character as one who "lives for deceit" and is silent when "The performance is over" (Elliot 28). Elliot asserts Chaucer highlights good and evil through the Pardoner. He settles on the idea that through the lack of detail with the three deaths, there is a lack of sympathy and justice for the rioters, but not necessarily the Pardoner. Although, as Helen Cooper points out, the rioters' behavior is "exposed in advance as damnable" (268), readers cannot use this detail to assume the same for the Pardoner because, as previously mentioned, the Pardoner's journey is not complete. Instead of viewing only the chaotic sermon structure, which layers in the rioter story, as a parallel to the Pardoner's path, it is more comprehensive to consider Chaucer's philosophical source material and its impact on genre. The exemplum includes avarice, the Pardoner exemplifies avarice, but not as a serious indication of fate. Instead, it is an indication of Boethian source material and mixed genre. For Bertrand H. Bronson, Ralph W. V. Elliot, Michaela Paasche Grudin, and John Halverson, the Pardoner is addressing his typical peasant audience when attempting to sell relics, which makes him less evil and more humorous, ending with a joke for the Host. Thus, the Pardoner is more easily

redeemable because he is further from evil. This leaves room for positive outcome at the end of the Pardoner's ascent and also for philosophical Boethian themes. It is less doom-eager.

Furthermore, the flurry of scholarship that surrounds The Pardoner's Tale is understandable given that Chaucer used the Pardoner and the consolation genre paired with chaotic medieval sermon structure to ask the philosophical question: what is the outcome of a wicked pilgrim? Regardless of methodology, most scholars, like Kittredge, have been quick to answer this question with confident, clear assertions due to their medieval sermon structure analysis. Such assertions are also drawn based on the Pardoner's sermon placement and resulting audience in the Tale. Helen Cooper was right when she asserted the Pardoner "himself is a character within his own tale" (266) but he is not a character in his tale for the sake of judgement as she assumed; he is a character in his tale by way of Chaucer "vitalizing" (Knott 62) philosophical source material. After all, as Charles Muscatine suggests, Chaucer is a "spiritual pupil of Boethius" (132). There is a debate among scholars about where the sermon ends and who the sermon audience is. However, when one considers Chaucer's philosophical source material and the consolation genre as the height of Chaucer's authorial power, the end of the sermon is "Whan that the soule shal from the body passe" (940). The sermon audience is his fictitious pilgrim audience.

Conclusion

By working through the methodical process G. L. Kittredge was praised, for and by considering Chaucer's philosophical source material, it is clear there is more than one possible outcome for the Pardoner. Chaucer modified the structure of the philosophical source material he borrowed by focusing on the wicked instead of the victim and by keeping the *consolatio* genre firmly woven into the sermon or "looser…homily" frame structure Helen Cooper mentions (264). This affected the overall structure of his art when he left the pilgrimage unfinished, by focusing on the individual, by including the Pardoner's open admission of guilt, and by including the Pardoner's moments of brief clarity and truth. Chaucer does not name the pilgrims specifically, and by leaving the Pardoner unnamed, he leaves room for readers to see themselves. Chaucer has mastered his philosophical borrowings by answering philosophical questions about the outcomes of the wicked with additional questions, using irony, ambiguity, the meditative ascent, and unknowing. Chaucer has "visualized and vitalized" (Knott 62) this philosophical source material with a character so unsettling that it brings wickedness to life in a way that most would warrant hopeless. The result makes God's grace that much more remarkable. Chaucer challenged his reader's understanding of wickedness, providing hope for change.

The flurry of scholarship surrounding The Pardoner's Tale demonstrates Chaucer's "power" (Knott 62), using Boethian philosophical source material, which continues a relevant conversation from the sixth century. Because of its relevance, what is needed is a renewed interdisciplinary focus on the tale. It ought to be studied as both a literary and philosophical text since it is a work that demonstrates philosophical and religious challenges by way of literary genius.

While many are quick to latch onto Kittredge's assessment, given his contribution to the field, it is worth noting that he does not take a holistic approach with the Pardoner's outcome. Although his assessment of the Pardoner's fate *might* be accurate, the alternate Boethian view of the Pardoner is equally convincing, if not moreso. As one's view of the Pardoner changes by interpreting sermon structure, Kittredge's assessment of the Pardoner's soul is conditional—it is only plausible *if* the Pardoner continues to reside in "Despair" (Howard, "'Modernizing'" 51). However, it is possible the Pardoner changes, as shown, making him capable of redemption. Even Kittredge has shown hints of the Pardoner's change with the potentially "serious mood that has surprised him" ("Chaucer's Pardoner" 832). Who is to say he has not or will not reach the internal tipping point that makes redemption possible?

Despite his many insights, Kittredge has overlooked a simple truth—a secret perhaps. However, it is not the same secret mentioned in Walter Clyde Curry's "The Secret of Chaucer's Pardoner" where his character is determined by "Physiognomies" (595). Instead, it is a truth similar to the idea mentioned in Chaucer's second moral ballad, "Truth," which is based on the belief, noted by Donald Howard that the "and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Chaucer's poem concludes:

> The wrastling for this worlde axeth a fal.
> Her nis non hoom, her nis but wildernesse:
> Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beste, out of thy stal!
> Know thy contree, look up, thank God of al;
> Hold the hye wey, and lat thy gost thee lede:
> And trouthe shal delivere, hit is no drede. (16-21)

"Truth" explains life as a pilgrimage; the very act of going on a pilgrimage indicates a longing for internal transformation, longing to break free from an internal prison. Unlike the rioters in his exemplum, the Pardoner understood the difference between the physical and spiritual world even if he hardly acts on it in the *Tales*. The rioters, by contrast, demonstrate blindness, viewing death as a physical quality instead of a spiritual; they are more concerned with the physical condition and by acting on physical desires, and their ignorance grows and manifests into a downward spiral removed from spiritual wellbeing. Because the Pardoner is aware of the separation between the physical and spiritual world, and he demonstrates his ability to access the spiritual world, however briefly, readers are able to hope for his physical and spiritual enlightenment. Thus bringing a layer of sincerity to his words, "My theme is alwey oon and evere was: / *'Radix malorum est Cupiditas'*" (Chaucer 333-334). Therefore, two things distinguish the Pardoner's tipping point and final outcome: his motivation to exert free will, and his ability to move away from what Howard called "Despair" through penitence while journeying through his meditative ascent. Although penitence is religious, it is also philosophical.

Ultimately, Chaucer's question—what is the outcome of a wicked pilgrim?—is deliberately left unanswered—that is Chaucer's gift to readers. Like the medieval work, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Chaucer deliberately left us within a cloud of our own "unknowyng" (453). We are unable to judge the Pardoner's fate with certainty. According to Harold Bloom, a fundamental difference between *The Canterbury Tales* and Dante's writing lies in our understanding of the way each author viewed moral judgement. Harold Bloom writes, "We know exactly Dante's judgement as to every person in his poem…[but] Chaucer and Shakespeare do not pretend to know finalities" ("Chaucer" 104). Readers are unable to observe where and how

his journey ends, and by displaying the Pardoner's journey and using philosophical source material, Chaucer prompts readers to reflect on their own meditative ascents. By leaving room for more than one outcome for the Pardoner, Chaucer reminds readers there is hope for them as well. This Tale works to lift the fog from readers' eyes, directing them inward, so they too, like Boethius the prisoner, may see clearly and be enlightened on their journey.

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