

of the history of this woman here, the better to account for the concern she had in the wicked life I was now leading; into all the particulars of which she led me, as it were, by the hand, and gave me such directions, and I so well follow'd them, that I grew the greatest artist of my time . . ." (186). Although my previously chosen example was unfortunate, I genuinely believe that, the other woman's contribution notwithstanding, Moll ultimately wants us to regard the governess as her criminal mentor.

This claim is reinforced by the elaborate parallels within the novel between the "arts" of the governess' former midwifery and of Moll's thievery that Robert A. Erickson ingeniously details in "Moll's Fate: 'Mother Midnight' and *Moll Flanders*" (*Studies in Philology* 76[1979]:85–94). While not condoning my error of fact, I can nevertheless point with ironic chagrin to the misleading resemblance between Moll's statement about her subordinate "schoolmistress"—"no woman ever arriv'd to the perfection of that art like her"—and her earlier comment about the governess' midwifery—"My governess did her part . . . with the greatest dexterity imaginable, and far beyond all that ever I had any experience of before" (148)—as well as to Moll's suggestive allusion to the governess in comparing her apprenticeship to the fellow thief with an apprenticeship to a midwife (175). In sum, I believe we must still regard the governess as a role model for Moll's professionalization and for her proud artistry.

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Chaucer's Pardoner

To the Editor:

Although I enjoyed Melvin Storm's analysis of Chaucer's Pardoner ("The Pardoner's Invitation: Quæstor's Bag or Becket's Shrine?" *PMLA* 97 [1982]:810–18), my imagination balks at the idea of the Pardoner as a practical threat or an obstacle to the continuance of the pilgrimage, "a kind of walking shrine" or surrogate Saint Thomas whose powers could satisfy the desires of the pilgrims without requiring them to travel on. This is indeed the jesting assumption of the Pardoner in *The Play Called the Foure PP.*, who openly claims:

Euen here at home is remedy,
For at your dore my-selfe doth dwell,

Who coulde haue saued your soule as well
As all your wyde wandrynge shall do,
Though ye wente thryes to Iericho.

Though a pardoner may assert such authority, Chaucer's Pardoner has already described both his covetous aims and his fraudulent relics too clearly for him to hope to impose on the faith of his companions, even if he might still frighten them into accepting his services in a crisis. The Pardoner seems to offer himself not as a substitute agent for any benefits to be found at the shrine at Canterbury but rather as travelers' insurance for the ongoing journey: if "ther may fallen oon or two / Doun of his hors, and breke his nekke atwo," the Pardoner will be on the spot "whan that the soule shal fro the body passe" to render absolution for a price. Other options would be to pay premiums "anon" or "at every miles end." The spiritual protection his presence affords will make the Pardoner valuable to the group only as they proceed on their way.

Whether he be "a geldyng or a mare," eunuch, homosexual, or hermaphrodite, the Pardoner is clearly not at ease with his sexual distinction. One of the pleasures his income makes possible is, he declares, to "have a joly wenche in every toun." His interruption of the Wife of Bath seems to disclose his heterosexual interests when he asks what the cost of marriage will be on his flesh. He puts himself forward as a young man with the thoughts of one "aboute to wedde a wyf"; marriage is to him a question of satisfaction, not of capacity.

Behind his pretense of heterosexuality, behind his covetousness and the efforts to manipulate and profit from others, may lie a sexual embarrassment that the Pardoner is eager to compensate. One way to do so would be to overreach the manly world around him and prove his powers superior, indeed almost supernatural, when they are put to the test after his Prologue confession. The Host may represent a most apt challenge, not merely "because of his position [as leader]" but because "A large man he was with eyen stepe . . . / And of manhod hym lakkede right naught." The Pardoner aims to frighten the Host by challenging him to reflect on the special enormity of his sins. With his business acumen and his "manhood," the Host does not miss the points of either the money sought or the sexual difference concealed but hits home with a reference that the Pardoner must find most offensive: he declares the fitness of the Pardoner's testicles, as relics, to "be shryned in an hogges toord!"

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