

THE PARDONER'S TWO BODIES: READING BEYOND SEXUALITY IN THE *PROLOGUE* OF THE *TALE OF BERYN*

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As even the most casual reader of Chaucer knows, one of the central ironies of the *Canterbury Tales* is the absence of Canterbury itself from the narrative. Aside from a few oaths to 'Seynt Thomas' in the less-than-pious contexts of the *Miller's Tale* and *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, and the title 'tales of Caunterbury' in Chaucer's own *Retraction*, the destination of the pilgrimage barely features at all during its course. Most importantly, the journey itself grinds to a halt on the fringes of the city, as the closest Chaucer's 'joly compaignye' get to Beckett's shrine is Harbledown in Kent, a village some two and a half kilometres away from the cathedral.¹ Nevertheless, while the pilgrims may have been marooned by their creator, other medieval writers took the initiative and allowed them to make the final, suspended leg of their journey. Perhaps the best-known of these efforts is that of John Lydgate, whose *Siege of Thebes* (c.1421) is preceded by a brief framing narrative in which Lydgate himself takes a pilgrimage to Canterbury 'aftere siknesse', happens to stay in an inn 'where the pylgrymes were logged everichon' and joins them on their return journey, during which he regales them with an encyclopaedic epic of nearly 5000 lines.² This extension even attained a curious proximity to the Chaucerian canon among early readers, being included by John Kingston in his 1561 edition of Chaucer's works.³

However, Lydgate seems to have been narrowly beaten to the punch by the text that concerns the present paper, the *Prologue* of the *Tale of*

¹ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, VIII.583, *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry Dean Benson, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.23-328 (p.270). Subsequent references are to this edition and appear in parentheses in the text.

² John Lydgate, *The Siege of Thebes*, ed. Robert R. Edwards, TEAMS (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001).

³ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The woorkes of Geffrey Chaucer, newly printed, with diuers addicions* (London: John Kingston, 1561), ff.361-78v (STC 5076).

Beryn.⁴ This is preserved in a single manuscript copy dating from the third quarter of the fifteenth century, and now in the collection of the Duke of Northumberland, where it is embedded in a uniquely arranged version of the *Canterbury Tales*.⁵ The *Prologue* as a whole provides an account of the pilgrims' activities in Canterbury, their overnight stay at the 'Cheker of the Hope' tavern, and their visit to the shrine of St Thomas. It ends with the group heading back to London as the Host delivers a second invocation to spring, before finally giving way to a further story from the Merchant, a redaction of the French *Roman de Berinus*.⁶ Given that it occurs within the sequence of Chaucer's authentic *Tales*, *Beryn* and its *Prologue* thus represent not merely an imitation or extension of Chaucer, but an attempt to complete the trajectory mapped out by his unfinished frame narrative.

Most of the key pieces of information about the text are difficult to establish. While the text is likely to have been composed some time earlier than its manuscript, its precise date cannot be fixed with confidence. Derek Pearsall dates the *Tale of Beryn* to c.1410, although remains uncertain about the date of the *Prologue*, while Peter Brown has put forward the attractive proposal that it was composed to honour Canterbury Cathedral's fifth jubilee in 1420.⁷ The author responsible for the text is similarly unknown. Although a colophon attached to the piece gives the 'nomen autoris' as a 'filius ecclesie Thome', or 'son of the church of Thomas', the meaning of this statement is unclear. According to Frederick Furnivall, *Beryn*'s Victorian editor, it places the writer in the Benedictine community

⁴ 'The Canterbury Interlude', *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions*, ed. John M. Bowers, TEAMS (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), pp.60-78. Subsequent references are to this edition and appear in parentheses in the text.

⁵ See Linne R. Mooney and Lister M. Matheson, 'The Beryn Scribe and his Texts: Evidence for Multiple Copy Production of Manuscripts in Fifteenth-Century England', *Library* 4 (2003), 347-70.

⁶ Robert Boussat, *Berinus, roman en prose du XIVe siècle*, 2 vols (Paris: Société des anciens textes français, 1931-33).

⁷ Derek Pearsall, *Old and Middle English Poetry* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p.298; Peter Brown, 'Journey's End: The Prologue to the *Tale of Beryn*', *Chaucer and Fifteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. Julia Boffey and Janet Cowen (London: King's College Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1991), pp.152-53.

at Canterbury Cathedral.⁸ This view has been taken up by Brown but is by no means secure: Mary Tamanini, for instance, suggests that the poet was attached to one of the Inns of Court, while Richard Firth Green makes him a rector at Winchelsea.⁹ Whoever he was, he evidently knew Canterbury very well. At one stage, for example, he sends ‘the Knyght with his meyne’ to tour the city defences, and gives a detailed description of the walls of the city in the process (237). His choice of ‘the Cheker of the Hope’ likewise reveals some local knowledge, since this was an actual hostelry close to the cathedral precincts that still survives in part; it gained a further literary connection in the sixteenth century when it became the scene of a brawl between Christopher Marlowe and the tailor William Corkine.¹⁰ In fact, Robert Sturges has recently noted that a sensitivity to urban spaces permeates the text as a whole.¹¹

Even aside from the issues of its authorship and occasion, this text raises a number of further questions, as scholarship on the poem has been quick to recognise. As John Bowers has noted, it clearly shows that medieval readers were dissatisfied with the unfinished, open-ended condition of the Chaucer’s text, that they ‘did not instinctively view the Tales as unfinished but complete’ as much modern criticism has tended to do: the *Beryn*-poet appears to have felt, like Thomas Tyrwhitt in the eighteenth century, that the inconclusiveness of the *Tales* was ‘much to be regretted’ rather than part of its design.¹² Stephanie Trigg likewise points out the lack of ‘rhetorical anxiety’ with which its author can appropriate the

⁸ F.J. Furnivall and W.G. Stone, *The ‘Tale of Beryn’, with a ‘Prologue of the Merry Adventure of the Pardoner with a Tapster at Canterbury’* (London: Trübner, 1887), p.vii; Brown, ‘Journey’s End’, pp.148–50.

⁹ ‘The *Tale of Beryn*: An Edition with Introductory Notes and Glossary’, ed. M.E.M. Tamanini (unpublished doctoral thesis, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, 1970), pp.40-48; Richard Firth Green, ‘Legal Satire in *The Tale of Beryn*’, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 11 (1989): 43-62 (p.62).

¹⁰ See Charles Nicholl, *The Reckoning: the Murder of Christopher Marlowe* (London: Picador, 1992), p.87.

¹¹ Robert S. Sturges, ‘The Pardoner in Canterbury: Class, Gender, and Urban Space in the *Prologue to the Tale of Beryn*’, *College Literature* 33 (2006): 52-76.

¹² John M. Bowers, *Chaucer and Langland: The Antagonistic Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p.178; Thomas Tyrwhitt, ‘An Introductory Discourse to the Canterbury Tales’, *The Canterbury Tales of Chaucer*, 4 vols. (London: T. Payne, 1775), IV.188.

Canterbury Tales, even as Chaucer is undergoing his apotheosis into ‘fader reuerent’ and ‘Cheef Poete of breteyne’ amongst poets invested in the Lancastrian regime.¹³ The specific question this paper will pursue, however, is one that may seem superficially simpler, although in fact carries some significant ramifications. What I want to explore here is precisely why the *Beryn*-poet singled out one pilgrim in particular in the composition of his narrative. From the first, the Pardoner is revealed as the central focus of the text. Within the first twenty lines his dominance is established: after its initial review of the *Canterbury Tales*, which notes Chaucer’s mixture of ‘sotill centence’, ‘vertu and lore’ with ‘othir myrthis...holich to foly’, the Pardoner peels away from the other pilgrims and tries to seduce Kit, ‘tapstere’ of their lodgings (3-5). In much of the action that follows he continues to be the hub of the narrative, not only remaining an important presence while the pilgrims eat and drink together and make their devotions at the shrine of St Thomas, but being allocated his own extensive sub-plot: in the course of this he is cheated out of his possessions by Kit and her ‘paramour’, and caught in a running battle with ‘the hosteler of the house’ in the kitchens of the Cheker, armed with a ‘grete ladill’ and a cooking pan (427, 574). Such is the Pardoner’s centrality to the text that John Urry, the first modern editor of the poem, gave it a title to commemorate this fact, naming the whole sequence ‘the mery adventure of the Pardonere and Tapstere at the Inn at Canterbury’.¹⁴

At first glance, the question of why the Pardoner attracted such attention may seem to answer itself. After all the Pardoner is often held up as one of Chaucer’s most striking and captivating pilgrims, a ‘vivid and frightening’ character in Donald Howard’s phrase, in whom many readers have seen an unusual level of ‘psychological depth’.¹⁵ In terms of the volume of critical response he has generated, he probably ranks second only to the Wife of Bath. Lillian Bisson has called him the ‘most controversial and elusive figure in the assemblage’ in terms of scholarly

¹³ Stephanie Trigg, *Congenial Souls: Reading Chaucer from Medieval to Postmodern*, Medieval Cultures Series 30 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p.87.

¹⁴ John Urry, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, compared with the former editions, and many valuable MSS* (London: Bernard Lintot, 1791), pp.594-600.

¹⁵ Donald R. Howard, *Chaucer: His Life, His Works, His World* (New York: Dutton, 1987), p.16; David A. Lawton, *Chaucer’s Narrators*, Chaucer Studies 12 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1985), p.18.

debate, and this is supported by University of Toronto's series of annotated Chaucer bibliographies, which lists over 1400 separate items of commentary on the Pardoner and his *General Prologue* portrait: this is more than the sum for the Knight and the Shorter Poems, and exceeds the total for the Miller, Reeve and Cook combined.¹⁶ There is also some evidence to suggest that medieval readers shared in this fascination, at least in the decades immediately after Chaucer's death.¹⁷ In his survey of early manuscripts of Chaucer, Charles Owen discovered that the *Pardoner's Tale* was one of the most widely occurring of the *Tales*, even appearing as a standalone text in eight separate copies.¹⁸ Unusually, the piece also had a reach beyond the purely textual, as scenes from the *Tale* appear on a panel from a carved chest dating from c.1400, now held at the Museum of London.¹⁹ As Bowers states, the Pardoner seems to have been 'the one pilgrim who lingered most strongly in the memory of the fifteenth-century audience'.²⁰

The assumption that straightforward popularity or interest can account for the *Beryn*-poet's use of the Pardoner has in fact guided much existing criticism of the text. Many engagements are preoccupied by the issue of continuation between the two authors, assuming that its author is simply trying to replicate Chaucer's style, themes and character as closely

¹⁶ Lillian M. Bisson, *Chaucer and the Late Medieval World* (Farnham: Palgrave, 1998), p.62. See Marilyn Sutton, *Chaucer's Pardoner's Prologue and Tale: An Annotated Bibliography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Caroline D. Eckhardt, *Chaucer's General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp.407-22; T.L. Burton and Rosemary Greentree, *Chaucer's Miller's, Reeve's and Cook's Tales* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Russell Peck, *Chaucer's lyrics and Anelida and Arcite* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983); Monica E. Alpine, *Chaucer's Knight: An Annotated Bibliography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

¹⁷ On shifting attitudes to the Pardoner during the fifteenth century, see Paul Strohm, 'Chaucer's Fifteenth-Century Audience and the Narrowing of the "Chaucer Tradition"' *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 4 (1982): 3-32 (p.32).

¹⁸ Charles Owen, 'The *Canterbury Tales*: Early Manuscripts and Relative Popularity', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 54 (1955): 104-10.

¹⁹ V.A. Kolve, 'Chaucer and the Visual Arts', *Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Derek Brewer (Cambridge: Brewer, 1974), pp.292-93.

²⁰ John Bowers, 'The *Canterbury Interlude* and Merchant's Tale of Beryn: Introduction', *The 'Canterbury Tales': Fifteenth-Century Continuations*, pp.55-59 (p.55).

as possible, and appraising his success in this endeavour. This position emerges with Furnivall, who commends the poem on the basis that 'the Master's humour and lifelikeness...are well kept up', and is followed by much subsequent commentary: thus Karen Winstead concludes that the poem is 'on the whole Chaucerian in both spirit and accomplishment', while E.J. Bashe goes so far as to allocate the *Beryn*-poet a final 'percentage of consistency' based on 'how well he kept up Chaucer's characters'.²¹ Even when recognising departures from Chaucer's precedent, this older form of analysis has tended to see them as unconscious results of the poet's misunderstanding, conservatism, or even incompetence, as in the work of Jean Jost, Glending Olson and Betsy Bowden.²²

However, over the last two decades or so, scholars have begun to see the *Prologue* in less derivative terms, considering it as a quasi-critical, interpretive exercise in its own right, rather than merely an appendage to Chaucer. There has been a new awareness that the *Beryn*-poet's Pardoner has not been simply imported from Chaucer's text, or passed unproblematically from one author to his successor. Other commentators have seen him as subject to a calculated process of revision. Kathleen Forni, for instance, prefers to regard the *Beryn* Pardoner as a deliberate suppression of the possibilities offered by Chaucer, 'an attempt to silence and debase this subversive figure'.²³ Along the same lines, Robert Sturges has also urged that the *Beryn Prologue* be regarded as 'a considerably more complex response to Chaucer' than many discussions have allowed, while James Simpson has termed it 'an exceptionally shrewd response to the *Canterbury Tales*'.²⁴ What such examinations make clear, then, is that the

²¹ *The Tale of Beryn*, p.vii; E.J. Bashe, 'The Prologue to *The Tale of Beryn*', *Philological Quarterly* 12 (1933): 1-16 (pp.2, 11).

²² Jean E. Jost, 'From Southwark's Tabard Inn to Canterbury's Cheker-of-the-Hope: The Un-Chaucerian Tale of Beryn', *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 21 (1994): 133-48; Glending Olson, 'The Misreadings of the Beryn Prologue', *Mediaevalia* 17 (1994): 201-19; Betsy Bowden, *Chaucer Aloud: the Varieties of Textual Interpretation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), p.89.

²³ Kathleen Forni, *The Chaucerian Apocrypha: A Counterfeit Canon* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2001), p.85.

²⁴ Robert S. Sturges, *Chaucer's Pardoner and Gender Theory: Bodies of Discourse* (Farnham: Palgrave, 2000), p.40; James Simpson, 'Chaucer's Presence and Absence, 1400-1550', *Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.251-69 (p.260).

Pardoner has been reconfigured and revised during his journey into the newer text, as the later poet has not simply replicated him but reinterpreted him. The *Beryn* Pardoner has been forced to accommodate new meanings, as several aspects of his original form have been omitted or excised: he is a self-conscious revision of Chaucer's pilgrim, possibly even a rebuttal to him, generated by modifying or negating aspects of the original model. Furthermore, these revisions also begin to suggest why the *Beryn*-poet targeted the Pardoner in the first place. They imply that his focus was born less out of interest and more out of a sense of dissatisfaction, unease or even anxiety with the figure he had inherited from Chaucer, a desire to suppress elements he embodies. In the words of Elizabeth Allen, who offers her own codicological explanation of the issue, the *Beryn*-poet is consciously trying 'to make the Pardoner's disruptions easier', curtailing 'the threatening and volatile possibilities' he represents.²⁵

Nevertheless, this critical activity, despite the increasing sophistication of the readings it has produced, does raise a few problems of its own. In the first place, it has tended to see the *Prologue* and Pardoner in fairly narrow terms. By and large these discussions have focused almost exclusively on the issue of sexuality in the text, privileging and isolating this factor at the expense of other themes and strands of meaning. For example, a number of writers, including C. Donald Benson, Richard Firth Green and A.J. Minnis, have used the seduction subplot to argue for the 'sexual normality' of the Pardoner in both the *Prologue* and *Canterbury Tales*: in Benson's words, since he is portrayed here as 'neither eunuch nor homosexual, but a randy, if silly, heterosexual', the *Prologue* shows that the hints of deviance that have been identified in the Pardoner were not recognised by medieval readers.²⁶ Such readings are perhaps closer to the derivative interpretations of Bashe and Winstead, as they posit an essential congruence between the two texts, and assume that the *Beryn*-poet is simply following where Chaucer led, which is why his Pardoner can be

²⁵ Elizabeth Allen, 'The Pardoner in the Dogges Boure: Early Reception of the *Canterbury Tales*', *Chaucer Review* 36 (2001): 91-127 (p.92).

²⁶ C. David Benson, 'Chaucer's Pardoner: His Sexuality And Modern Critics', *Mediaevalia* 8 (1982): 337-46 (p.345); Richard Firth Green, 'The Sexual Normality of Chaucer's Pardoner', *Mediaevalia* 8 (1982): 353-57 (p.353); A.J. Minnis, *Fallible authors: Chaucer's Pardoner and Wife of Bath* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p.151.

said to reveal Chaucer's own intentions. But even commentators who have attributed greater critical awareness to the *Beryn*-poet have tended to treat his text as a riposte to Chaucer's treatment of sexuality above all else. Forni, for instance, writes that the Pardoner's 'aggressive heterosexuality' is 'one of the more striking features of the prologue', while Sturges interprets the entire Kit sub-plot as a 'symbolic contest for the phallus'; similarly, Velma Richmond summarises the whole poem as 'an early revision that removed the sexual difficulty of Chaucer's Pardoner'.²⁷ Either way, the *Beryn*-poet's refocusing of the Pardoner's desire has remained the chief object of discussion.

What is curious about these efforts is that they tend not to consider sexuality as an index of wider interests or concerns, despite the fact that Chaucer's own work has been routinely read in this way for at least half a century.²⁸ Instead of placing the Pardoner's revised sexuality in a larger spiritual or satiric framework, and treating it as a crystallisation of wider tendencies, it has been seen as simply an object in its own right, the end-point of analysis and discussion. In other words, while Chaucer's comments on the Pardoner's sexuality or anatomical irregularity have generally been treated as symbolic, the *Beryn*-poet has not been permitted such subtlety, and considered only as naïve or transparent in his portrayal of a libidinous Pardoner. In fact, as this paper will demonstrate, when trying to identify the underlying reasons why the *Beryn*-poet selected the Pardoner in the first place, his sexuality is best treated as an element in a larger pattern of modifications. While it remains a key concern, its real significance is less as a theme in its own terms and more as a symptom of a wider set of tendencies running through the text.

This point becomes clearer when examining an aspect which is closely related to sexuality, the *Beryn*-poet's treatment of the body. The body of the Pardoner is in fact a continual presence throughout the piece, although it tends to be evoked only in a very precise context, becoming visible only when it is beaten or otherwise subjected to violence. The

²⁷ Forni, *Counterfeit Canon*, p.85; Sturges, *Chaucer's Pardoner*, p.41; Velma Bourgeois Richmond, *Chaucer as Children's Literature: Retellings from the Victorian and Edwardian Eras* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004), p.100.

²⁸ See especially Robert P. Miller, 'The Scriptural Eunuch, and The Pardoner's Tale', *Speculum* 30 (1955): 180-99.

Pardoner experiences several grave injuries throughout the *Prologue*, all of which are lovingly and precisely catalogued. After pleading at his intended victim's 'dorward', for instance, his own staff is sharply 'leyd...on his bak' (477, 525). He is then chased into the tavern's scullery by Kit's 'paramoure', where he receives 'strokes ryghte inowghe...on his armes, his bak, and his browe' (597-98, 633). He only escapes this onslaught by taking refuge in the bed of a 'grete Walssh dogg', which 'spetously' bites him on the thigh until morning (641). Such is his ordeal that before he can rejoin the company on the road back to Southwark, he is forced to 'wissh away the blood' and feign 'lightsom chere' (661-63). The Pardoner, as Green comments, seems to have 'finally met his match' in this text.²⁹

As befits the critical history of the text, when these episodes have received attention, they have usually been interpreted in light of Chaucer's precedent. It has often been noted that this aggression resembles Chaucer's own treatment of the Pardoner, which has in turn allowed it to be read as a simple extension of his example. Bradley Darjes and Thomas Rendall, for instance, see the violence in precisely these terms, remarking that 'the fifteenth-century author's purpose is to continue the comic deflation of the Pardoner that begins in the *Tales* when the Host makes his rude reference to the Pardoner's coillons'.³⁰ The allusion here is to Bailly's outburst when the Pardoner attempts to sell his 'relikes' to the pilgrims. Bailly rages: 'I would I hadde thy coillons in myn hond/ In stide of reliques or of seintuarie/ Lat kutte hem of, I wol thee helpe hem carie' (VI.951-53). Brown also cites this threat, and agrees that the Pardoner is 'pilloried and vilified by the *Beryn*-author' as part of the 'process...initiated by Harry Bailly'.³¹ According to these interpretations, then, the composer of the *Prologue* is merely prolonging an episode from the *Tales*, importing its style of aggression directly into his own text without alteration or innovation.

Nevertheless, this line of reasoning overlooks some interesting features of the *Prologue*. Under closer examination, there are clear differences between the two texts and the ways in which they frame injury to the Pardoner's body. Foremost of these is the simple fact that the

²⁹ Green, 'Sexual Normality of Chaucer's Pardoner', p.353.

³⁰ Bradley Darjes and Thomas Rendall, 'A Fabliau in the *Prologue to the Tale of Beryn*', *Mediaeval Studies* 47 (1985), p.431.

³¹ Brown, 'Journey's End', p.158.

Prologue does inflict damage on the figure, leaving him with ‘akyng of his hede’, while Chaucer largely shies away from injuring his body (672). Despite its severe implications, Harry Bailly does not in fact need to put his threat into action: as it turns out, the insult alone is enough to silence the Pardoner, ‘so wrooth he was, no word ne wolde he seye’ (VI.957). Moreover, it is a curious fact that if Bailly did wish to make good his abuse, he would be unable to do so. One of the Pardoner’s most salient features is his lack of testicles. As has been frequently reiterated at least since the work of Nils Bolduan and Walter Clyde Curry, the Pardoner constitutes ‘a classic description of the eunuch’.³² In one of the most frequently discussed passages in the *General Prologue*, the Pardoner is said to be a ‘geldyng’: many of the features associated with emasculation are also attributed to him, such as a ‘voys...as hath a goot’ and ‘no berd’ (I.691, 688-9). The Pardoner thus has no ‘coillons’ that can be ‘kutte’ and ‘shryned in an hogges toord’: he is out of the range of Bailly’s threatened mutilation (VI.954-5). Chaucer, in short, does not allow the Pardoner to be wounded. Although he hints at violence against him, he only does so in conditions that safely insulate him from injury’s full force, as Bailly’s insult cannot be brought to fruition.

This in turn marks an important point of departure between Chaucer and the *Beryn*-poet in their entire conception of the Pardoner. In the course of being moved from one text to the other, the Pardoner seems to have gained a greater degree of physicality, as his form is noticeably more concrete in the later piece. In Chaucer’s text he is not merely elusive when Bailly attacks him, as his form proves to be almost wholly fugitive throughout the *Canterbury Tales*. As Pearsall writes, he often seems to have ‘no “within”...rather like one of those apples that grow near the Dead Sea, that look like true apples but turn to “wynnowande askes” when touched’.³³ In his *Prologue*, he describes himself as a ravenous vacuity, a

³² Nils W. Bolduan, ‘Chaucer and Matters Medical’, *New England Journal of Medicine* 208 (1933): 1365-68 (p.1368); Walter Clyde Curry, *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1960), pp.54-70; Robert Lumiansky, *Of Sundry Folk: the dramatic principle in the Canterbury Tales* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1955), p.203; Michael Hoy, *Chaucer’s Major Tales* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), p.107.

³³ Derek Pearsall, ‘Chaucer’s Pardoner: the death of a salesman’, *Chaucer Review* 17 (1983): 361-2.

bottomless pit into which all things vanish: 'I wol have moneie, wolle, chese, and whete...of the poverest wydwe in a village,/ Al sholde hir children sterve' (VI.448-51). As Carolyn Dinshaw writes, he seems to manifest himself as 'an enormous lack, an unquenchable *cupiditas*', seemingly lacking any substance of his own.³⁴ He is also scattered, not anchored to any firm centre but dispersed throughout 'sondry landes' and 'every toun' (VI.443, 453). He is primarily an absence of identity, possessing no cohesion or even selfhood. The point of this, as Alfred Kellogg pointed out some time ago, is probably to evoke the Augustinian view of sin as non-being, 'nec illa effectio sed defectio': according to this idea, the Pardoner is presented as an absence in order to suggest his separation from God, the *summae essentiae* or 'summit of being'.³⁵ But what makes this significant here is that his imperviousness to violence clearly extends out of this general nothingness. It is after all the incompleteness of his body, the points at which it is absent and unformed, that allows him to remain insusceptible to even the threat of mutilation. This in turn highlights the *Beryn*-poet's radicalism in his treatment of the Pardoner. By directly subjecting the Pardoner to violence, by allowing his body to be beaten and injured, the text comprehensively rejects Chaucer's portrayal of the figure as nebulous and indistinct. It instead considers him something tangible and concrete, an object that can be reached and struck. The *Prologue* is able to convert Chaucer's purely symbolic, 'ritual' violence into definite injury because it rethinks the Pardoner himself, making him into something determinate and solid.³⁶

This further manifests itself in the functions that the violence performs here. Throughout the poem, violence tends to be used in a markedly definitive, even diagnostic manner. To adopt a phrase from Walter Benjamin, aggression here might be said to 'prepare the body for emblematic purposes', as the wounds its narrator inflicts on the Pardoner

³⁴ Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p.162.

³⁵ Alfred L. Kellogg, *Chaucer, Langland, Arthur: essays in Middle English literature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1972), pp.245-68; St. Augustine, *City of God Against the Pagans*, Loeb Classical Library 411-7, 7 vols (London: William Heinemann, 1957-1972), IV (1966), pp.10, 32.

³⁶ John M. Bowers, "'Dronkenesse is Ful of Stryvyng": alcoholism and ritual violence in Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*", *English Literary History* 57 (1990): 757-84.

are invariably symbolic in nature.³⁷ This process is in fact stated quite candidly in the poem. At one point the paramour boasts that his blows have made the Pardoner identifiable as a disturber of the tavern's peace: he declares that the interloper 'bereth a redy mark/ Wherby thow maist hym know', meaning that he should be visible among the guests in the morning (612-13). As this comment makes clear, injury here is designed to demarcate its victim, fixing a definite and recognisable value to him. This pattern is sustained throughout the text, as the wounds it portrays tend to have clear moral resonances, evoking the sufferer's crimes. For instance, the first blow the paramour gives the Pardoner lands on a part of his body which recalls his habitual profiteering: his staff is said to be 'leyd...on his bak,/ Right in the same plase as chapmen bereth hir pak' (525-26). These mercantile connotations of course recall the Pardoner's attempts to hawk his wares after his sermons, to persuade all-comers to 'unbokele anon thy purs' (VI.945). In effect the *Prologue* uses the blow to transmit a moral judgement, stamping the Pardoner's body with his wrongdoing, inscribing his avarice on to him.

Nor does the *Prologue* restrict its inscriptions to this injury alone. Other instances of violence in the poem also serve to mark the Pardoner as a specific type of sinner. For instance, when he is forced to lie 'adown his hede/ In the dogges littir...under a steयर', where he is mauled by the litter's occupant, a similar definition is at work (633, 645-46). By entering this space, he is effectively placed within a classification: he is drawn into a compartment designed to hold specific contents, an area with an overt categorising function. Again, his installation into this field directly reflects his misbehaviour, since earlier that night he is said to have 'scraped the dorr welplich' while seeking access to Kit's lodgings (482). Being forced to take shelter in a domain reserved for dogs, where he is bitten by a dog, commemorates this misconduct. Becoming canine also reflects his broader crimes, as the dog often symbolises chronic venality in medieval iconography, following Proverbs 26.11 and 2 Peter 2.22. As one thirteenth-century bestiary states: 'when a dog returns to its vomit, it signifies those who fall into sin again after confession'.³⁸ Stephen Harper detects further

³⁷ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osbourne (London: Verso, 1998), p.217.

³⁸ *Bestiary: Oxford MS Bodley 764*, trans. and ed. Richard Barber (London: Folio Society, 1992), p.77.

resonances at work here as well, arguing that the Pardoner's consignment to the dog's bed also suggests folly, allowing him to be linked with the stereotypical figure of the madman in medieval romance.³⁹ At any rate, it is clear that violence in this text serves to spell out each of the Pardoner's crimes on his body, as the *Prologue* mutilates the Pardoner in order to assess and label him. Aggression in the poem, in sum, is not the simple knockabout comedy it might appear, but something closer to moral satire, as violence is serving as a vehicle for evaluations and judgements.

Once again, this shows a fairly comprehensive rejection of Chaucer's precedent, as it highlights a clear difference in satirical technique between the two authors. As has often been noted, Chaucer's satire against the Pardoner works in an allusive rather than condemnatory way. It operates largely by inference, giving only what E.T. Donaldson calls an ironically 'tolerant' treatment of the figure, rather than offering any firm assessments of him, or seeking to 'moralize' or 'ameliorate' his offences.⁴⁰ In effect, Chaucer's presentation of the Pardoner gives us an image of a sinner without pinning down his exact sins, casting him only as a vague malevolence. In the *Prologue*, however, this same figure has been transformed into something more definite, an object that can be readily punished and appraised. Again, it is the revision to his body that permits this: insisting on his physicality not only provides a surface on which valuations can be made, but also undoes the dispersal that Chaucer associated with him, as his incomplete body is one means by which this is registered. Quite obviously, the *Prologue's* engagement with the Pardoner is not a simple echo of Bailly's 'rude reference to the Pardoner's coillons': the later poem is more decisive and castigatory, demanding that the figure should be opened up to firm appraisals, and using violence on his anatomy to achieve this.

What the *Beryn*-poet's treatment of the body calls attention to, therefore, is his overall solidification of the Pardoner. The later poet has

³⁹ Stephen Harper, "'Pleyng with a 3erd': Folly and Madness in the Prologue and 'Tale of Beryn'", *Studies in Philology* 101 (2004): 299-314 (p.302).

⁴⁰ E. Talbot Donaldson, 'Chaucer the Pilgrim', *Chaucer Criticism*, ed. Richard Schoeck and Jerome Taylor, 2 vols (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1960-61), I (1960), p.10; George Lyman Kitredge, 'Chaucer's Pardoner', *The Atlantic Monthly* 72 (1893), pp.829-30.

rendered the figure more determinate not only in bodily but also in semantic terms, by the simple manoeuvre of opening him up to violence. These details thus reveal what might be termed a general policy in the poem as a whole. The boundaries that Chaucer deliberately muddies or even collapses in his treatment of the Pardoner are emphatically reasserted in the *Prologue*. Rather than permitting him to stand outside sets of categories, outlines are forcefully drawn around the Pardoner in the later text, both bodily and moral. Ultimately, the *Beryn*-poet does not seem to have chosen the Pardoner for the figure's intrinsic magnetism, but in order to re-impose on to him the classifications he appears to evade.

The question of sexuality can be accommodated within this general approach. As has been repeatedly stressed, the reason why the sexuality of the Pardoner has provoked such discussion is not that it is a 'secret', as Curry termed it, quietly conveyed through allusion and innuendo alone; rather, it is that Chaucer gives an overabundance of information about the figure's practices and preferences, which leaves it impossible to impose any single category on to him.⁴¹ As Monica Alpine writes in what has become a classic meditation on the issue, what we are offered are a series of 'options...for the interpretation of the Pardoner', which even Chaucer's narrator seems unable 'to decide between'.⁴² He is simultaneously characterised as a 'geldynge', implying castration, whether congenital or surgical; as a 'mare' (I.693), implying sodomitic activity; as a 'hare', apparently combining male and female anatomical features (I.684); as a pursuer of 'a joly wenche in every toun' (VI.453); and even as a prospective husband in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, 'aboute to wedde a wyf' (III.163). He is, then, at one and the same time impotent, homosexual, hermaphroditic, and both promiscuously and monogamously heterosexual. His desire is not restricted to one, untrammelled set of proclivities but veers in several directions: he is, it might be said, an embodiment of the 'queer' as described by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender or anyone's sexuality aren't made or can't be made to signify monolithically'.⁴³ The

⁴¹ Curry, *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences*, p.54.

⁴² Monica McAlpine, 'The Pardoner's Homosexuality and How It Matters', *PMLA* 95 (1980): 8-22.

⁴³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.7.

Beryn-poet, however, by portraying the Pardoner as a womanizer, has entered into this host of competing possibilities and firmly selected one. Once again, the text can be seen to take the problematic figure it has inherited and render him more decisive and clear-cut. Here it actively makes the decisions that Chaucer suspends, reinforcing the distinctions he has overloaded, and finalising the indeterminacies that 'the multiplicity of his body...proliferates'.⁴⁴ The revision of the Pardoner into 'a randy, if silly, heterosexual' is therefore part of a wider tendency in the text, part of its project of re-establishing the categories and boundaries that the original figure has occluded, especially those relating to his body.

But all this raises the obvious question of exactly why the Pardoner should have required redressing in this way, and why the *Beryn*-poet felt it necessary to restate the boundaries he collapses. A possible key to this lies in one further set of divisions that Chaucer's Pardoner compromises, those defining the role of priesthood itself. There are numerous direct, albeit implicit references to his unclear social position in the *Canterbury Tales*: for instance, the pilgrims' uncertain expectations when the Host invites him to speak suggest their difficulty placing him, as to their minds he is as likely to deliver a story of 'ribaudye' as 'som moral thyng' (VI.323-24). There is also some suggestion that pardoners as a group were totemic of such ambiguity, as they existed 'on the periphery of the church's structures', with 'no formal place in its hierarchy, no rank in clerical orders'.⁴⁵ But what is more important is how Chaucer creates this sense of confusion. The Pardoner's clerical status is presented in much the same manner as his sexuality, being overdetermined to the point of contradiction. As the critical debate surrounding his station has highlighted, his locus in the church is extremely difficult to establish. At various points he seems to be a friar who refers to 'my bretheren' (VI.416), an Augustinian canon wearing the customary 'cappe' or biretta of the order (I.685), and a secular priest or 'noble ecclesiaste' who is able to participate legitimately in 'an

⁴⁴ Lailla Abdalla, "'My body to warente...': Linguistic Corporeality in Chaucer's Pardoner", *Rhetorics of Bodily Disease and Health in Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. Jennifer C. Vaught (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp.65-86 (p.80).

⁴⁵ R.N. Swanson, *Indulgences in Late Medieval England: Passports to Paradise?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.181. See also Nicholas Vincent, 'Some Pardoner's Tales: The Earliest English Indulgences', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002): 23-58 (p.26).

offertorie' (I.708-10).⁴⁶ Elsewhere he seems to be positioned no higher than minor orders, being apparently 'about to take a wyf'; at other points still he seems to be a layman, who by his own admission merely stands 'lyk a clerk in my pulpet', resembling a priest without actually being one (VI.391).⁴⁷ It is not only in terms of his body and sexual identity that the Pardoner proves elusive and uncategorisable, therefore, as his physiological ambiguity echoes and is supported by his uncertain status within the church. He proves difficult to classify in social as well as sexual and biological terms.

This gains further significance from the fact that the *Beryn*-poet seems to have equated the Pardoner's bodily and social instability, responding to them in much the same way. His installation of the Pardoner into a more readily definable anatomy is accompanied by a comparable revision of the Pardoner's social and professional status. Again the *Beryn*-poet latches on to one of the many options Chaucer indiscriminately sets up, and fits his Pardoner into one firm classification alone. Throughout the later text the Pardoner is repeatedly described as a 'clerk'. This is particularly emphasised in his dealings with Kit: she, for instance, pleads to him through her chamber door that he make his speech to her 'nat over queynt, thoughe ye be a clerk' (349). He even takes it on himself to show off his learning to her, offering to interpret her recent 'sweven', and evoking the authority of 'Seynt Danyel' in the course of this (106).

⁴⁶ On these issues, see for instance Joseph Spencer Kennard, *The Friar in Fiction* (New York: Brentano's, 1923); Henry Barrett Hinckley, *Notes on Chaucer* (New York: Haskell House, 1964), p.45; Marie P. Hamilton, 'The Credentials of Chaucer's Pardoner', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 40 (1941): 48-72 (p.62); Clarence H. Miller and Roberta Bux Bosse, 'Chaucer's Pardoner and the Mass', *Chaucer Review* 6 (1972): 171-84 (p.173).

⁴⁷ George F. Reinecke, 'Speculation, Intention and the Teaching of Chaucer', *The Learned and the Lewed: Studies in Chaucer and Medieval Literature*, ed. Larry Dean Benson and Bartlett Jere Whiting (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp.81-94 (pp.89-90); John M. Manly, *Some New Light on Chaucer* (New York: Peter Smith, 1951), p.129; Paul E. Beichner, 'Chaucer's Pardoner as Entertainer', *Medieval Studies* 25 (1963): 160-72; Leger Brosnahan, "'And Don Thyn Hood" and Other Hoods in Chaucer', *Chaucer Review* 21 (1986): 45-52; J.J. Jusserand, *English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages*, trans. Lucy Toulmin Smith (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1921), pp.421-36.

To drive home this point further, a network of allusions also ties him to various clerk figures from the *Canterbury Tales*. His resemblance to Absolon, the thwarted seducer in the *Miller's Tale*, has been noted at length by Frederick Jonnassen and others, but there are also insistent links to Absolon's rival Nicholas.⁴⁸ The Pardoner's tactile method of introducing himself to Kit recalls Nicholas, as he grabs 'hir by the myddill' (25) just as Nicholas seizes Alisoun 'harde by the haunchebones' when making his adulterous intentions known to her (I.3279). Beyond the *Miller's Tale*, he also gives his name as 'Jenken' (62) in a probable echo of the Wife of Bath's final husband, 'this joly clerk, Jankyn, that was so hende' (III.628). He is further connected to this figure by Kit's claim that 'ye clerkes con so much in book,/ Ye woll wyn a womman atte first look' (343-44), a line which recalls the Wife of Bath's comment on the romantic utility of academic discourse: 'so wel koude he me glose...that he wolde han my love anon' (III.509-12). The fact that Kit lures him by relating a dream 'that I myselff did mete this nyght' also recalls the means by which Alisoun ensnares Jankyn (101), with her own bogus dream of a bed 'ful of verray blood' (III.579). All of these echoes seem designed to embed him further in minor orders, attaching him to Chaucer's own clerks. This might also explain some of the restrictions the *Beryn*-poet puts on the Pardoner's behaviour. Throughout the *Prologue*, the figure does not arrogate any of the powers of a fully beneficed priest, as he does in Chaucer's text. At no point does he try to preach or offer absolution, and 'nowhere is there the slightest reference to the Pardoner as a self-enriching purveyor of indulgences and exploiter of sham relics'.⁴⁹ His behaviour remains, in other words, within the limits that minor orders demand, rather than infringing on the secular orders. Just as the Pardoner's queer body is compressed into one category, his shifting status is also fixed into one distinct 'degree'.

What makes this all the more important, especially in light of the critical reception of the *Beryn Prologue*, is that the text's imposition of heterosexuality on to the Pardoner is clearly bound up with this revision. Not only does it follow the same general pattern, with the *Beryn*-poet

⁴⁸ Frederick B. Jonnassen, 'Cathedral, Inn, and Pardoner in the Prologue to the Tale of Beryn', *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 18 (1991): 109-32; Melissa Furrow, 'Middle English Fabliaux and Modern Myth', *English Literary History* 56 (1989): 1-18 (p.12); Darjes and Rendall, 'Fabliau in the *Prologue to the Tale of Beryn*', p.419.

⁴⁹ Bowers, 'Canterbury Interlude: Introduction', p.57.

honing in one of the several options with which Chaucer surrounds the Pardoner, but this de-queering also serves to shore up the figure's clerical status. After all, since the First Lateran Council of 1123, with its stark declaration 'absolutely forbidding priests, deacons or subdeacons from living with concubines or wives, and cohabiting with other women', the only group of clerics who were not expected to remain celibate were those in minor orders.⁵⁰ Indeed, the sexual appetites of clerks were virtually proverbial, especially in the fabliau tradition which the author is employing: as Charles Muscatine and others have repeatedly noted, clerks are 'so often the erotic heroes of fabliau triangle plots' that their libidinous behaviour seems almost to be a generic requirement of the form.⁵¹ The Pardoner's shift into heterosexuality can therefore be seen as a further method by which he is marked as a clerk, a further technique for fitting him securely into this category. The treatment of sexuality here, in short, both mirrors and reinforces the treatment of the Pardoner's status in relation to the church. Rather than being a separate manoeuvre carried out by the text, it is part of a network of modifications which seek to confine this wayward figure into a definite social group.

All of this returns us to the question raised at the beginning of this paper, again raising the issue of exactly why the *Beryn*-poet should single out the Pardoner for this treatment, and why he should approach Chaucer's original creation from such a corrective, even anxious point of view. What his desire to contain the Pardoner serves to do, ultimately, is remind us that the two poets were writing in very different circumstances. Although only twenty years at the most separate Chaucer and the *Beryn*-poet, in that time a series of anti-Wycliffite statutes had altered the conditions in which vernacular texts could be produced and circulated: as Anne Hudson and Nicholas Watson have documented in particular, such measures as Archbishop Arundel's *Constitutions* and its secular counterpart Henry IV's *De Haeretico Comburendo* effectively organised vernacular literature into two polarised camps, marking a clear boundary between acceptability and

⁵⁰ 'Presbyteris, diaconibus vel subdiaconibus concubinarum et uxorum contubernia penitus interdicimus et aliarum mulierum cohabitationem': Henricus Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum et Definitionum* (Wurzberg: Sumptibus Stahelianis, 1856), p.185.

⁵¹ Charles Muscatine, *Medieval Literature, Style and Culture* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 1999), p.164.

unorthodoxy.⁵² While it would be naïve to treat these measures as a monolithic influence on early fifteenth-century culture, since their practical effects seem to have been much less severe than their potential implications, as Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and others have recently observed, it is nonetheless clear that the *Beryn*-poet was sensitive to these new pressures.⁵³ As Bowers and others have shown, numerous aspects of the text show the poet responding to the demands of orthodoxy.⁵⁴ This is perhaps most blatant when Harry Bailly silences a discussion of the cathedral's stained glass amongst the pilgrims, barking 'Pese!...Let stond the wyndow glased./ Goth up and doth your offerynge' (157-58). In effect Bailly has suppressed a debate on religious imagery of the kind characteristic of Lollardy, urging that a display of traditional, material piety take its place. These concerns might also register in the poet's emphasis on the authority and essential unity of the existing church. At one stage he separates the regular and secular clerics into their own distinct company: following their devotions at the shrine, the Monk, Parson and Friar head off to drink 'spyces and eke wyne' with one another, going 'forth togider, talking of holy matere' (275, 279). The point of this otherwise implausible gathering seems to be to present the church as a harmonious body, replacing Chaucer's vision of a fractious clergy with a seamless unit in which each member is a 'frende...met in fere' (277).

⁵² Anne Hudson, *Premature Reformation: Wycliffite texts and Lollard history* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp.390-445; Nicholas Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: vernacular theology, the Oxford translation debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409', *Speculum* 70 (1995): 822-64.

⁵³ Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Books under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late-Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006). See also Katherine C. Little, "'Books ynowe": Vernacular Theology and Fourteenth-Century Exhaustion', *English Language Notes* 44 (2006): 109-12; Linda Georgianna, 'Vernacular Theologies', *English Language Notes* 44 (2006): 87-95; David Lawton, 'Voice After Arundel', *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Kantik Ghosh and Vincent Gillespie, *Medieval Church Studies* 21 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp.135-52.

⁵⁴ John M. Bowers, 'The Tale of Beryn and The Siege of Thebes: alternative ideas of *The Canterbury Tales*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 7 (1985): 23-50; Ben Parsons, "'For my synne and for my yong delite": Chaucer, the *Tale of Beryn*, and the Problem of Adolescentia', *Modern Language Review* 103 (2008): 940-51.

The treatment of the Pardoner and his body are best seen as an extension of these concerns. The fact that he is not associated with opportunistic, unlicensed preaching seems to be in direct deference to the *Constitutions*, which had made this into an especially loaded issue. The first and second articles ordain that ‘no-one whether secular or regular with insufficient approval is to preach the word of God by written law...to the people or to the clergy in any way, in Latin, or in the vernacular, within a church, or in its grounds’.⁵⁵ The Pardoner’s relative silence in the later text tacitly echoes this requirement, nullifying an aspect of his behaviour that the statutes had made problematic. But more importantly, the poet’s insistence on the Pardoner’s status also seems to be responding to Arundel’s articles, as it reflects their concern with the division between cleric and layman. In his third article Arundel specifically prescribes what may be discussed before lay congregations and what may be put before clerics, fixing a clear point of separation between the two groups. The relevant section holds that ‘to clergymen, one will specifically preach of the faults which spring forth among them, and to laymen of the sins they commonly commit, and not the other way around; if anyone goes beyond this dictate in preaching, he will be severely punished by the canon of that place’.⁵⁶ The confusion of the lay and clerical estates that the Pardoner represents in Chaucer had clearly become more vexed in the decades following his death, as the new statutes did their utmost to reassert this same distinction. The *Prologue*’s consolidation of the vague, disparate figure he had inherited from Chaucer therefore appears to be an attempt to contain him along the lines the new legislation demanded. The Pardoner’s body, sexuality and estate are more explicitly drawn in this later text in order to impose on him the same limits demanded by Arundel’s clampdown on writing in English.

As a result, the *Beryn*-poet’s de-queering of the Pardoner refers us back to the shifting climate of fifteenth-century vernacular culture, with its

⁵⁵ ‘Quod nullus secularis aut regularis ad praedicandum verbum Dei a jure scripto minime auctorizatus...populove aut clero quovismodo praedicet, in Latine sermone, vel vulgari, in ecclesia, aut extra’: *Consiliae Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae*, ed. David Wilkins, 3 vols (London: Sumptibus R. Gosling, 1737), III, p.316.

⁵⁶ ‘Clero praesertim praedicans de vitiis pullulantibus inter eos, et laicis de peccatis inter eos communiter usitatis, et non e contra; alioquin sic praedicans secundum qualitatem delicti, per loci ordinarium canonice et acriter puniatur’: *ibid.*

desire to re-establish the bounds challenged by rising lay literacy and heresy. The poem is the result of a writer attempting to bring his work, possibly even that of Chaucer himself, within the bounds of orthodoxy as he saw them. In sum, this aspect of the text challenges two critical myths about its author's engagement with Chaucer. On the one hand, he is clearly not seeking to offer a naïve extension or reprisal of the *Canterbury Tales*: his work seems to be motivated by something closer to anxiety or horror, focusing on a figure that has become particularly troublesome, and forcing him back into the limits of acceptability. On the other hand, it also shows that sexuality is not an element that can be isolated from the rest of the text and placed under a bell-jar, as it is anchored in a wider nexus of meaning. It is of course interesting that the *Beryn*-poet implicated sexuality in his reinterpretation, something perhaps born out of the easy linkage between 'herites et sodomittes' in medieval culture. Nevertheless it should not be forgotten that it is merely an aspect of a wider revision of the Pardoner, not a separate strategy in its own terms.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Jean Froissart, *Oeuvres de Froissart*, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove, 25 vols. (Osnabruck: Biblio Verlag, 1967), II.87-88. See Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), pp.55-99.