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Final Project - Creative

The Pardoner's Prologue

Drunk off the liquor heartily poured,
the group took a long, thoughtful pause
digesting the tale the Miller crafted.
As they walked along to Canterbury,
the host longed to quell the quiet that had settled.
"I have a tale to tell."
the Pardoner spoke,
reaching for another of his fine cheeses.
"Well, my friend,
where shall we expect to be swept away?"
the host eyed the Pardoner,
who was now tossing coins
back and forth
and back and forth
between his palms.
"To that, I cannot say.
But I must warn you all of this -

Do not be easily swayed by men of
noble positions.
Nor by attractive treasures beyond your wildest dreams.
Lest you be swept away
by naivety like the dear John of our past.
Men like our knight in shining armor,
I do wonder how it is polished so bright
especially with the lingering war raging on.
But no matter,
for this tale that I should tell
is the most pious,
the most honest,
the most humble."

The Pardoner's Tale

Here begins my pious tale

Once,
in the faraway town of Lille,
there lived a very strange man
in a very strange house
with a very strange beard,
and an even stranger reputation.
The man was infamous throughout his community -
not as one ought to be.

He was not particularly kind.

He was not particularly generous.

He was not particularly mean.

Nor was he particularly anything.

If he was, it was to be ignored,

for the man had a vibrant beard

that shone a magnificent shade of cerulean.

His face at once ghastly and fixating,

the man continued in his endeavors.

For he lived in a magnificent house of his own creation.

There were beautiful mahogany floors

and fireplaces in a grand living room.

There was intricate wallpaper

and light fixtures that seemed as though

they were plucked from the skies themselves.

The man worked tirelessly throughout his days

perfecting his castle,

trading through the village,

and spent all of his free time devoted

to the good lord's book.

The man decided that he had lived alone for far too long,

that the intricacies of his castle would go to waste.

So the man set out to town,
destined that he would come home with a new bride.

But alas, no money in the world
could hide that hideous cerulean beard.

So the man did what he could.

On the first night, he attempted to shave it.

Finally! His face freed from its unruly blue locks!

The man admired himself in the mirror
and decided to set out for a wife the following day.

As he awoke,

he stretched his limbs,

clamored out of bed,

and ambled to the washbasin.

Only to discover the cerulean beard back in full force.

However, the man was determined.

If he could not shave the beard,

what if he tried to hide it?

So the man set about his house,

looking for the finest jewels he could.

Delicately, the man bedazzled his beard,

much like his house.

After hours of meticulous placing and weaving,

the man gazed at his reflection.

Diamonds, rubies, and emeralds glistened along the strands of cerulean.

The man smiled and set forth once more.

The man arrived at the house of a man he knew to
have three daughters.

The man had helped manage his estate years prior,
and hoped that he was willing to overlook his strange exterior.

The Reeve, knowing of the man's immense fortune,
granted the man one of his daughters in marriage.

"I have but one condition,"
said the Reeve,

"My daughters must decide among themselves
on who you will marry.

You must also agree to take care of all three
if one is in your care."

The man, having been alone for so long,
willingly agreed.

Alice, Emma, and Louise giggled amongst themselves,
pointing and fighting as to who would be this strange man's bride.

"I think I could do it if he would allow me all of the diamonds in his beard!"

Exclaimed Alice.

The other sisters giggled and agreed
and helped their sister prepare her things.

Within an hour, Alice and her new husband returned to his palace.

The man was quiet but quizzed her on her education thus far.

Alas, Alice was busy counting the diamonds strung to the man's cheek
to notice his intense questions continue.

As they arrived at the man's castle,
he lovingly took her on a tour of her new home.

She swooned over the fine china
and the elaborate grand piano.

And they lived together peacefully for the next two weeks.

The man invited all her friends to their matrimony
and doted on her constantly.

Her sisters were enthralled with the life their sister was now living.

Until one day, the man told Alice that he must go away on business
to collect money for the church.

He granted her the keys to every room and cupboard in the house,
telling her to throw as many grand parties as she pleased while he was gone.

"Please, my dear, I just have one request.

Do not enter the basement.

I am giving you the key,
as well as my most cherished bible,
and I will know if you have betrayed my wishes."

Although the request was rather odd,

Alice promised him his request.

The man quickly gathered his things and left their home,

and Alice wasted no time exploring the house once again.

Every nook and cranny was carefully inspected

except for the room in the basement.

But as the days continued,

the curiosity slowly began to eat away at Alice.

She cleaned,

she read,

she danced,

and she cooked.

But it was as if the basement was calling to her.

The key felt like fire in her hands,

and when she moved through the pages of her husband's bible,

it continued to spell out the same thoughts in her head.

After three days, she found herself just a few paces from the door.

Open the door.

Alice moved towards the door,

put the key in the lock,

then dropped her hand and turned away.

She paced away from the door,

upset at herself,

upset at her husband for doing this to her.

And then she turned around,

twisted the knob,

and swung open the door.

Alice gasped and dropped the bible onto the floor -

a sickening slap hit the floor as the aroma wafted through her nose.

The room was slathered with blood,

and the skulls of the man's past wives hung on display.

Alice gasped and tried to ground herself.

She grabbed the bible off the floor, dripping with blood

and ripped the key from the door and slammed it shut.

She ran upstairs to the bathroom,

desperate to scrub what she had just seen off.

"Alice, honey, I'm home!"

Alice's heart sank. She quickly turned off the light

and clung to her legs in the bathtub.

Thump. Thump. Thump

The man slowly made his way up the stairs.

"Alice? Are you alright? I just need my keys and bible, darling.

I miss you."

Thump. Thump. Thump.

"Alice. You need to answer me *now*."

Thump. Thump.

The man was standing outside the bathroom door.

Alice held her breath,

shaking violently as tears streamed down her face.

"Lord be my witness. Alice. Did

you

go

into

the

basement?"

Ba - Dum

Ba - Dum

Ba - Dum

Alice's heart was beating wildly

praying he would forget her promise.

She prayed it was all a dream

that she was still in her father's house with her dear sisters

The door creaked open as the man grabbed Alice,

as she tried to pry herself from his hold.

She tried to beat him with blood-stained hands,

crying as he dragged her closer and closer to the basement.

His cerulean beard radiated

as he started saying as many hail marys as he could.

Until he finally reached the basement.

Ba - Dum

Ba - Dum

Ba - Dum.

The next day, the man awoke bright and early in his empty bed.

He went about his usual morning routine.

He washed in the basin,

cooked a meager breakfast,

read some scripture,

and prepared crops for trading.

He carefully pulled each diamond from his beard

and replaced them with new onyx

gifted to him from a poor man in Venice.

He braided each gem into his cerulean beard

and then swiftly prepared his things to travel to the village.

The very strange man was once again left alone,

in his very strange house,

with his very strange beard

and his even stranger reputation.

The Pardoner's Epilogue

The Pardoner grinned wildly,

as he took another swig of ale.

"That was absolutely *vile*,

Pardoner."

The Wife of Bath glared at him

while he straightened his back and gazed into his cup.

"I don't appreciate the dig at me, sir.

Everyone knows Reeve's like myself

are far too clever to fall for the likes of someone

as outrageous as the man in your tale!"

The Pardoner shifted his items

but made no indication that he was listening to their cries.

Instead, he continued to hum quietly,

jingle the coins in his pocket,

and take small sips of the ale still in hand.

After a moment,

he spoke.

"Though it not my intention,

some tales that matter the most,

tend to upset quite a few in the process."

The host then quickly intervenes as more pilgrims

begin to process what the man said,

and then on they continued to Canterbury.

Critical Interpretive Argument

Throughout the Pardoner's original introduction, he is described as keeping false relics, so he can continue profiting from believers. According to Robyn Malo, false relics are remains of the saints (*The Pardoner's Relics (And Why They Matter the Most)*, 84). Religious men such as the Pardoner often kept these to allow pilgrims to witness heavenly remains and to be moved into religious fanaticism. Throughout my blue beard rendition, I have included these relics in the

form of jewels with which the man delicately decorates his cerulean beard. These relics have two main goals; the first goal is to distract the people with his enormous wealth, wealth so large he can cover his face in *diamonds*. The second goal is to conceal his horrifying nature - this is shown through his hideous blue beard.

Religion is something that Chaucer often criticizes in his tales, but never directly. A devout man himself, it is questionable whether he was entirely able to question religion as an ideology, but he spends much of his time parodying religious men who abuse their power. Chaucer's Pardoner's tale ends in a bloodbath similar to my own. It is clear that the Pardoner himself is upset at the notion he must tell a story that follows the strict guidelines of his religion, so he flips the narrative and tells a gruesome tale to the pilgrims. Pearsall says that "he is offended by the unwillingness of the 'gentils' to let him tell a tale of 'myrthe' and therefore deliberately gives an exaggeratedly diabolical view of himself so that they will not realize how foolish they have been" (Chaucer's Pardoner: The Death of a Salesman, 360). The Pardoner is an honest man - so honest he even tells the pilgrims that his relics are fake to get more money from the people he preaches to. Even after he reveals this, he tries to convince these pilgrims to view his fake relic and give him money.

Religious fanaticism still sweeps through our nation today, and it is clear that in both Chaucer's tale and mine, he is trying to warn these people about the dangers of blindly trusting men like himself. Just because he has devoted his life to God does not mean he is absolved from sin, nor is he unwilling to use religion to get what he wants. The jewels present in my tale are false relics. They shine brightly on the religious man's face, making the entire town believe him to be a simple and loving man. Alice herself falls for this line of thinking. She believes the man to be straightforward and refuses to look a little closer at the beard the man is trying to hide.

This denial is Alice's eventual downfall. She has convinced herself that these jewels mean her husband is an honest and open man. She spends little time actually getting to know him and simply believes what is on the outside, and when she falls for his treacherous trap, there is no one to save her. The Bible drips with the blood of all the women he has convinced to come home with him, and his cerulean beard is a slap in the face of the ugly monster he truly is.

The Bible itself is a false hope of man's nature. It plays a vital role in coaxing Alice into a false sense of security that religion tends to provide. A feeling that someone so devout cannot possibly have ulterior motives, nor would someone be so evil as to use this faith to convince them that they are safe. Chaucer makes it clear that the Pardoner does not care about the people of his tales, so instead of ending the tale with blue beard losing (which is typical), I have played into the Pardoner's belief that men like him can succeed, and that people of a lower class than himself are destined to fall into his pocket.

The Pardoner also spends a lot of time discussing the problems with money, yet is obsessed with it himself. This is why the man in my tale lives in an extravagant palace, can throw brilliant parties and is also supposed to be a simple religious man. In the Pardoner's prologue and epilogue, it is unclear whether or not the man understands the depth of his own tale. If he does understand it, then he is willingly leading the pilgrims to believe that he understands that his obsession with the materialistic takes him further away from God and piety. If he does not, it makes the pilgrims believe that maybe the tale is less satirical and more biographical. The pilgrims are aware of the Pardoner's obsession with money and reputation, and his epilogue seems to be a twisted representation of what the Pardoner believes is amusing.

The Pardoner is a clear-cut example as to the kind of men Chaucer despises. He is a representation of what is wrong with the religious men of the time, yet he encapsulates clear goals of the church itself. Malo states that "he can be thought of as a kind of private entrepreneur who tries to capitalize on a well-established system..." (The Pardoner's Relics (And Why They Matter the Most), 84). The man murders innocent women for fun to test them on their loyalty. This can be seen throughout religious extremists through centuries and would not be lost on Chaucer himself. As stated previously, he has commented extensively on people using religion to get them to a higher station in life. But what if religion was a part of that problem?

Throughout the Bible, God tests his people and their faith multiple times. Most notably, in the story of Issac, he asks Abraham to kill his own son as a show of faith and obedience. The man in my tale does the same. He brings these women into a life they could never dream of - they have a doting and loyal husband, jewels beyond their imagination, and all he asks is that they do not go into a single room in the palace, yet they consistently disobey. The man simply likens himself to God, the master of the people around him. The Pardoner does this deliberately. He is aware of the shortcomings of his religion and is trying to show the pilgrims that the religion itself is insecure and constantly needs reassurance.

Whether or not Chaucer would ever agree to this interpretation of his religious characters is unclear, but it is interesting to unravel his work in this way. The man was born when questioning the religion itself was dangerous and unheard of, which is why we only ever see Chaucer make fun of the people themselves. This religious fanaticism has led people into different kinds of sin, some as harmless as leading them away from the religion itself and some down a more bloody route, like the man in my tale.

This distraction and diversion are present throughout many of Chaucer's tales, and I wanted to do the same, even quoting before the story that this was the "most pious tale" that was going to be told on the way to Canterbury. Not only is this in line with the tales Chaucer has said before it, but it sets up the Reeve's tale brilliantly. In my version, the Reeve is now mad at the Miller and the Pardoner for making fun of men of his rank and will do whatever he can to get them back by telling a tale of a man who tries to cheat his way to the top, and is quickly knocked down. It is also essential that women and their autonomy are ignored in this tale, as the Pardoner himself disrespects women throughout every interaction, most notably the Wife of Bath, who finds this murder of women abhorrent.

Citations

Malo, Robyn. “The Pardoner’s Relics (And Why They Matter the Most).” *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2008, pp. 82–102. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25094420>. Accessed 28 Nov. 2022.

Pearsall, Derek. “Chaucer’s Pardoner: The Death of a Salesman.” *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1983, pp. 358–65. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25093852>. Accessed 28 Nov. 2022.