

The Pardoner's Tale

The Body and Its Politics in the *Pardoner's Tale*

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Introduction

Taken on its own, the *Pardoner's Tale* is an exemplary tale warning its audience against greed and the sins of the tavern: three revelers go out in search of Death to defy him, yet when they find a stockpile of riches instead of Death at the appointed place, they kill one another and unwittingly find what they were originally seeking. While its content is secular rather than biblical, it is the kind of stern tale you might suppose stereotypical medieval people might have heard at a pulpit. But the context around the *Pardoner's Tale* is anything but stereotypical or expected when we consider the teller of that tale. The Pardoner, a hypocrite guilty of the vices he preaches against, cares not about people but only the money he can make from them, which he accomplishes by selling access to holy relics that are actually shams, a deception I will describe in greater detail later. As if this quackery is not horrible enough, he proudly describes his deceptions to his fellow pilgrims, who would presumably value relics since they are on the road to visit St. Thomas Becket's enshrined bones in Canterbury, after all. He seems to prize not only conning his poorest victims to feed his own avarice but also disrupting the very meaning of the pilgrimage to Canterbury.

His character is further complicated by the attention Chaucer the narrator puts on his body. Scathing body humor is abundant in Chaucer's *General Prologue*. Consider the Reeve's skinny calves (GP 591-592), the Miller's furnace-like mouth (GP 559), or the Summoner's "fyr-reed" face (GP 623-633). All these bodily features are presented for our quick judgments that in turn affect how we view these characters' villainous personalities and problematic tales, thereby encouraging readers to link a flawed body to a flawed soul. Similarly, the *General Prologue's* narrator ridicules the Pardoner's body, but in the Pardoner's case, the narrator uses vague, pejorative hints that attack the Pardoner's masculinity—and assumes our complicity in laughing along and making the same link between the Pardoner's spiritual bankruptcy and his failure at being a "real" man. Readers might perceive the intended humor but also be more uncomfortable and suspicious of this line of attack than the narrator is. After all, in our own time, we have seen people precluded from the military, bathrooms, and other places because they were either not masculine enough or feminine enough. Society punishes difference. The Pardoner may offer a rare representation of a queer character—someone who does not fit the male/female binary in sex or gender presentation, or someone without a heterosexual orientation—and that representation

makes the narrator's intentions far more problematic, his voice of authority far more exclusionary than we would usually perceive from his normally gentle, even shy, bearing. The narrator and the other pilgrims do seem distinctly uncomfortable—even aggressively so, in the case of the Host—with the Pardoner's body in a way that might be recognizable today.

When having this discussion in class last fall, a student objected that we cannot use our modern understanding of gender or queerness, because that is anachronistic. This charge of anachronism is important to consider. It is also important to consider why this same student with his t-shirt and headphones did not feel any potential anachronism precluded him from discussing the Wife of Bath's fashion sense or the Miller's bagpipes—it is interesting to note when we readers suddenly tense up and fear we are bringing our century into the picture, as if locating our frame of reference muddies the waters. Does trying/pretending to be medieval give us a more genuine understanding of the Pardoner? Alternatively, does this so-called medieval perspective provide a means to avoid conversations of our own century? Some readers may believe the original artistic experience is the only authentic one, while others may believe that a work of art can live different lives and speak different truths across time.

Because of the debatable nature of these issues, the scholarship that seeks to understand the Pardoner is just as ambiguous and contradictory as the Pardoner himself. We will look at some of the scholarly views in this essay. Students new to Chaucer might be swayed by some of the authoritative voices here—both Chaucer's voices and the voices of scholarly discourse. However, I also want to turn attention to the Pardoner's own voice. He makes us aware that words carry power over the lives and well-being of others, and some people are more readily preyed upon than others—perhaps including himself. This heightened attention to authority and abuse underscores how much this discussion about the Pardoner matters. There are stakes involved in what we think and say about the Pardoner's body, whether we marginalize him, and what motivates that marginalization. What we say about his body might say something about ourselves.

Tools

Unlike any other Canterbury pilgrim, the Pardoner has a way of pushing our buttons yet inciting highly diverse, conflicting interpretations from his readers. In particular, one camp of readers foregrounds the Pardoner's body and/or sexuality as essential to a reading of his character and tale. Quite a different camp claims you cannot prove anything about his body or sexuality, and not much is said about either, so no use thinking much about such things—better to think instead of the abundant and dominant signs of the Pardoner's spiritual corruption, including preaching beyond his station and abusing his power as a dealer in fake relics without any compassion for his victims.^[1] This fork in the road yields massive consequences. Either way you cut it, reading Pardoner scholarship feels personal as well as scholarly and political, and there is a sense of high stakes in how we read that body or do not read it—and how we discuss the Pardoner in the classroom. There is room for both areas of exploration, but whatever camp you fall into, it seems problematic to argue in class that the Pardoner's potential queerness is irrelevant, anachronistic, or less important a topic than his spiritual depravity. Just because Chaucer shows apparent discomfort with the Pardoner's body does not mean we need to behave likewise, especially when this character is so deeply compelling for modern readers who see a marginalized body seeking

to be seen, a sexual minority struggling to be heard. The stakes feel high in preventing the Pardoner's erasure, and without dismissing the importance of the Pardoner's spiritual condition, his body merits attention.

So what do we know about his body? Character descriptions in the *General Prologue* usually yield insights into the tales that follow after, and this seems especially true of the Pardoner. Our first encounter of the Pardoner, however, is primarily aural rather than visual, as the Pardoner playfully sings a love song with the Summoner. His high, feminine voice, singing "Com hider, love, to me!" at full volume, complements his partner the Summoner's more masculine bass: "This Somonour bar to hym a stif burdoun"(GP 672-73). Although the phrase "stif burdoun" indicates a strong, low-pitched undersong accompanying the Pardoner's melody, the phrasing also could refer to the Summoner's stiff staff that he "bar" to the Pardoner. This gendered and sexually charged language, juxtaposed with the Pardoner's effeminate performance in this duo, suggests to some readers the men's homosexuality. The description then unfolds visually to an elaborate description of the Pardoner's long, pale hair hanging over his shoulders—as with his loud singing, he seems to display his effeminacy without shame rather than conceal it. Next, the narrator notes his "male" or pouch, bulging with the hood he refuses to wear and also pardons "al hoot" from Rome. This full pouch in the Pardoner's lap suggests some kind of joke at the Pardoner's expense, his compensating for his effeminacy by keeping his pouch front and center. From this point, the narrator openly questions the Pardoner's ambiguous sex, conveyed indirectly—and pejoratively—through comparisons to animals:

A voys he hadde as small as hath a goot.
No berd hadde he, ne nevere sholde have;
As smothe it was as it were late shave.
I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare. (688-91)[2]

In this portrait, we see not only his sexuality potentially questioned but his sex as well. If he is a gelding (a castrated horse) or a mare (a female horse), can he be called a man? For almost one hundred years, since Clyde Walter Curry proposed that there is a "secret" to the Pardoner's body that explains the physical "symptoms" listed in the *General Prologue* and the behaviors shown by the Pardoner later, readers have attempted to reveal or elaborate on this "secret" with medieval notions of sex and sexuality.[3] Besides Curry's claim that the Pardoner is a eunuch, readers have called the Pardoner, among other things, intersex, homosexual, heterosexual, feminoid, and a phlegmatic (this last term refers to a man rendered effeminate from the imbalance of his bodily humors).[4] Medieval medicine is often used to support such claims. For example, it was thought that the fetus's position in the womb determined sex characteristics—a fetus on the right side of the womb would become a masculine man or a masculine woman; the left side would produce a feminine man or feminine woman; the center would produce a person with both male and female sex characteristics (intersex).[5] Scholars have used such medieval understandings of gender and sexuality to explain the Pardoner's body.

More recently in queer scholarship, by which I mean scholarship that centers what is queer in literature rather than marginalizing or erasing that queer presence, readers have shied away from labeling the Pardoner's body with any specificity as this limits the Pardoner and how we read him, especially since, as mentioned before, nothing can be definitely proven anyhow. Carolyn

Dinshaw argues there is an unspecified but suggestive “lack” in the Pardoner; seemingly he lacks testicles, but he could alternatively be lacking in general manliness, and it is this figurative lack of manliness that matters in decoding his character.^[6] Another scholar, Robert S. Sturges, experimentally proposes holding all the conflicting possibilities into play—the Pardoner as both eunuch and intersex, heterosexual male womanizer and lesbian—in a kind of flux conducive to analyzing gender.^[7] This shift away from a defined body, however, puts queer readings somewhat uncomfortably in line with scholarship that shuns discussion of the Pardoner’s body, sex, and sexuality as unknowable and so unworthy of attention.^[8] Obviously sex and sexuality are important to queer readings, but if there is no distinct body, how are sex and sexuality embodied in the first place?

Of course, the Pardoner is a literary creation and hence not bound by the rules of real bodies: for comparison, consider the size of the monster Grendel in the Old English poem *Beowulf*. Grendel haunts King Hrothgar’s Danish court at Heorot year after year and feeds on his warriors. Heorot’s massive doors burst open by a mere touch of Grendel’s fingers, and he can pick up men to devour them, yet those same arms are outmatched by Beowulf’s grip. It is a logistics dilemma: how could Beowulf wrestle a creature of that size? Literature can be slippery that way, and the Pardoner is a literary creation in part derived from the allegorical character False Seeming in Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun’s influential thirteenth-century French text, *Le Roman de la Rose*. Allegorical characters might not require defined bodies, yet they often do, and their gender is a site of complex interest. Romance languages include masculine and feminine nouns, and since abstract nouns in Latin are typically feminine, so were their allegorical representations . . . most of the time. As Diane Watt points out, there were deviations, such as John Gower’s character Mort (Anglo-Norman for Death, feminine linguistically) whom Gower represents as a (predominantly?) male Death.^[9] Poets had choice in gendering a personification, even in queer ways, and Chaucer would possibly be aware of the gender ambiguity surrounding Death when he inserts his own Death into the *Pardoner’s Tale*. Even if we can never know for sure Chaucer’s intentions in regards to the Pardoner’s body, he probably had some (perhaps developing) notion of that body and the risks of having such a body.

Furthermore, it is worth pondering this medieval subject in light of the modern politicization of bodies, particularly bodies that depart from a normative gender binary of male and female, including trans and intersex bodies. Modern people in general see themselves as more civilized and socially evolved than the “dark” Middle Ages, but the Pardoner forces us to face such false pretenses, considering the bathroom laws in recent U.S. history and the high number of infants with atypical genitalia forced to undergo surgeries to comply with social norms.^[10] These politicized bodies show how precarious human rights are for people with bodies that are not deemed gendered in socially sanctioned ways. Key to this discussion is to keep our academic analysis of this medieval text from being insulated from those high stakes, thereby missing how potentially relevant these issues really are and losing awareness of potentially problematic language in our discussions of bodies. You do not have to read much scholarship to find exclusionary language and discomfort with the possible bodies of the Pardoner. Eunuchs have bodies typified in scholarship by “lack,” an assumed depravity, and compensation strategies because of this lack, without any acknowledgement that this language might be marginalizing to readers, students, and colleagues, considering the realities of testicular cancer or simply being born with such a body. The theory that the Pardoner is intersex^[11] has been dismissed as if such

bodies and the non-medieval medical terms scholars have used to make the argument are over-the-top and too odd to credit or consider—yet with one of every 2,000 babies born intersex, intersex people are a real part of society.^[12] Framing non-binary bodies as ridiculous, anachronistic, mythical, or sensational often perpetuates discrimination and erasure, potentially to people in our own classrooms. Most scholars no longer feel the need to “prove” the Pardoner to be intersex, gay, trans, or a eunuch, but offer up these possibilities for open discussion (some of which have been more well received than others). Pardoner scholars have begun to see the Pardoner’s powerful presence in modernity, the way his voice speaks to us not just then but now. As Steven K. Kruger commented, “our own readings, however historicized, are always in some sense a response to the current moment,”^[13] and in light of intersex activists bringing public awareness to harmful genital reconstructive surgeries on children and trans activists fighting for access to public spaces, it would be productive to see how the Pardoner contributes to the discussion of access, agency, marginalization, and the power to speak.

In the description of the Pardoner and later in his tale, we confront dichotomies with implied hierarchies—body and soul, fakes and relics, rhetoric and truth. With his body and his words, the Pardoner takes these reductive dichotomies and flips them, entwines them, and implicates his audiences with uncomfortable truths.

Text

The *Pardoner’s Prologue* before his *Tale* solidifies his moral culpability already hinted at in the *General Prologue*. However, whereas the narrator foregrounds the Pardoner’s body as effeminate and something to be ashamed of (a shame assumed in some scholarship), in his own *Prologue*, the Pardoner unabashedly foregrounds his body as a powerful instrument that masters tone and audience: “I peyne me to han an hauteyn speche, / And ryngge it out as round as gooth a belle” (PardP 330-1). If Chaucer comments on his goat-like voice as yet another marker of his problematic body, the Pardoner proudly focuses on his voice’s resonance and effectiveness, refined to practice his avaricious schemes and control his audience. He describes at length his skill and ease at persuading the gullible to be moved by his sermons and inspiring them to desire—and pay for his own profit—indulgences and sham relics. Relics are supposed to be a part of a saint’s body or personal belongings, but the Pardoner’s relics are pigs’ bones and other such debris made to appear like actual sacred objects. Relics are an important part of Pardoner scholarship, traditionally underscoring his lack of moral character and justifying the condemnation of the Pardoner’s soul—but also the condemnation of his body, which seems to compensate for his lack of masculinity with these strong symbols of spiritual power. Relics, being mere bones and such ubiquitous matter, do not seem inherently impressive, but Robyn Malo points out that there are two ways to convey their value: either with costly ornamental structures that convey the value of the unseen contents or the way the Pardoner rhetorically ornaments his fake relics to make them seem sacred.^[14] The Pardoner uses rhetoric to dress up his relics and perhaps also to dress up himself; while this strategy may seem par for the course in his practice of deceptions, it may indicate how he has learned to assign value to things society rejects, including queer bodies like his own, as M. W. Bychowski has argued.^[15]

The Pardoner’s rhetoric grants his body a purity that sets him apart from the corruption of the world. When he speaks about the sins of gluttony and drunkenness as the ruination of the body,

he is at pains to shed tears like the apostle Paul (PardT 529-31)—in other words, his body and “pitous voys” emulate the apostle’s speaking “ful pitously” and strengthen his association with purity and priestly wisdom, while he condemns sinners for their belly full “of dong and of corrupcioun,” foul-sounding at both of the body’s ends (531; 529; 535). He conspicuously couches his praises and critiques with the language of the body, and he implicitly aligns himself with the body of Christ, rent to pieces by those who swear oaths and drink and play at dice, even while he has just fortified himself with “a draughte of corny ale” before beginning his tale (PardP 456). He boasts of fleecing his listeners but frames his own body as meek yet attacked—a hypocritical stance, yet haunting in light of his sex and sexuality.

His rhetorical skill underscores the age-old suspicion that rhetoric is ornamental but false and divided from philosophical truth.^[16] A living example of the dangers of rhetoric, the Pardoner shows no remorse for conning his relic-revering victims and abusing the pulpit he preaches from. His words are lies, as he freely admits: he tells “an hundred false japes” (394) while his head bobs like an innocent dove’s. He seems pure, but

Thus kan I preche agayn that same vice
Which that I use, and that is avarice. (427-28)

Why is he telling us all this, though—why so truthful about his falseness? Is rhetoric undermining truth or revealing it? While his boasting is a common trope that typically would condemn him, his implicating disclosure points out the ambiguous truth-value of his sermons and “moral tale.” Can a tale be moral if told by an immoral teller? Received knowledge since Cicero is that an orator must be a wise and good man, or else his eloquent words are compromised and severed from virtue.^[17] While the medieval Church separated the impurities of the preacher from the pure word of God being preached, rending the Pardoner technically accurate in that he can tell a moral tale despite his own immorality, the Pardoner oversteps these boundaries by openly declaring his sinful intentions: “For though myself be a ful vicious man, / A moral tale yet I yow telle kan” (459-60).^[18]

With this background, his simple, if stark, “moral tale” becomes quite complicated. Three revelers, angered at Death, go in search of him after an old man tells them that Death can be found under a certain tree. At first, the old man’s advice seems far from the truth, because what they find is not Death but treasure, upon which they forget their original quest and murder one another duplicitously—a playful fight conceals murderous intent, and a drink of wine conceals the rat poison within. The conclusion has the feel of a cautionary tale heard at a pulpit to warn an audience against the protagonists’ vices. Even so, the oaths that rend the body of Christ, the dice, and even the drinking do not seem to doom these men fundamentally as much as their obsession to hunt down Death personified and put themselves in harm’s way. The Pardoner seems to mock them for their literal-minded, comic quest, yet he also includes the old man’s more tragic version of that same quest. No mere secondary character helping the murder plot to move forward, the old man seems to hold the emotional heart of the story. The Pardoner is sensitive to the old man’s frustration with his ancient, deteriorating body and to his despair at living. The old man and Death seem linked in provocative ways, as are these characters’ roles with gender. Death is a male, according to the rioters, but seems to be a “mooder” to the old man (PardT 729-37), if his Mother Earth as the grave and Death can be conflated. Death’s more feminine, maternal softness

subverts the overall moral that death is a terrible fate; for as the old man's story makes clear, it is more terrible to live in suffering, out of the reach of a mother's long-lost embrace, than to die. While the text deals in shifting genders, familial roles, and status (the rioters' male thief and traitor versus the old man's mother), this slippery personified Death is not the incestuous Death of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book II or even Gower's male/female Mort as much as it is the Death of British author Terry Pratchett's Discworld novels. Pratchett's Death is a scythe-bearing, physically clichéd figure who surprises us with his heartbreaking fatigue with his job. Pratchett loads the representation with social commentary conveying a nuanced blend of dry humor and cynical frustration with how things are in this life and after, cognizant that people go out of their way to cause misery and destruction to those they formally swear to live and die for "As though he were his owene ybore brother," while divine power does nothing redemptive or restorative, only continues impartially cycling lives into the grave (704). As Pratchett's Mort says, There is no justice. Just us.[\[19\]](#)

Similarly, the Pardoner's critique is despairing and comic when it comes to the corruption of human hearts and the despair of living in a spiritual vacuum beyond God's compassion. Maybe it takes a crook to know one and someone like the Pardoner to create such villainous characters, but most readers would find the Pardoner's corrupted yet sophisticated heart to be on an entirely different level than the foolish men who blunder their way to their deaths. Yet in a fashion, the Pardoner unwittingly stumbles upon shame, violence, and marginalization when he calls upon his pilgrim audience to repent of their sins and, while on their knees, receive the benefits of the (fake) relics in his *male* or pouch. Every reader has noticed that this is an odd strategy since he has already unmasked his avaricious, false practices to the audience he now hits up for money and for devotion toward the contents of his "male, / As faire as any man in Engeland" (920-1). There is some compulsion, perhaps, in playing this role, in being the "suffisant pardoneer" (932) whose wit and body has the means to redeem men's souls. This is where the "lack" argued by Dinshaw may come into play—his relics make up or stand in for the masculinity he is missing. He renders the scene yet more sexually suggestive when he invites the Host to "kisse the relikes everychon" and "Unbokele anon thy purs" (944-45). Is he just angling for the Host's money or is this invitation social or even erotic? And if it is such an invitation, does it bear upon the tale he has just told—is he seeking the thing that will undo him? Because one cannot defeat Death anymore than the Pardoner can expect the Host to kiss his relics: it is a quest that can only end one way. Badly.

The Host rejects the Pardoner's offer and points out the disconnect between the value the Pardoner assigns to his relics and the reality perceived by the Host: "Thou woldest make me kisse thyn olde breech, / And swere it were a relyk of a seint, / Though it were with thy fundement depeint!" (948-50). The Host would rather castrate the Pardoner:

I wolde I hadde thy coillons ["testicles"] in myn hond
In stide of relikes or of seintuarie.
Lat kutte hem of, I wol thee helpe hem carie;
They shul be shryned in an hogges toord! (952-55)

This insult silences the furious Pardoner and gives the Host the upper hand, but to some readers, the Host is implicated—for now the Host styles himself as a Pardoner of sorts, carrying his own

relics, namely the Pardoner's testicles. His parody perpetuates the possible erotic undertones, and the only way he dodges complicity with homosexuality is through the aggressive violence of his threat to castrate his road trip companion. Like the violent brethren of the *Pardoner's Tale*, the brethren on the road to Canterbury act out a script of violence ending in the deathly silencing of the Pardoner. True, the Knight stages a reconciliatory kiss between the Host and Pardoner, which suggests a positive reintegration of the Pardoner back into the fold of the pilgrims, yet the Pardoner does not speak another word but only gives the kiss required of him. As much as reconciliation would make the ending more comfortable to modern readers, the coercive nature of the Host's threat and then the imposed kiss and silent compliance cast a somber ending to a tale told by a man who unmasked himself arguably more than any other pilgrim on this pilgrimage.

Transformation

1. *The Pardoner's Tale* in Context: The Host famously threatens the Pardoner with castration at the end of his tale. Could there be any contextual significance to the Host's threat in light of the *Physician's Tale*, which ends with Virginia's father decapitating her? These two tales—so seemingly different on the surface—may carry deeper similarities in terms of power enacted over gendered bodies and narratives of self-justified male dominance. To what extent do Virginia and the Pardoner capitulate to or resist these narratives?
2. *The Pardoner's Voice*: The Pardoner may be a con-artist, but his voice is arguably the strongest of all the pilgrims, both in terms of his rhetorical skill and also for those qualities creative writers praise in a good voice, with every word revealing a rich and complex character. We can study that voice on its own or in relation to the Pardoner's body. Can we clarify that connection between body and voice? Do they work in sync or in tension with one another in regards to the Pardoner's performance? Why did Chaucer invest so much in this one character's language and body?
3. *The Pardoner's Body Today*: How is this discussion of the Pardoner's body relevant now? How do we talk about these issues of identity when many of the terms we currently use did not exist in the Middle Ages? When we position the Pardoner as other/different or as universal, what do we gain or lose by such explorations, and how would this positioning resonate or be in tension with discussions of LGBTQIA+ issues today?
4. **Creative writing/art project**: For this project, pick an artistic medium and explore an interpretation of the Pardoner: draw a portrait of the Pardoner, rewrite a scene from his point of view (for example, what went through his mind when the Host threatened castration?), or consider the Pardoner's subtext or physical reality as you compose dialogue for him with another Canterbury pilgrim in a scene off the books. Or try writing, from his point of view, the story he would have told if it were not for the pilgrims' insistence on "som moral thyng" ["some moral thing"] (PardP 325). Reread the text for guidance, but feel free to use a modern setting anywhere in the world, or a fantasy setting of your choice; you can fudge it with the window dressing or even core materials, but know where you are taking liberties, and why. [\[20\]](#) In my teaching of *Beowulf*, I have done an assignment in which students draw Grendel, and in post-discussion, we share images and explore two main trends: the extreme variation of his size (the range is justified in different parts of the poem), and (2) the sympathy the artist affords to him

based on facial expression and humane vs. monstrous features. I would expect similar results for an exercise on the Pardoner—his body and the sympathy the viewer has for him would vary. Which kinds of bodies elicit a viewer’s empathy, and which do not? How does the Pardoner speak to audiences today? How relevant is his body, really, and how should we frame it—should it be foregrounded or left blurry and protean in the background? A creative response differs from an analytical one, but the impulses that drive creative work can be complementary. It is good to remember that bodies drive character, and that all bodies participate in a culture with demands, expectations, and dangers.

Suggestions for Further Reading:

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Notes:

[1] See Benson (above). For the primary importance of spiritual crimes, see Minnis (above).

[2] Also, lines 675-9 describe the Pardoner's pale, long hair, and 684 describes the glaring eyes of a hare, an animal believed in medieval times to be intersex. See Rowland (1964) (above).

[3] See Curry Chapter Three, "The Pardoner's Secret," 54-70 (above).

[4] See Rowland (1979), McAlpine, Green, Howard, and Whitney (above).

[5] See Nederman and True (above).

[6] See Dinshaw (above).

[7] See Sturges (above).

[8] For example, Benson, 346.

[9] See Watt (above).

[10] In recent 2017 news regarding LGBTQIA+ rights, see Davis, Julie Hirschfeld and Cooper. For information on infant intersex surgeries and pressure on intersex people to show a socially sanctioned gender, see Davis, Georgiann (above).

[11] Today's intersex community prefers to be called intersex, but the now-marginalizing term "hermaphrodite" is the language often seen in medieval literary scholarship (no doubt for historical reasons, as this is the term used in the medieval texts themselves). I use the term intersex unless directly quoting a text using this language.

[12] I will be discussing this dismissal and the criticism against medical terminology in greater detail in a forthcoming article.

[13] See Kruger (above).

[14] See Malo (above).

[15] Bychowski makes an elegant point affirming the Pardoner's body, in that the Pardoner deals with pig bones and such refuse fit for the trash heap, much as his own body has been so harshly judged, yet he has made something of himself in spite of society's violence and scorn; likewise he has taken dismissed fragments and has built sacred objects of them. Bychowski's argument elides the Pardoner's financial schemes, but then again, society and much previous scholarship has so often elided everything about the Pardoner except for that moral degeneracy. See Bychowski (above). The piece carries added significance for its response to transphobic language that had occurred at the same conference:

<http://www.thingstransform.com/2016/05/genres-of-embodiment-theory-of-medieval.html>.

[16] See Copeland (above).

[17] Copeland, 124.

[18] Minnis, 125-130.

[19] See Pratchett (above).

[20] In a way, I have done this assignment myself. See my modern adaptation of the *Canterbury Tales*, Zarins (above). I had to make decisions I had avoided unwittingly as a scholar and teacher. Now I wish I had wrestled with those ideas sooner.



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