

The Pardoner's Tale:

Chaucer as a Storyteller with a Perspective of Relativity and a Value of Pluralism

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[Abstract]

The Pardoner's Tale mirrors Chaucer's relativistic attitude and pluralistic perspective. Chaucer recognizes the holistic way in which the perverse/the absence is an integral part of the dominant culture. He believes that truth or meaning also exists in the depraved and subordinate items of the binaries that the dominant culture has excluded. To reach the issue of morality and a certain truth, Chaucer presents another way of perversity through the Pardoner's narrative, rather than the straightforward and authoritative path. In addition, the Pardoner's narrative is a representative work in which the reader plays some part as co-author in constructing its meaning. A message or the meaning of a literary work is not decided by whether the work is true or the storyteller is morally good, but by the reader's intervention in it. In spite of the Pardoner's playful and deceitful voice that evokes laughter from the audience, "som moral thyng" lies underneath his deceptive words and frivolities. The moral truths in the Pardoner's narrative lie not in the narrator's authority, but in the reader's authority that enables him to construct the moral truths enclosed in the narrator's playful words and even his distorted texts.

Key Words: *The Pardoner's Tale*, Narrative Techniques, Reader's Role, Laughter, Morality

I. Introduction

As David Benson points out, contrary to his sermon full of the verbal tricks and empty ranting, the Pardoner's exemplum is a story of great moral force and makes "the audience close to evil without identifying with it."¹⁾ Considering the Pardoner's exemplum alone in terms of the reader's response to its morality without his Prologue and Epilogue, we can recognize the truth of the moral statement in his narrative without doubt on the narrator and his words. Furthermore, an audience expecting moral instruction from the reading of the exemplum cannot find the gap between the storyteller's intention of exemplifying the tavern sins and his story.

Unlike the omniscient and authoritative narrator of the moral tales in the *Gesta Romanorum*, however, the Chaucerian narrator, the Pardoner, manipulates another voice—the voice of performance—in addition to his "confessional"²⁾ and sincere voice in his exemplum. That is, the Pardoner adopts a polyphony of voices or verbal masks in telling of himself in the Prologue and in retelling the story of the treasure-finders that he has learnt by heart for his mercenary purpose.³⁾ A reader's response to the Pardoner's narrative, that derives from the narrator's manipulation of a dialogic voice, is quite different from the response or the attitude a reader takes in the moral tales in the *Gesta Romanorum*. An audience habituated to didactic and allegorical material would endorse the moral sermon on the tale, that the narrator preaches in the tales of the *Gesta Romanorum*, or he does not feel discomfort about its seriousness, though he does not agree with it. On the contrary, it is by intruding

playfulness into the Prologue and the Epilogue that Chaucer wants his audience to confront some sort of discomfort, before the audience listens to the tale unleashed by his narrator. Even the conflicting voices that the Pardoner-narrator assumes in his tale-telling drive the audience confused and make it difficult to construct the true meaning of his narrative and his intention.

But my point is that the mixture of playfulness and seriousness in the Pardoner's narrative voice reflects Chaucer's narrative tendency in dealing with the religious materials. That is, as I will explain in a more detailed way in the discussion of the confrontation between the Pardoner and the Host, rather than taking a single straightforward path insisted on by the Host and the gentlefolk in his way of approaching truth, Chaucer, as implied in the kiss between the Pardoner and the Host, takes the Pardoner's perverse path as another way to reach truth. Chaucer through the Pardoner's narrative constructs the closed and hierarchical binaries such as impotent Pardoner/virile Host, sterile Pardoner/vigorous "gentils," morally corrupted Pardoner/spiritually worthy Knight, reality/fiction, game/earnest, and falsity/truth. But he does not put his authority or value on the first items that had been long cherished in the dominant culture of his age, and he thinks of the second items as the integral part to the first ones. By removing the bar that divides the first (bad) from the second (good), Chaucer encourages his audience to understand the moral meaning or truth that lurks in the second items, for example, the Pardoner's playful voice and the falsity of his relics.

II. The Pardoner Vs. The Host in Terms of Narrative Viewpoint

Derek Pearsall has pointed out that “Chaucer removes from himself the burden of authority which lay upon the poet and which would tend to direct him, if he did not adopt disguises... into authoritative and dogmatic discourse concerning the Christian religion. There was no other authority from which the poet could claim to speak” (Pearsall 30). In order to free himself from the burden of authority, he is generally reluctant to assume the role of a moral preacher in his narrative concerning a Christian morality. Instead, by posing uncertainties and questions within the tale told by his narrator, he transfers the responsibility for constructing morality in the tale to his audience (Dillon 209, Vance 703). In short, Chaucer as a poet eschews the authoritative role of a preacher whose goal lies in indoctrinating a moral truth into his audience’s mind. By wrapping a moral truth with the envelope of a “fiction,” Chaucer encourages the audience to exert his own knowledge and judgment, independently of an untrustworthy narrator, in constructing a moral meaning or truth enclosed in a “fiction.” Likewise, in the Pardoner’s narrative, by refusing to present a closed moral imperatives directly through his narrator’s mouth, Chaucer frames the plain moral exemplum within a surrounding discourse that undermines its moral force, and he further urges his audience to defer judgment.

Before proceeding to the discussion of the *Pardoner’s Tale*, I want to focus on the *Physician’s Tale*, the immediate context framing the Pardoner’s narrative, in order to see the differences in the way of conveying a moral to a reader between two narratives and to reveal the Host’s point of view on a literary work and a world. The striking difference between the Physician and the Pardoner lies in that, unlike the latter, the former underscores the moral of his tale in a very heavy-handed way.

Through his earnest and authorial voice, the Physician apparently controls his reader's moral response to his narrative. But, as Dieter Mehl points out, Chaucer, as in the *Man of Law's Tale*, exaggerates the Physician's moralizing interruptions throughout the narrative in order to keep his audience distanced from his narrator's voice. According to Mehl, in spite of Chaucer's effort to distance his audience from the Physician's "fiction," one member of the pilgrim audiences, the Host, becomes so involved with the tale as to lose sight of the boundary between the fiction and the reality. The Host, falling into the dramatic illusion, curses the evil judge and bemoans the death of an innocent maid as if they were real people. Even the Host's over-involvement in and his excessive reactions to the Physician's "fiction" make him look absurd.

On the other hand, his response to a literary fiction implies his abiding concern about the absolute authority of a narrator and the moral teaching of a narrative; regardless of the implied author's intention to cast doubt on the Physician's moralizing voice, the Host's style of reading a literary work is to trust the authority of the Physician-narrator and to accept the narrator's moral judgments as his own without suspicion. It is not surprising at all that the Host's reading tendency of imposing truth on the narrative voice and of imbibing a closed moral imperative within the narrative clashes with the Pardoner's narrative style of revealing his moral perversity as a narrator and even the falsehood of his narrative. That is, instead of looking for a true meaning or wisdom hidden in a fiction (a metaphor), that is, in the Pardoner's false relics and false narrative, the Host as a leader of the pilgrimage does not accept the absence of truth and authority itself in the Pardoner's narrative and his relics.

From the moment the Pardoner takes his turn to tell a tale, we can find how different the Pardoner's point of view on a narrative is from the Host's. The Host,

overwhelmed by the Physician's sad story on a maid's death, demands the Pardoner to "Telle us some myrthe or japes" (319). Against the Host's demand, the "gentils" protest:

"Nay, lat hym telle us of no ribaudye!
Telle us som moral thyng, that we may leere
Som wit, and thanne wol we gladly heere." (324-6)⁴⁾

The Pardoner, conscious of a reader's response, agrees to the two contradictory demands and offers both mirth and morality simultaneously in his tale. To put this another way, the Pardoner, by using the envelope of "game" and "solaas," conveys his moral exemplum to us, and, unlike the narrator of the tales in the *Gesta Romanorum*, he does not want his pilgrim audience to accept it as a reality.

III. The Pardoner's "Som moral thyng" in His Performative Voice

The Pardoner's first words underline his consciousness of the tale as a fiction that is, a performance, that he has habitually presented for his own goal (Klitgård 31):

"Lordynges," quod he, "in chirches when I preche,
I peyne me to han an hauteyn speche,
And ryngge it out as round as gooth a belle,
For I kan al by rote that I telle. (329-32)

Even the Pardoner seems to be scornful of his gullible, "lewed" audiences that have

believed his performance as a truth, as implied in his disparaging asides. But, when the Pardoner manipulates his uneducated folk of the lower classes through his voice of “performance,” he is aware of the need to display “authority” and “earnestness” in each of his words and of his acts. Moreover, he looks confidently on his power over his “lewed” audiences and is excited by such power:

I stonde lyk a clerk in my pulpet,
And whan the lewed peple is doun yset,
I preche so as ye han herd bifoore
And telle an hundred false japes moore. (391-4).

But, when he addresses to his primary audience of pilgrims who, the Pardoner thinks, would not be hoodwinked by his performative voice, he exposes and even comments on his hypocrisy and his fake relics. Rather than forcing them to believe the “authority” of his words and the “faith” of his relics, as does in his manipulation of the uneducated audiences, the Pardoner simply lets his pilgrim-audiences enjoy his tale-telling about the people defrauded by his performative voice. As his narrative proceeds, however, the Pardoner’s distinction between his “confessional” voice addressed toward the pilgrim-audiences and his “performative” voice toward the “lewed” audiences blurs, and, as Maureen Thum points out, “the hypocrisy, stupidity and duplicity which he had attributed overtly and implicitly to the ‘lewed’ are also shared by the ‘gentils’” whom he flatters by confessing his true identity (266). In other words, since he recognizes that his pilgrim-audiences, unlike the “lewed” people, are not so easily hoodwinked,⁵⁾ the Pardoner, through his outrage frankness, makes them feel amused and superior, and feel sympathy toward himself, as they join in his condescension. But his outright self-revelation, as revealed in the voice-merging and his assault on the Host at the end of the tale, is so beguiling: on

the surface, forming an intimate and conspiratorial relationships with his pilgrim-audiences, the Pardoner, in practice, is trying for the same effects that he has intended for his uneducated audiences--his underlying contempt and his drawing money from their pockets. In short, while he has spit out his venom to his “lewed” audiences under the veil of holiness and authority (421-2), the Pardoner secretly unleashes malice to his pilgrim-audiences under the appearance of honesty and confession.

As Janette Dillon points out, rather than offer a truth or a spiritual instruction to his pilgrim-audiences, the Pardoner in the Prologue tries to seek his own pleasure that derives from “the gap between the falseness of himself as Pardoner-author and the authority of his text (Dillon 212).” Indeed, the Pardoner’s pleasure lies in the distance between the falseness of his intention (459-62)⁶⁾ and the authoritative texts such as Christ’s pardon, both letters and relics that he abuses and even makes a joke off or his own “coveitise.” The image of the dove on the barn that the Pardoner uses to describe his gesture of preaching before his audiences also strengthens the gap between the insincerity of the Pardoner and the authenticity of his text. As he parodies the true and spiritual power of Christ’s pardon and the holy relics through his performative voice, the picturing of the Pardoner stretching his neck out like a farmyard dove makes a joke on a true preacher and travesties the power of Holy Ghost.

By twisting such images as the dove sitting on the barn, associated with something Biblical,⁷⁾ the Pardoner offers “mirth” to his audience. On the other hand, his employment of the Biblical allusions throughout his tale provides his audience some sort of judgmental context from which to figure out his narrator’s words. That is, a moral truth inheres not in the narrator’s or the revelers’ fictional words, but scattered throughout the text. Like the Wife of Bath, the Pardoner throughout his

narrative twists to his advantage texts from Paul and other Biblical images (Peck 16-69). If we take a close look at his exemplum, it reveals that the Biblical images, especially the images of Christ and of Crucifixion, are inverted. The meeting place of three revelers is the tavern, the devil's temple, rather than the attic or the Church which is the place of communion for Christ's disciples. They set out on their mission to kill Death for eternal physical life. Inverting the image of Christ who conquers Death by his self-sacrifice, their quest, as Eric Stockton points out, is an unwitting attempt to usurp the function of Christ (Stockton 47). Appropriately, the role that the three questors expect to perform—"And many a grisly ooth thanne han they sworn,/And Cristes blessed body they torente—/Deeth shal be deed, if that they may hym hente!" (708-10)—represents an inversion of the Crucifixion. In addition to the inverted images of Christ and Crucifixion, the Christian concepts of brother hood and of the Holy Trinity are also reversed; they have sworn to "lyve and dyen ech of hem for oother" (703) and they have formed a trinity of body: "we thre been al ones" (696). But, ironically, they die "ech of hem for oother" not for the sake of love for the others but for their self-seeking lust. Moreover, the death of three revelers, the feast before their death, and the oak tree are associated with the Biblical images of a Communion, the Last Supper, and the Tree of Knowledge, the possible allusion to the Cross, respectively.

Accordingly, what an audience has to do is to trust his own knowledge obtained either from his own experience or from his previous reading. Chaucer throughout the Prologue foregrounds the deceitfulness of the narrator, and he forces his audience to recognize an independent authority in sorting out the words spoken by the narrator. But Chaucer does not preclude the possibility of an audience's earnest response to his tale. Although the Pardoner's playful and deceitful voice evokes laughter from the audience and leads him to failure in fulfilling his avaricious goal finally, "som moral

thyng” lies underneath the Pardoner’s deceptive words and frivolities. As the false relics that the Pardoner carries, regardless of his false claims for their effects, bring sinners to repentance in no doubt⁸⁾, the moral truths in the Pardoner’s narrative lie not in the narrator’s authority, but in a reader’s authority which enables the reader to construct the moral truths enclosed in the narrator’s playful words and even his distorted texts. In both cases, there is a common point that both the power of the Pardoner’s relics and that of his narrative come not from their author, but from the Pardoner’s audience, whose religious faith and reading perception respectively make real their authenticity. In this regard, a great difference between a Middle English tale of morality and Chaucer’s “tale of morality” exists. While, in a Middle English tale of morality, an audience follows the directions given by an authoritative narrator and endorses the narrator’s didacticism, the *Pardoner’s Tale* emphasizes the distance between the narrator [his true intention] and the texts that he has used for duping his audiences and lets the audience search for the moral truth for themselves.

IV. Conflict between the Host and the Pardoner

Not only in the Pardoner’s Prologue and Epilogue, but also even in the exemplum that exerts a great moral power on his readers, Chaucer wraps the moral issues through the inverted Biblical images and allusions. By doing so, he strengthens the power of moral teaching through the exemplum. Furthermore, instead of inculcating the moral issues into his reader’s mind directly, Chaucer urges us to find a morality hidden in the revelers’ frivolity, their “game,” as implied in the first rioter’s plan to kill the murder of the youngest:

Looke whan that he is set, that right anon
Arys as though thou woldest with hym pleye,
And I shal ryve hym thurgh the sydes tweye
Whil that thou strogelest with hym as in game,
And with thy daggere looke thou do the same; [Italics mine] (826-30)

Even when the first two have killed the youngest, they are still anticipating the mood of merriment: "Now lat us sitte and drynke, and make us merie,/And afterward we wol his body berie" (883-4). As such frivolous attitudes toward the serious issues of morality imply, Chaucer does not exclude, as I have mentioned earlier, the second items, such as "game," "merriment," "fiction," "falsity" and so on, for the emphasis of the moral issues. Chaucer's aim appears to lie in incorporating two contrasting items in a body without division or distinction between them.

As I have mentioned before the discussion of the Pardoner's narrative, we can explain the confrontation between the Pardoner and the Host and the scene of kiss by the Knight's intercession in terms of such notion of binary opposition. After he finishes his tale-telling on the theme of "*Radix malorum est cupiditas*," he singles out the Host as his target of attack:

I rede that oure Hoost heere shal bigynne,
For he is moost envoluped in synne.
Com forth, sire Hoost, and offre first anon,
And thou shalt kisse the relikes everychon,
Ye, for a grote! Unbokele anon thy purs."
"Nay, nay!" quod he, "thanne have I Cristes curs!
Lat be," quod he, "it shal nat be, so theech!
Thou woldest make me kisse thyn olde breech,
And swere it were a relyk of a seint,
Though it were with thy fundement depeint!

But, by the croys which that Seint Eleyne fond,
 I wolde I hadde thy coillons 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.” (941-53)

The Pardoner’s attack appears to be unmotivated. We can only suppose that the Pardoner’s malice against the Host stems from his perverse attitude toward human nature; the Pardoner with the “unnaturalness” of the male body bears envy and even anger against the virile and masculine man like Harry Bailly. About Harry Bailly we have been told:

A semely man Oure Hooste was withalle
 For to been a marchal in an halle.
 A large man he was with eyen stepe--
 A fairer burgeys was ther noon in Chepe--
 Boold of his speche, and wys, and wel ytaught,
 And of manhod hym lakkede right naught. (General Prologue 751-6)

Besides his absence of potency as man, the Pardoner’s sudden insult at the “virile” Harry Bailly⁹⁾ seems to derive from his jealousy of Harry’s moral authority, as shown in his response to the *Physician’s Tale*.

Of course, Harry retorts vehemently against the Pardoner’s personal assault, because he is singled out as the Pardoner’s target among the other pilgrims. Beyond this simple reason for his outburst, as implied in his fear of Christ and of the cross, and his verbal surgery against the Pardoner’s invitation to kneel and kiss his fake relics (946-55), Harry might feel that his true identity as a potent man and a moral Christian is threatened by the Pardoner whose physical “abnormality” and spiritual

“impotency” are irreconcilable to his own identity. That is, Harry believes that the transgressive power of the Pardoner’s appearance detracts not only from his attempts to establish his personal authority as a leader of the pilgrimage, but also from the unity and stability of the pilgrimage. Thus, by simply excising the perverse power of the Pardoner which derails Harry’s linear “pilgrimage to Jerusalem,” Harry attempts to seek the unitary body of pilgrimage under the name of order and stability. Glenn Burger comments that “Harry Bailly’s simplistic attempt to re-form the pilgrimage body by excising the Pardoner replicates the desire of relic worshipers to fetishize a part rather than a whole and thus falsely appropriate the meaning of the relic as their own (Burger 1150).” To put Harry’s attempt to seek an unitary body in terms of the notion of binary opposition, he abides in the first items of the binaries, such as *masculine*, *earnest*, *authentic*, *spiritual*, and so on, which have been cherished in the dominant culture of his times.

As implied not only in Harry Bailly’s response to the *Physician’s Tale*, but also in the Knight’s reconciliation of the altercation between the Pardoner and Harry, Chaucer’s aim in the Pardoner’s narrative lies not in championing Harry’s tendency of fetishizing certain fragments of the wholeness; instead of the straightforward and authoritative path insisted on by Harry, Chaucer as a method to reach the issue of morality and a certain truth presents to us another way of perversity, as implied in the Pardoner’s fiction and his fake relics. As shown in his naive involvement into the dramatic illusion of the Physician’s narrative, Harry’s abiding concern lies in the distinction between the good and the bad, or the truth and the falsehood. He does not understand that there is truth in play and even in falsehood. Denying the truth or moral meaning hidden in the metaphors, that is, the Pardoner’s false relics, or in his perverse language, his literal mindedness adheres only to “soth” and “authority” in them.

In this regard, it is not surprising that Harry's adherence to the voice of ultimate authority is challenged by the Pardoner's "performative" voice exposing his own hypocrisy and falsity. Especially, the impassioned conflict between the two pilgrims at the end of the tale and the inclusion of the Knight is quite natural and appropriate. The Knight serves as a healer of the divided social order by summoning forth the kiss of peace. Beyond this, as implied in the Knight's terms, "Sire Pardoner" and "Sire Host" (963; 964), the Knight as a mouthpiece of Chaucer functions to provide not only the "virile" Harry but also the Pardoner with his unmanly body with the equal or the similar position in the body of pilgrimage. That is, the Knight does not define the Pardoner as absolute other in comparison with Harry, but he may try to construct the Pardoner as a respectable member of the Body of Christ. In short, the Knight as a man of balance and order provides a more holistic way to link Harry's orthodox and authoritative perspective in viewing a thing with the Pardoner's perverse and topsy-turvied one. And the kiss of peace, though uncomfortable to Harry, silences Harry's voice of moral authority and reflects Chaucer's desire to include both Harry's voice of moral earnestness and the Pardoner's voice of frivolity. Glenn Burger explains the meaning of the kiss as follows:

... the kiss of peace stills the active masculine renunciation of the Host into a "speaking picture" in which a variety of voices--and no voice--is heard. It is precisely the Knight's (and the other pilgrims') desire to laugh and play as they did before that produces this other ending for the Pardoner's Tale, allowing the Pardoner's body to linger perversely in the foreground in active, "masculine" play with the other pilgrims (1147).

V. Conclusion

The structural pattern of the Pardoner's exemplum, except for some negative transformations, is quite similar to the archetypal pattern of the Middle English popular tales in which the narrator tries to imprint the moral upon his audience strongly and vividly. Furthermore, as in the Middle English popular narratives, the speediness of action, the plainness of narrative style, and the minimization of character-description are strikingly noticed in the *Pardoner's Tale*. In spite of such similarities between a Middle English popular narrative and the Pardoner's narrative in terms of structure and the narrative stylistics, more differences exist between the two tales; the differences, in part, derive from the configurations that Chaucer made from the basic folk story of the treasure-finders through his elaborately constructed "voices," especially with his pluralistic voicing, and through his choice of narrator.

The Pardoner's Tale mirrors Chaucer's attitude of relativity and his pluralistic perspective; he recognizes the holistic way in which the perverse/the absence is an integral part of the dominant culture, and he believes that truth or meaning also exists in the depraved and subordinate items of the binaries that have been excluded by the dominant culture/voice. In addition, the *Pardoner's Tale* is a representative work that shows the importance of a reader's role as a co-author in constructing the meaning of the tale. In other words, a message or the meaning of a literary work is not decided by whether the work is true or the storyteller is morally good, but by a reader's negotiations with it. Likewise, in spite of our knowledge on what the Pardoner does ("I preche") and who he is ("a ful vicious man"), a moral meaning or truth that is dispersed in the Pardoner's false preaching and his fake relics depends on a reader's judgment and intelligence together with his faith.

Notes

- 1) For his comparison of the Pardoner's sermon and exemplum, see his book entitled *Chaucer's Drama of Style: Poetic Variety and Contrast in the Canterbury Tale*, 52-63, quoted from 61.
- 2) Some critics have argued that the Pardoner's exemplum is a story about himself and the doom that awaits him; Marshall Leicester, Jr., "'Synne Horrible': The Pardoner's Exegesis of His Tale, and Chaucer's," in *Acts of Interpretation: The Text in Its Contexts 700-1600: Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Literature in Honor of E. Talbot Donaldson*, eds. Carruthers Mary J and Kirk Elizabeth D (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim, 1982), 25-50; see also Martin Stevens and Kathleen Falvey, "Substance, Accident, and Transformations: A Reading of the Pardoner's Tale," *Chaucer Review* 17 (1982): 142-58.
- 3) See Maureen Thum, "Frame and Fictive Voice in Chaucer's 'The Pardoner's Tale' and Kipling's 'The King's Ankus,'" *Philological Quarterly* 71 (1992): 261-79. He discusses the Pardoner's manipulation of the two voices and summarizes that "The ostensibly 'confessional' voice addressed to his primary audience of pilgrims exposes and comments on the purported hypocrisy and manipulateness of the second voice. The second voice, that of the pseudo-preacher, is customarily directed toward the 'lewed' or uneducated... folk of the lower classes" (264).
- 4) *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987): Quotations of Chaucer are from this edition.
- 5) William Kamowski says that "The Knight, Clerk, Franklin, Man of Law, Prioress, her Nun, her Priest, the Physician, Monk, Friar, and especially the Wife of Bath (three-time pilgrim to Jerusalem)"—since such pilgrims might have seen too many fake relics, they would not believe the Pardoner's relics and his pardon. He further says that "the Miller, Reeve, and Manciple were too well versed in deceit themselves to have credited all the bogus relics they encountered." See his article entitled "'Coillons,' Relics, Skepticism and Faith on Chaucer's Road to Canterbury: An Observation on the Pardoner's and the Host's Confrontation," *English Language Note* 28 (1991): 4-5.
- 6) In addition, ll 403-4, 407-8, 423-4, and 432-3 also highlight the narrator's vicious and covetous intention.
- 7) For a discussion of religious allusions, see Marshall Leicester, pp. 25-50. See also Benson, 60 and David Lawton, *Chaucer's Narrators* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985), 25.
- 8) Joanna Beall points out that "in the Pardoner's recognition and confession of his own vice there is a seed of virtue that has the power to turn others to repentance,... only the verbal

trickery by which he coerces people to confess sins and buy 'pardons,' thus converting his words into physical gold" (36-7): See "Spiritual Gold: Verbal and Spiritual Alchemy in 'the Pardoner's Tale' and 'The Canon's Yeoman's Tale,'" *Medieval Perspectives* 15 (2000): 35-41.

- 9) For the study of the Pardoner as a feminist hermeneutical model, see Monica McAlpine, "The Pardoner's Homosexuality and How It Matters," *PMLA* 95 (1980): 8-22; Carolyn Dinshaw, "Eunuch Hermeneutics," in *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 156-86. See also Marshall Leicester, Jr., *The Disenchanted Self: Representing the Subject in the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

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국문초록

「면죄부 판매자의 이야기」를 통해 본 초서의 상대적 관점과 다원적 가치관

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「면죄부 판매자의 이야기」는 작가 초서가 지녔던 상대적 태도와 다원적 관점을 반영하고 있다. 진리 혹은 가치란 이항 대립적 관점에서 볼 때 지배문화에 의해 형성된 상부개념 속 요소들(선, 정신, 도덕)에만 존재하는 것이 아니며, 지배문화에 의해 무시되고 거부되었던 타락하고 부정적인 하부 요소들에도 존재하고 있음을 「면죄부 판매자의 이야기」는 보여준다. 하부 개념 속 요소들 역시 사회를 형성하는 중요한 부분이며, 그 안에 의미와 가치가 존재한다는 통합적이며 포용적인 관점을 초서는 면죄부 판매자의 내러티브를 통하여 말한다. 직선적이며 권위적인 방향을 지양하고, 초서는 도덕적 가르침이나 진리에 이르는 또 다른 방법이 거짓되고 도덕적으로 타락한 면죄부의 행동과 내러티브에도 존재한다는 사실을 말해주고 있다. 이와 더불어, 면죄부 판매자의 내러티브는 이야기의 의미내지 도덕적 교훈을 찾는데 있어 독자의 역할의 중요성을 보여주는 대표적인 작품이라고 볼 수 있다. 문학작품 속 메시지나 의미는 텍스트의 내용이 사실적 혹은 그렇지 않느냐에 따라 결정되는 것도 아니며 화자가 도덕적으로 선한지, 악은지에 따라 결정되는 것도 아니며, 오직 작품과 독자 사이의 교섭에 의해 이루어진다는 점을 초서는 「면죄부 판매자의 이야기」를 통하여 드러내고 있다. 관객들로부터 웃음을 자아내는 화자의 거짓되고 위선적인 행동과 장난스런 목소리 속에 나름 도덕적인 의미와 가르침이 내재되어 있다. 한마디로 면죄부 판매자의 내러티브 속 도덕적 진리나 가르침은 화자의 권위나 텍스트 그 자체에 있는 것이 아니라, 화자의 거짓됨과 장난스러움 속에 감춰져 있는 종교적 믿음과 의미를 찾아내는 관객들

의 믿음과 텍스트 해석능력에서 비롯된다.

주제어: 『면죄부 판매자의 이야기』, 내러티브 기법, 독자의 역할, 웃음, 도덕

논문접수일: 2017.05.10

심사완료일: 2017.06.06

게재확정일: 2017.06.08

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