

The Portrait of the Pardoner

From *The General Prologue*, lines 671–716

With him ther rood a gentil PARDONER
 Of Rouncivale, his freend and his compeer,
 That streight was comen fro the court of Rome.
 Ful loude he soong ‘Com hider, love, to me!’
 This Somonour bar to him a stif burdoun;
 Was nevere trompe of half so greet a soun.
 This Pardoner hadde heer as yelow as wex,
 But smothe it heeng as dooth a strike of flex;
 By ounces henge his lokkes that he hadde,
 And therwith he his shuldres overspradde;
 But thinne it lay, by colpons oon and oon.
 But hood, for jolitee, wered he noon.
 For it was trussed up in his walet,
 Him thoughte he rood al of the newe jet;
 Dischevelee, save his cappe, he rood al bare.
 Swiche glaringe eyen hadde he as an hare.
 A vernicle hadde he sowed upon his cappe.
 His walet lay biforn him in his lappe,
 Bretful of pardoun, comen from Rome al hoot.
 A voys he hadde as smal 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 gelding or a mare.
 But of his craft, fro Berwik into Ware,
 Ne was ther swich another pardoner.
 For in his male he hadde a pilwe-beer,
 Which that he seyde was Oure Lady veil:
 He seyde he hadde a gobet of the seil
 That Seint Peter hadde, whan that he wente
 Upon the see, til Jhesu Crist him hente.

He hadde a crois of latoun ful of stones,
And in a glas he hadde pigges bones.
But with thise relikes, whan that he fond
A povre person dwellinge upon lond,
Upon a day he gat him moore moneye
Than that the person gat in monthes tweye;
And thus, with feyned flaterye and japes,
He made the person and the peple his apes.
But trewely to tellen atte laste,
He was in chirche a noble ecclesiaste.
Wel koude he rede a lessoun or a storie,
But alderbest he song an offertorie;
For wel he wiste, whan that song was songe,
He moste preche and wel affile his tonge
To winne silver, as he ful wel koude;
Therefore he song the murierly and loude.

The Introduction to the Pardoner's Tale

Oure Hooste gan to swere as he were wood;
 'Harrow!' quod he, 'by nailes and by blood!
 This was a fals cherl and a fals justise,
 As shameful deeth as herte may devise
 Come to this juges and hire advocats!
 Algate this sely maide is slain, allas!
 Allas, to deere boughte she beautee!
 Wherefore I seye al day that men may see
 That yiftes of Fortune and of Nature
 Been cause of deeth to many a creature. 10
 Hire beautee was hire deth, I dar wel sayn.
 Allas, so pitously as she was slain!
 Of bothe yiftes that I speke of now
 Men han ful ofte moore for harm than prow.
 But trewely, myn owene maister deere,
 This is a pitous tale for to heere.
 But natheles, passe over, is no fors.
 I pray to God so save thy gentil cors,
 And eek thine urinals and thy jurdones,
 Thyn ypocras, and eek thy galiones, 20
 And every boyste ful of thy letuarie;
 God blesse hem, and oure lady Seinte Marie.
 So moot I theen, thou art a propre man,
 And lyk a prelat, by Seint Ronyan!
 Seyde I nat wel? I kan nat speke in terme;
 But wel I woot thou doost myn herte to erme,
 That I almoost have caught a cardynacle.
 By Corpus bones! but I have triacle,
 Or elles a draughte of moiste and corny ale,
 Or but I heere anon a myrie tale, 30
 Myn herte is lost for pitee of this maide.
 Thou beel ami, thou Pardoner,' he saide,

'Telle us som mirthe or japes right anon.'

'It shal be doon,' quod he, 'by Seint Ronyon!
 But first,' quod he, 'heere at this alestake
 I wol hothe drinke, and eten of a cake.'

But right anon these gentils gonne to crye,
 'Nay, lat him telle us of no ribaudye!

Telle us som moral thing, that we may leere
 Som wit, and thanne wol we gladly heere.'

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'I graunte, ywis,' quod he, 'but I moot thinke
 Upon som honest thing while that I drinke.'

The Pardoner's Prologue

‘Lordinges,’ quod he, ‘in chirches whan I preche,
 I peyne me to han an hauteyn speche,
 And ringe it out as round as gooth a belle,
 For I kan al by rote that I telle.
 My theme is alwey oon, and evere was –
Radix malorum est Cupiditas.

First I pronounce whennes that I come,
 And thanne my bulles shewe I, alle and some. 50
 Oure lige lordes seel on my patente,
 That shewe I first, my body to warente,
 That no man be so boold, ne preest ne clerk,
 Me to destourbe of Cristes hooly werk.
 And after that thanne telle I forth my tales.
 Bulles of popes and of cardinales,
 Of patriarkes and bishopes I shewe,
 And in Latin I speke a wordes fewe,
 To saffron with my predicacioun,
 And for to stire hem to devocioun. 60
 Thanne shewe I forth my longe cristal stones,
 Ycrammed ful of cloutes and of bones, –
 Relikes been they, as wenen they echoon.
 Thanne have I in latoun a sholder-boon
 Which that was of an hooly Jewes sheep.
 “Goode men,” I seye, “taak of my wordes keep;
 If that this boon be wasshe in any welle,
 If cow, or calf, or sheep, or oxe swelle
 That any worm hath ete, or worm ystonge,
 Taak water of that welle and wash his tonge, 70
 And it is hool anon; and forthermoore,
 Of pokkes and of scabbe and every soore
 Shal every sheep be hool that of this welle
 Drinketh a draughte. Taak kep eek what I telle:

If that the good-man that the beestes oweth
 Wol every wyke, er that the cok him croweth,
 Fastinge, drinken of this welle a draughte,
 As thilke hooly Jew oure eldres taughte,
 His beestes and his stoor shal multiplie.

And, sires, also it heeleth jalousie; 80

For though a man be falle in jalous rage,
 Lat maken with this water his potage,
 And nevere shal he moore his wif mistriste,
 Though he the soothe of hir defaute wiste,
 Al had she taken prestes two or thre

Heere is a miteyn eek, that ye may se.
 He that his hand wol putte in this mitayn,
 He shal have multiplying of his grain,
 Whan he hath sowen, be it whete or otes,
 So that he offre pens, or elles grotres. 90

Goode men and wommen, o thing warne I yow:
 If any wight be in this chirche now
 That hath doon sinne horrible, that he
 Dar nat for shame of it yshrive be,
 Or any womman, be she yong or old,
 That hath ymaad hir housbonde cokewold,
 Swich folk shal have no power ne no grace
 To offren to my relikes in this place.
 And whoso findeth him out of swich blame,
 He wol come up and offre in Goddes name, 100
 And I assoille him by the auctoritee
 Which that by bulle ygraunted was to me.”

By this gaude have I wonne, yeer by yeer,
 An hundred mark sith I was pardoner.
 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.

The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale

Thanne peyne I me to strecche forth the nekke,
 And est and west upon the peple I bekke, 110
 As dooth a dowve sittinge on a berne.
 Mine handes and my tonge goon so yerne
 That it is joye to se my bisynesse.
 Of avarice and of swich cursednesse
 Is al my preching, for to make hem free
 To yeven hir pens, and namely unto me.
 For myn entente is nat but for to winne,
 And nothing for correccioun of sinne.
 I rekke nevere, whan that they been beried,
 Though that hir soules goon a-blakeberied. 120
 For certes, many a predicacioun
 Comth ofte time of yvel entencioun;
 Som for plesance of folk and flaterye,
 To been avauced by ypocrisyse,
 And som for veyne glorie, and som for hate.
 For whan I dar noon oother weyes debate,
 Thanne wol I stinge him with my tonge smerte
 In preching, so that he shal nat asterte
 To been defamed falsly, if that he
 Hath trespased to my bretheren or to me. 130
 For though I telle noght his propre name,
 Men shal wel knowe that it is the same
 By signes, and by othere circumstances.
 Thus quyte I folk that doon us displeances;
 Thus spitte I out my venym under hewe
 Of hoolinesse, to semen hooly and trewe.
 But shortly myn entente I wol devise:
 I preche of no thing but for covetise.
 Therefore my theme is yet, and evere was,
Radix malorum est Cupiditas. 140
 Thus kan I preche again that same vice
 Which that I use, and that is avarice.

But though myself be gilty in that sinne,
 Yet kan I maken oother folk to twynne
 From avarice, and soore to repente.
 But that is nat my principal entente;
 I preche nothing but for coveitise.
 Of this mateere it oghte ynogh suffice.

Thanne telle I hem ensamples many oon
 Of olde stories longe time agoon. 150

For lewed peple loven tales olde;
 Swiche thinges kan they wel reporte and holde.
 What, trowe ye that whiles I may preche,
 And winne gold and silver for I teche,
 That I wol live in poverte wilfully?
 Nay, nay, I thoghte it nevere, trewely!
 For I wol preche and begge in sondry landes;
 I wol nat do no labour with mine handes,
 Ne make baskettes, and live therby,
 By cause I wol nat beggen idelly. 160

I wol noon of the apostles countrefete;
 I wol have moneie, wolle, chese, and whete,
 Al were it yeven of the povereste page,
 Or of the povereste widwe in a village,
 Al sholde hir children sterve for famine.
 Nay, I wol drinke licour of the vine,
 And have a joly wenche in every toun.
 But herkneth, lordinges, in conclusioun:
 Youre liking is that I shal telle a tale.
 Now have I dronke a draughte of corny ale, 170

By God, I hope I shal yow telle a thing
 That shal by reson been at youre liking.
 For though myself be a ful vicious man,
 A moral tale yet I yow telle kan,
 Which I am wont to preche for to winne.
 Now hoold youre pees! my tale I wol biginne.'

The Pardoner's Tale

In Flaundes whilom was a compaignye
 Of yonge folk that haunteden folye,
 As riot, hasard, stywes, and tavernes,
 Where as with harpes, lutes, and giternes, 180
 They daunce and pleyen at dees bothe day and night,
 And eten also and drinken over hir might,
 Thurgh which they doon the devel sacrifice
 Withinne that develes temple, in cursed wise,
 By superfluitee abhominable.

Hir othes been so grete and so dampnable
 That it is grisly for to heere hem swere.
 Oure blissed Lordes body they totere –
 Hem thoughte that Jewes rente him noght ynough;
 And ech of hem at otheres sinne lough. 190
 And right anon thanne comen tombesteres
 Fetys and smale, and yonge frutesteres,
 Singeres with harpes, baudes, wafereres,
 Whiche been the verray develes officeres
 To kindle and blowe the fyr of lecherye,
 That is annexed unto glotonye.
 The hooly writ take I to my witnesse
 That luxurie is in wyn and dronkenesse.

Lo, how that dronken Looth, unkindely,
 Lay by his doghtres two, unwittingly; 200
 So dronke he was, he nyste what he wroghte.

Herodes, whoso wel the stories soghte,
 Whan he of wyn was repleet at his feeste,
 Right at his owene table he yaf his heeste
 To sleen the Baptist John, ful giltelees.

Senec seith a good word doutelees;
 He seith he kan no difference finde
 Bitwix a man that is out of his minde

And a man which that is dronkelewe,
 But that woodnesse, yfallen in a shrewe, 210
 Persevereth lenger than doth dronkenesse.
 O glotonye, ful of cursednesse!
 O cause first of oure confusioun!
 O original of oure dampnacioun,
 Til Crist hadde boght us with his blood again!
 Lo, how deere, shortly for to sayn,
 Aboght was thilke cursed vileynye –
 Corrupt was al this world for glotonye.
 Adam oure fader, and his wyf also,
 Fro Paradis to labour and to wo 220
 Were driven for that vice, it is no drede.
 For whil that Adam fasted, as I rede,
 He was in Paradis; and whan that he
 Eet of the fruit deffended on the tree,
 Anon he was out cast to wo and peyne.
 O glotonye, on thee wel oghte us pleyne!
 O, wiste a man how manye maladies
 Folwen of excesse and of glotonies,
 He wolde been the moore mesurable
 Of his diete, sittinge at his table. 230
 Allas, the shorte throte, the tendre mouth,
 Maketh that est and west and north and south,
 In erthe, in eir, in water, men to swinke
 To gete a glotoun deyntee mete and drinke.
 Of this matiere, o Paul, wel kanstow trete:
 ‘Mete unto wombe, and wombe eek unto mete,
 Shal God destroyen bothe,’ as Paulus seith.
 Allas, a foul thing is it, by my feith,
 To seye this word, and fouler is the dede,
 Whan man so drinketh of the white and rede 240
 That of his throte he maketh his privee,
 Thurgh thilke cursed superfluitee.