

PARATAXIS. In “Inducing the Hole: Paratactic Structure and the Unwritten *Canterbury Tales*,” Arthur Lindley addresses what he perceives as an “absence of syntactic, semantic, and logical connections” in the *Canterbury* tales generally: according to Lindley, Chaucer’s poems are characterized by a “form of parataxis in which grammatical and narrative units are deployed, seemingly at random, with the absolutely minimum of logical or syntactic ordering.” A bold intervention clearly designed to inspire critical debate, Lindley’s general assessment is certainly germane in the specific case of *The Franklin’s Tale*. Even for a medieval romance, the tale is remarkably “paratactic” and loose-jointed, constructed as a sequence of isolable episodes, each a bravura set-piece whose causal connections to its narrative environment appear at times vaguely, or problematically, realized.

In an arrestingly original study, narrative theorist Anna Narinsky finds that *The Franklin’s Tale* links together a grand total of sixty-four discrete episodes: in Narinsky’s estimation, thirty-three of these are “actual events,” but thirty-one are “virtual unrealized events.” The Tale’s most salient feature, she finds, is the amount of attention its author gives to recounting “virtual” events that *do not* come to pass — events, in other words, conceived only in its characters’ minds. Thus, by “creat[ing] the biggest number of unrealized strings of events” and by “deploy[ing] the richest field of virtualities in the whole collection of *The Canterbury Tales*,” *The Franklin’s Tale* provides “a narrative model that views plot not as a linear sequence of actual events,” but rather as a “cluster of possible stories” that “will forever retain their virtual character.”

In an equally sophisticated set of critical maneuvers, Seeta Chaganti explores the singular features of the tale’s non-linear narrative form as these features are embodied in the aporias, interconnections, and interstices of its own unfolding plot. Chaganti finds that the “exaggerated attention” the tale gives to “serial structure” and its concomitant “signposting” of its own “conspicuous transitions” invite an interrogation of the problematic “logic of causation” as a way of understanding the narrative imperatives of literary fiction. As an alternative hermeneutic, Chaganti discovers in *The Franklin’s Tale* a “terpsichorean” set of leitmotifs, that is, dance-like arrangements of liberating gestures—physical, grammatical, syntactic, logical, and narratological—all of which offer the reader a wide variety of “multiply vectored pattern(s)” within which to read the tale’s events. Narinsky’s “virtual” analysis of the Tale as a “cluster of possible stories” and Chaganti’s “terpsichorean” celebration of the Tale’s interrogation of the “logic of causation” are both salutary refinements of traditional assessments of the Tale’s narrative design. However, these studies invite further reflection on the implications (aesthetic, psychological, ethical, and cultural) of the *Franklin’s* paratactic liberties. In other words, is there any implicit “argument,” virtual or otherwise, that informs the Tale’s paratactic structure and that provides not only an appreciation but a critique of the terpsichorean appeal of its surface effects?

SURFACE. *The Franklin’s Tale*’s first “virtual event”—and perhaps its first “terpsichorean” gesture as well—is an unusual covenant mutually agreed upon by the Tale’s two protagonists. After an

appropriately stylized courtship, the lower-class aristocrat Arveragus and the higher-class aristocrat Dorigen agree to marry in accordance with a contract made of their own “free wyl” (V.745). In this agreement, the asymmetrical relationship of courtly love (the lady as mistress, the suitor as servant) and the asymmetrical reversal of this relationship in marriage (the husband as lord, the wife his subordinate) are both to be finessed, or harmonized, or made to disappear. The Franklin details how Dorigen and Arveragus in their future relationship will enjoy freedom and autonomy as equal partners, bearing and forbearing like “freendes” that “everych oother moot obeye” (V.762). Just as wonderfully, Arveragus will continue to “obeye and folwe [his lady’s] will”; and Dorigen, equally wonderfully, will prove to be both his “lady, certes, and his wyf also” (V.797.)

Despite the surface attractiveness of the Franklin’s noble words, an unsentimental reading of the deeper workings of this romantic union reveals that all is not entirely well. As the Franklin continues to elaborate, we learn that patience in marriage, while it is a “virtue,” is also a superior force that “venquysseth” (V.774) by providing “avantage al above” (V.773). We learn that in marriage one must “[l]erneth to suffer, or elles/ Ye shul it lerne, wher so ye wole or non” (V.777-778). And we also learn, as the Franklin darkly reminds us, there are myriad reasons we cause harm to each other: “Ire, siknesse, or constellacioun,/ Wyn, wo, or chaunginge of complexioun/ Causeth ful ofte to doon amis or speken” (V.781-783). In fact, a very close reading reveals that this idealized partnership has been conceived from a male perspective entirely, its ultimate concerns proving to be the husband’s life-

long “ease” balanced by the faultlessness of his ever-obedient wife:

And therfore hath this wise, worthy
knyght,
To lyve in ese, suffrance hire bihight,
And she to hym ful wisly gan to swere
That nevere sholde ther be defaute in
here. (V.786-790)

There is one more stipulation in the Franklin’s marriage covenant that casts light on the iffiness of the entire enterprise: namely, this contract must never be made public. To use Narinsky’s terms, this agreement needs to remain a “virtual event” rather than become an “actual event”: it has to be kept secret so that Arveragus might maintain “the name of soveraynetee,” or else suffer “shame of his degree” (V.751-752). How real, then, how binding, and how “actual” is this new-age covenant? There is even one more disequilibrating matter: as soon as the terms of the agreement are spelled out, the contract vanishes into thin air, and for the remainder of the tale no one thinks of it again, even in the most urgent of circumstances. Thus, in light of its own internal self-contradictions, and in light of its immediate erasability, this inaugural locution proves to be a *faux*-contract rich in patriarchal privilege and rife with logical contradictions. In fact, the inherent tensions in this contract—between surface and depth, appearance and reality, cause and effect, public display and private truth—anticipate tensions of even greater consequence that will surface later in the tale, where rhetorical eloquence camouflages serious ethical confusions, and optical illusion succeeds in trumping the truth.

Peter Travis, “The Franklin’s Symptomatic Sursanure,” from *The Cambridge Companion to the Canterbury Tales* (forthcoming)

The Clerk's disclaimer two lines before the beginning of the Envoy--"And lat us stynte of earnestful matere" (1175)--has encouraged modern readers to see the ending as comic play that protects the seriousness of the tale. In a frequently cited appraisal of this "concessionary comedy," for example, Charles Muscatine argues: "The Clerk admits the opposition purposely, so willingly and extravagantly as to make safe from vulgar questioning the finer matter that has gone before." Such a reading is consistent with Freud's view of humor as a healthy, even precious, defense mechanism wherein the humorist takes on the psychic part of both father and child; the superego speaks like a parent to the frightened ego, saying "Look here! This is all that this seemingly dangerous world amounts to. Child's play--the very thing to jest about." But what, exactly, is the young male ego of the Clerk so frightened of? And how is it the "finer matter" of Griselda's story that the envoy makes safe? As Freud further suggests, the humorist always repudiates suffering and affirms the ego's invulnerability; humor, then, would seem far more likely to trivialize, even undercut, a heroine whose power is equivalent to her capacity to embrace suffering and who can subordinate her own ego so completely to the cultural superego (the Law of the Father, the domination of Walter).

Given the similarity of the Clerk and the narrator of the *Legend of Good Women*, I conclude from the nature of the jest attempted in the envoy that the clerk is simultaneously afraid of women and afraid of being (like) a woman. What frightens the clerk so much that he has to joke about it is, first, the power of Griselda, the silenced woman, and her inhuman, celebrated capacity to suffer. This power, within the tale, has also frightened her husband Walter, in ways I have suggested; the envoy reveals that it is, moreover, paradoxically reminiscent of

the power attributed by the Clerk to women like the Wife of Bath. What Griselda and the Wife seem to have in common is their capacity, manifested in opposite ways, to escape or at least lay bare the operation of male tyranny by exceeding, in different directions, its enunciated limits.

Second, I submit, the Clerk may be frightened by his own likeness to Griselda, a parallel often drawn by readers. As a youth whose manhood is openly questioned by the Host, as an unbeneficed young cleric, and as a storyteller translating a renowned author, the Clerk occupies a marginal and insecure position in the culture that wants to rule the day, the hearty manly world organized and policed both by the menacing Host of the *Canterbury Tales* and by the literary tradition embodied in the authority vested in Petrarch and the Latin source text. If Griselda exceeds the demands of her husband, so too the Clerk exceeds the demands of translation, and nowhere more than in the excess of endings to his tale. While the Clerk's sympathy with women may be suspect, then, his identification with the feminine position and hence his insight into the nature of a certain kind of psychic oppression is plausible, and it is as frightening to him as it is to a woman like the Wife.

The Clerk's strategy at the end of his tale suggests both his fears and his defense against them. By playing in the envoy at taking the shrew's part, he continues to dissociate himself--now, however, with tongue quite obviously in cheek--from the crude antifeminism of men like Walter, who seriously and mistakenly expect women to submit to masculine dominance and who underestimate the powers of their victims. At the same time, he implies that after all he has managed to transcend the merely literal response to the tale's pathos that his ostensive sympathy with Griselda

might indicate and that he is in fact distanced by his superior learning and wit from the whole field of sexual warfare. Like the narrator of the *Legend of Good Women*, the Clerk finally signals that he is neither for real women nor against them; he is just playing a game, not the courtly cult of the marguerite but something not very different, a game played for and about men, and one that entails the transmission of the patriarchy's values, courtly or religious, through stories about idealized female figures. Griselda, then, is not finally unintelligible and threatening, she is just implausible; her suffering and its finer meanings can be forgotten. This is all there really is, the comic ending says, to the seemingly dangerous world of women and the war between lordly husbands and long-suffering wives--the very thing to jest about.

Freud, again like many modern Chaucerians, values humor for its "liberating" element and sees something "fine and elevating" in what he calls "the triumph of the ego": "It refuses to be hurt by the arrows of reality or to be compelled to suffer." But as humor liberates the humorist, does it liberate everyone? What about people who cannot laugh off the arrows of reality, who cannot refuse to be compelled to suffer--what about people like Griselda, whose only power lies in suffering? What about those who are the targets of real arrows, the butts of jokes, like the Wife of Bath? The Clerk's humorous ending deflates rather than protects Griselda's virtue, surely, and deflects us from both the real experience and the figurative value of her suffering and endurance; in liberating and elevating himself, then, he devalues and dismisses the feminine power of silence without liberating women from the complementary myths of absence or excess. The envoy in particular not only trivializes but also preempts the voice of a woman like the Wife of Bath, exaggerating just the sort of "vulgar" response--something short of throwing

his books into the fire--that she might indeed offer to a story like the Clerk's. Griselda, I have suggested, is made temporarily deaf, like the Wife, when Walter suddenly undergoes a dramatic reversal and agrees that she has proved her worth and can stop being tested; her story ends and her voice is silenced when the misogyny and fear that brings her into being finally comprehends how dangerous it is to let her suffer so visibly and well. In the same way, the Wife's position is silenced and disarmed by the Clerk's reversal when he impersonates her voice and takes up in jest precisely the kind of argument she might make.

Elaine Tuttle Hansen, "The Powers of Silence: The Case of the Clerk's Griselda," from *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender* (1992)



By the end of the story the Pardoner seems dominated by his tale: he rejects it at a literal level but remains racked by the heightened and frustrated consciousness of himself that the experience of telling it generates in him. This frustration leads him to force the issue of sin and spirit--the issue of himself--beyond the tale into the real world of the pilgrimage. The real moral the Pardoner has come to draw from the real exemplum of the tale, himself, emerges as he completes that exemplum:

And lo, sires, thus I preche.
 And Jhesu Crist, that is oure soules leche,
 So graunte yow his pardoun to receyve,
 For that is best; I wol yow nat deceyve. (915-18)

These famous lines represent not a "paroxysm of agonized sincerity" suddenly arrived at but a simple and direct statement of half of what the Pardoner has been saying all along. They gain their full energy only after the presentation of the other half that immediately follows, in which he seems to say, What you need is Christ's pardon--what you get is mine:

But, sires, o word forgat I in my tale:
 I have relikes and pardoun in my male,
 As faire as any man in Engelond,
 Whiche were me yeven by the popes hond.
 If any of yow wole, of devocion,
 Offren and han myn absolucion,
 Com forth anon, and kneleth heere adoun,
 And mekely receyveh my pardoun;
 Or elles taketh pardoun as ye wende,
 Al newe and fressh at every miles ende,
 So that ye offren, alwey newe and newe,
 Nobles or pens, whiche that be goode and trewe.
 It is an honour to everich that is heer
 That ye mowe have a suffisant pardoneer
 T' assoille yow in contree as ye ryde,
 For aventures whiche that may bityde.
 Paraventure ther may fallen oon or two
 Doun of his hors and breke his nekke atwo.
 Looke which a seuretee is it to yow alle
 That I am in youre felawshipe yfalle,
 That may assoille yow, bothe moore and lasse,
 Whan that the soule shal fro the body passe.
 I rede that oure Hoost heere shal bigynne,
 For he is moost enveloped 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. (919-45)

When these lines are read in context, it is hard to match them anywhere in Chaucer for sheer venom. There is direct venom against the pilgrims, to be sure--"Paraventure ther may fallen oon or two" sounds like a wish--but most of the Pardoner's contempt for them arises from

their failure to see and respond to what he here says he is. The passage recapitulates in concentrated form all the aggressive methods of dramatized self-condemnation the Pardoner has used throughout the tale--his conspicuous avarice, his ridiculous bulls, his rag-and-bone relics, even the hints of perverse sexuality in the obscene invitation "Unbokele anon thy purs"--and tries to ram them down the pilgrims' throats. In doing so, moreover, it gives greatest stress to the symbolic significance of these offered insults. Over and over the speech says, I am what the pope licenses, what the church supplies for your spiritual needs; I am the instrument of Christ's mercy, the representative of the Holy Ghost among you; I am what you kneel to, whose relics you kiss; I am that *cupiditas* that is the root of evils, the Old Adam, the obscenity of the *eunuchus non dei* that invites to fruitless generation; See what I make of the instruments of salvation--what do *you* make of a church that licenses me, of a world in which I am possible, of a God that allows me to exist?

This message is also what the Pardoner has been expounding all along. . . . His consistent practice is to convert the literal, the everyday, the phenomenal, to a sign for spirit. It is his idealism, in the technical sense, and it accounts for the feeling his tale notoriously gives of a world in which the power of the word over reality is nearly total. Having made these transformations, he then insists that the spiritual meaning of an old man, a bottle, or a pardoner is what these things *are* and how they must be treated. This insistence is, in another sense, his literalism and his delusion. But it is also an expression of his own spiritual state, of his presumption and despair. The Pardoner's greatest self-condemnation is his moment of greatest pride, the moment when he attempts to force on the pilgrims his own symbolic, typological vision of himself. What he wants here is to get them to take that vision for reality.

What he gets, however, is a set of responses that measures his excess and places it in a world at once more real and more ordinary than the one he has constructed in the course of telling his tale. The Host's answer to the Pardoner's final speech contains touches that seem to recognize the latter's spiritual

perspective and perhaps testify to its immediate rhetorical and emotional power: "Nay, nay! quod he, 'thanne have I Cristes curs!' " (946). But I think that what makes the already angry Pardoner even angrier--and silences him--is not that the Host reveals a sexual defect the Pardoner has been at pains to suggest and exploit but that he responds to a spiritual attack with a merely literal one. The Host's answer is not directed to the *eunuchus non dei*, only to a gelding. This response shows that he has missed the point of the Pardoner's self-presentation. His brutal literalism cuts through the tissue of spiritual allusion and moral self-dramatization in the Pardoner's final speech, reducing the Pardoner, his relics, and his "coillons," if he has them, to mere matter, and matter that is not even blasphemous, only insulting. The Host's explosion begins to restore a perspective that has been largely lost in the course of the tale's development when the Pardoner's voice is the only one before us--the perspective of the ordinary world. . . [of] the community of the pilgrims, namely, society. The Host may not know exactly what the Pardoner is doing, but he can tell that it is more than a joke. At first he responds in kind to its aggressive violence, what he rightly calls its anger: he can feel that the Pardoner is imposing something on him. After his initial outburst, however, the Host begins to put the situation in perspective. Perhaps he is a little shaken by his own reaction and the extent to which he has been drawn into the Pardoner's mood. At any rate he begins to back off: "I wol no lenger pleye / With thee, ne with noon oother angry man" (958-59). At this point other social forces intervene to break the mood further and contain it, as the Knight, observing that "al the peple lough" (961), urges a reconciliation: "'And, as we diden, lat us laughe and pleye.' / Anon they kiste, and ryden forth hir weye" (967-68).

The conclusion of the tale frames the Pardoner's performance as a social gaffe, a joke in bad taste that has gotten out of hand. It does so by showing how society closes ranks to repair the breach in decorum, the violation of the tale-telling contract the Pardoner has committed. The kiss of peace at the end is, of course, hollow, a mere social form that lets things move forward smoothly. It allows the group to pretend that

nothing seriously untoward has happened and leaves the Pardoner in frustrated possession of his unhappy consciousness. This ending may well increase our sympathy for him, but the group is nonetheless correct in its assessment of the situation, for the most effective criticism of the Pardoner's presumption is precisely that it is presumptuous in an ordinary sense. It is preposterous that any man should carry the symbolic weight the Pardoner gives himself. If he takes all our sins on his shoulders by committing them and scapegoats himself like Christ to dramatize the pervasive presence of spirit in ordinary life, his behavior is likely to make us reflect that Christ did not sacrifice himself out of self-hatred and that not everyone who climbs up on a cross is a Christ or a type of Christ, or even a type of the Antichrist. Even the New Testament seems to indicate that two out of three such people are likely to be common thieves.

H.M. Leicester, *The Disenchanted Self: Representing the Subject in the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley, 1990), 55-59



A key passage in the Pardoner's prologue hints more directly at what the concealed and deadly sinfulness in the body might be. The Pardoner describes one of his most ingenious tricks for persuading people to venerate his relics and offer alms:

Goode men and wommen, o thyng warne I yow:
If any wight be in this chirche now
That hath doon synne horrible, that he
Dar nat, for shame, of it yshryven 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. (ll. 377–84)

The specificity about the woman's sin and the lack of specificity about the man's provoke interpretation. It seems likely that the unnamed sin shares a number of characteristics with infidelity: it is a sexual sin; it is peculiarly associated with one sex—with men, as culpable infidelity had long been associated with women; and it inspires



a special opprobrium that arises from a cultural bias rather than from the principles of Christian ethics. Male homosexuality meets all these criteria.²⁹ Most important, the shame that attends the naming of the sin even in the confessional seems a clear allusion to homosexuality. Long before homosexuality was christened by Lord Alfred Douglas “the Love that dare not speak its name,” it had been commonly referred to in some variation of the formula found in Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*: “thilke abhomynable synne, of which that no man unnethe oghte speke ne write” (x.909).³⁰

It would be wrong to seem to deny, by qualification, the intense homophobia embodied in this notorious phrase, and yet it is important to recognize that there were shadings of opinion and feeling about homosexuality.³¹ In the *Canterbury Tales* the Pardoner's behavior and the reactions of the other pilgrims reflect a setting in which a homosexual person, while possibly aware of the severe penalties sometimes inflicted on his kind, did not feel a proximate fear for his safety.³² The Pardoner's flaunting of his friendship with the Summoner, though undoubtedly compulsive behavior, is probably not undertaken without some realistic assessment of the risks. As the pilgrims' apprehension about his ribaldry and Harry's false camaraderie suggest, what the Pardoner must confront in others is not their outright condemnation of him but their discomfiture, with its varying degrees of amusement, fear, sympathy, disgust, and ambiguous tolerance. In ministers of the church's sacraments, like Chaucer's Parson, the Pardoner would almost certainly encounter at least unthinking, if not vehement, reflections of that homophobia which the church had helped both to create and to perpetuate. In himself, the Pardoner has to contend with that self-hatred which internalizes the judgments of others. Ultimately the man who cannot confess the unnamed and unnameable sin is the Pardoner himself.

It may well be, moreover, that the Pardoner's inability to approach the confessional arises partly from his perception of the gulf between what the church was prepared to forgive and what he had to confess. As his portrait suggests, the Pardoner's homosexuality is a profound part of his being, an aspect that Chaucer could portray (and probably conceive of) only by project-

ing a biological cause.³³ The Pardoner himself seems to feel that he is in a state of alienation from Christ and the church, a state that is more than the sum of his sinful acts. *Mala*, or specific evil deeds, are not his concern; the *radix*, or root condition, is. But in the matter of homosexuality, as in matters of human sexuality generally, the church's moral theology tended to focus on acts, not on persons; and while it took account of a variety of actors, it defined them in terms of certain fixed statuses only: young or old, male or female, married or unmarried, clerical or lay. It understood homosexual acts only as the perverse behavior of basically heterosexual persons.³⁴ In other words, the church was prepared to deal with sinners like the scabby Summoner but not with the tortured Pardoner. The "inverted" Pardoner did not fit the church's definitions and could scarcely form a sincere purpose to amend a condition in himself he probably felt he had no power to change. Chaucer's study of homosexuality in the Pardoner seems to represent a deliberate intention to explore the inner reality of an outcast especially despised by his society and especially misunderstood by his church.

It is no accident that the man who cannot confess becomes a pardoner. Seizing on a theologically marginal church practice, the granting of indulgences, the Pardoner subverts the sacrament of penance he cannot use while simultaneously setting himself up as a substitute confessor. Officially, he had the power to offer almsgivers only remission of the punishment due sins already absolved by a priest. In practice, like many actual pardoners, he sold supposed absolution from sin.³⁵ While some of his customers may have been naïve Christians who could not appreciate the difference, others must have hoped to buy spiritual safety dishonestly, without reforming their lives. By exploiting the potential for self-deceit in those he imagines condemn him, the Pardoner attempts to convict his customers of being themselves "enveloped in synne." As he leads them away from the legitimate sacrament, it is as if he were saying, "If I cannot be truly forgiven, neither shall they be." At the same time, the Pardoner constantly enacts in reverse the scene of absolution he longs for. As he dispenses his own brand of absolution, often arousing in his audience true contrition (vi.430–

31), it is as if he were saying, "If there is anyone the church will not forgive, I will forgive him," all the while hoping that the forgiveness he dispenses will magically flow back to cleanse himself.

This manipulation of the sacrament is one of the things the Pardoner does that tend to be obscured by what he says as he constructs a smoke screen of single-minded avarice. But his intimate association with confession betrays, beneath his practiced cynicism, the seriousness with which he regards the sacrament. Apparently he does not allow himself the easy out he offers others—the chance to buy forgiveness and satisfaction with money or specific good works. For himself the Pardoner requires true contrition, true purpose of amendment; he *does* believe that Christ's pardon is best.³⁶

Interestingly, it was the subversion of the sacrament, more than the misappropriation of funds, that other churchmen principally complained of in actual pardoners. But Chaucer's association of his Pardoner with false relics may be a more imaginative touch, since it is not especially characteristic of the pardoners described in contemporary documents.³⁷ Perhaps nothing else about the Pardoner expresses so poignantly his anguish about his body as do the jars and bottles of old bones and bits of clothing he always carries with him. When Harry Bailey charges that the Pardoner would try to pass off his "olde breech" "with [his] fundement depeint" as a relic and proposes to enshrine the Pardoner's testicles in a hog's turd "in stide of relikes or of seintuarie" (vi.948–55), the symbolic equivalence between the relics and the Pardoner himself becomes almost explicit. For many readers, Harry's crudity must suddenly and explosively bring to consciousness a truth they have already apprehended subliminally.³⁸

A pre- and a post- are crucial to the relationship between Judaism and Christianity: as Christianity's ancestor, providing it with a so-called "Old Testament" seen as prophetically anticipating the New Testament of Christ's Incarnation, Judaism is both a crucial starting point for Christianity and one that Christianity has definitively superseded. Mapping on to the literal/spiritual dynamics discussed above is a Christian typological reading of the Biblical text in which the literal events of the Hebrew Bible are read as always also anticipating, spiritually, the Christian dispensation to come. That Jews and Judaism continue after the establishment of Christianity—"stubbornly" refusing the new dispensation—is a central problem for Christianity's self-conception and a structuring feature of Christian anti-Judaism. Anti-Jewish polemic must always grapple with the fact that Christianity arose from a religion that, despite Christianity's triumphs, continues to affirm its own value and truth.

Mary is implicated in this scheme of religious supersession as a kind of hinge: herself Jewish, she nonetheless provides the means by which Christianity definitively places Judaism in the past to establish itself as the religion of the present and future. Mary's common association in stories like the *Prioress's Tale* with an active anti-Judaism is therefore unsurprising: she replays in such miracle tales her choice of the new dispensation over her native religion. Further, the *Prioress's Tale* shows Mary siding specifically with the little clergeon rather than directly with the whole Christian community. Singling the young boy out reemphasizes Christianity's temporal self-construction as the new and vital survivor of its superseded ancestor, the younger but truer religion, one founded, of course, by Mary's own child.

A number of other details in the tale reinforce such temporal associations. The clergeon's mother is a "newe Rachel" (VII.627)—a Jewish matriarch typologically made "new" through her revival in a Christian role. And when the martyred clergeon is imagined in heaven with the celestial Lamb, he and his virgin fellows "synge a song al newe"

(VII.584). This newness is opposed to the Jewish adherence to an old and superseded order, represented most dangerously by "Oure firste foo, the serpent Sathanas" (VII.558), the spur to original sin. Also posed against the "newe Rachel" are the Jews as a "cursed folk of Herodes al newe" (VII.574). If reading the "Old Testament" typologically converts Jew to Christian, here a quasi-typological reading of the New Testament Herod casts modern Jews as perpetuating without spiritually transforming the anti-Christian violence of their Jewish ancestor. More specifically, the reference to Herod refers to his New Testament attack on innocent male children in a vain attempt to prevent the new dispensation promised by Jesus's birth (see Matthew 2:16-18). The tale reinforces this association by allusions to the liturgy for the Feast of the Holy Innocents. This makes the "litel clergeon" by extension kin to the children murdered at the time of Christ's birth in an attempt to maintain Jewish hegemony and to prevent Christianity's establishment. The clergeon is Christ-like, the Jews Herod-like, and the clergeon's mother associated with Mary. The Prioress herself is implicated in this whole trans-historical scenario in her claiming the status of "a child" (VII.484) and hence an identification with the clergeon, with Christ, and with Christianity as the younger religion.

The *Prioress's Tale*, through such temporal constructions, attempts to cast Judaism into the past. But it is nonetheless faced by the problem of Jewish persistence. If typology operated perfectly, there would be no Jewish presence after the Incarnation: the "Old Testament" would refer *only* to the New and Judaism would have dissolved into the Christian dispensation. But the quasi-typology of "new Herods"—the persistence of the Jews of the New Testament in the Jews of the current moment—creates a problem. The full conversion of Jewish to Christian meaning that typology should enact remains unaccomplished. Supersessionist temporality has to deal with the incompleteness of supersession. The execution of Jews within the tale works toward

eliminating the Jewish presence that thus troubles Christian supersessionism, as does the closing reference to Hugh of Lincoln, with its implicit reminder that Jews have been successfully eliminated from England. Still, the recognition that Jewish communities continue to exist somewhere else, if far away in Asia, highlights the broader world into which English Jews were expelled and the incompleteness of a project that would fully establish Christian hegemony. A tale like the Prioress's indeed exists because of this incompleteness: in a world in which Christian supersession were fully achieved, there would be no compelling need to return our attention to the supposed historical perfidy of the Jews.

Steven F. Kruger, "The Prioress's Tale," from *The Cambridge Companion to the Canterbury Tales* (forthcoming)

CHAPTER 1

WORK

Chaucer was the police, not in an attenuated or metaphorical sense: in the better part of his mature employments, he was an official of the repressive apparatus of state. Before that, he was a lackey, in domestic personal service. As a poet, he was both, police officer and domestic servant, in differing ratios, in differing poems, at differing times in his literary career. Still, his poetic work complemented and carried through to the realm of culture the other work he did, and this quality of his poetry, being a straightforwardly homologous reflection in the cultural sphere of his practical work in personal and state service, made his place in literary history. Chaucer's jobs determined his literary-historical role, in other words, his work in service and discipline shaping his work in literature, and it in its turn determining his reception. Chaucer was made "the father of English poetry" not because he was a good poet, though he was. There were other good poets. Chaucer was made the father of English poetry because he was servile, doing useful work serving dominant social interests, materially and ideologically, in both his poetic and other employments.

Thus Hawkins's desire to move quickly past, indeed almost to ignore, the boy's fear of being beaten by his teachers, also requires severe modification. Hawkins's statement implies that there is a real shift in levels of cruelty from the kind of violence feared by the clergeon and the kind of violence to which he is subjected by the Jews. Of course, on one level, he is right: there is a difference between being beaten by Christian teachers and having one's throat cut by scary Jews. But what is being skipped over once again is that the violence imagined and feared by the boy as being his own culture, the world of his little Christian within school, is being projected by the tale onto the outside, onto the Jews, onto the Old Law. In short, the violence done to children of "Cristen blood" by "Cristen folk" is being attributed to the Jewish scapegoat, just as, in the doctrine of the New Law versus the Old, the repressive authoritarianism of Christianity is being attributed to Judaism so that new icons of belief—Mary, for example, who is herself a libidinal threat to "monotheism" and a champion of the abject—can be instituted with all the fervor of what Bataille calls "affective effervescence."²⁴ We might put the question this simply: if the Jews were not responsible for those dead Christian children, who was?

The clergeon's fear of being beaten reminds us that violence was done to Christian children by Christians, not only in the extreme form of murder, but in everyday ways (familial violence was not uncommon) and in public ways. The tale's association of violence with the school reminds us, too, of the extent to which the control of knowledge in the service of belief was backed up, in the Middle Ages, by force.²⁵ Thus the tale projects both the disorder of violence and the violence of order onto the Jews. It does so because the tale fears not only change, but the incapacity for change—death in all of its forms. The degree to which the kind of culture represented by the clergeon's "scole" (and by convents) threatens to fall in on itself, to devour itself in acts of pure repetition, and the degree to which this kind of culture forbids the creation and acquisition of knowledge that is not "already" known are assigned to the Jews, in their role as punishers of transgression—a slippage recorded in the movement from the "felawe's" communication of forbidden knowledge "prively," to the "privy" in which the clergeon's still-singing body, on its way to becoming an icon of belief, is secretly cast. The secret of secret and unauthorized knowledge, of incipient creativity, is transformed into the secret of the identity of the

criminal, which is really no secret at all: "Mordre wol out, certeyn, it wol nat faille" (VII.576).

Detection thus substantiates projection; this murder, the Prioress's uncreating "creation," is transformed into something that can and will be found out, so that even the boy's will to knowledge returns in alienated and authorized form. It is authorized by the fact that, as the mother searches for the son (who, in his own very small way, had tried to go beyond what she knew and what she had taught him), the Virgin "already" knows, already has the knowledge the mother wants:

With moodres pitee in hir brest enclosed,
She gooth, as she were half out of hir mynde,
To every place where she hath supposed
By liklihedde hir litel child to fynde;
And evere on Cristes mooder meeke and kynde
She cride, and atte laste thus she wroghte:
Among the cursed Jues she hym soghte.
(VII.593–99)

What is at issue, finally, in this detection is the recovery of the interiority of the son by the knowledge of the mother, which in the Prioress's Tale is identified with the knowledge of the culture. The culture's own will to knowledge and to power, to territorial and economic expansion, and to making, is, in the Prioress's Tale, given release, but in the alienated form of seeing into the hearts of its children, remaking those hearts for belief in its icons, and thereby remaking the "alterity" of the future by colonizing its interior. The tale's concern with the space of the body leads us inexorably within, into "Asye," the city, the school, finally to the boy, to his heart pierced by the sweetness of the Virgin; through the opening made by the wound in the boy's body—a wound which the Prioress wants us to believe is inflicted by Jews rather than by the anxieties of "Cristen folk"—to the inside of the "wardrobe ... / Where as thise Jewes purgen hire entraille" (VII.572–73); to the inside of the Jew's heart, where Satan has "his waspes nest." The appearance of the body's insides marks the continuing collapse, in the Prioress's Tale, of the border between inside and outside, and of the attempt to give that border shape. The inward movement into ghetto, heart, privy—the desire to see, to master chaos by vision—indicates a desire to occupy, indeed to colonize, the borderline.

Louise O. Fradenburg, "Criticism, Anti-Semitism and the Prioress's Tale," *Exemplaria* 1 (1989): 69-115 (104-05).