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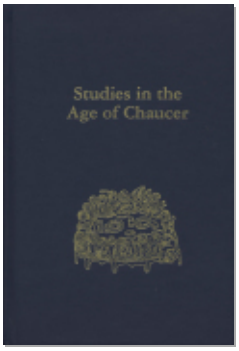


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# Chaucer's Pardoner and Host—On the Road, in the Alehouse

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WE FIRST ENCOUNTER the Pardoner of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in a sly passage steeped in images of Christian pilgrimage. Having come from Rome to Southwark in the company of the corrupt Summoner, the Pardoner makes a flamboyant entrance:

> With him ther rood a gentil PARDONER
> Of Rouncivale, his freend and his compeer,
> That streight was comen fro the court of Rome.
> Ful loud he soong "Com hider, love, to me!"
> This Somonour bar to hym a stif burdoun;
> Was nevere trompe of half so greet a soun.
> (I.669–74)[1]

As Melvin Storm and others have suggested, the "styf burdoun," which the Summoner is said to "bare," has the literal meaning of the bass line of the song of which the Pardoner sings the melody, but the word *burdoun* can also mean "staff," such as the kind used in pilgrimage, with all of its priapic connotations.[2] Although the Pardoner supposedly comes

[1] Citations of the *Canterbury Tales* refer to Larry D. Benson, gen. ed., *The Riverside Chaucer,* 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). I would like to thank the following people for their questions, suggestions, objections, and support on earlier versions of this essay: Columbia University's Medieval Guild and Queer Student Alliance, Susan Crane, Joan Ferrante, Kamil Godula, Frank Grady, Robert Hanning, Derrick Higginbotham, Adnan Hussein, Ellen Kettels, Katherine Lewis, Asifa Malik, Brenna Mead, Margaret Pappano, Paul Strohm, and the two anonymous readers of *SAC.*

[2] Melvin Storm, "The Pardoner's Invitation: Quaestor's Bag or Becket's Shrine?" *PMLA* 97 (1982): 810–18. Indeed, the Old French word *bourdon* is the one used in the *Romance of the Rose* (2.21354), a text that inspired part of Chaucer's characterization of the Pardoner. The Pardoner's pilgrimage staff is also overtly phallic in the prologue to the anonymous *Tale of Beryn,* a fifteenth-century continuation of the *Canterbury Tales.* See "The Canterbury Interlude and Merchant's Tale of Beryn," in John M. Bowers, ed., *The* Canterbury Tales: *Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992).

from the pope's court in Rome, the *vernycle* (I.685), a pilgrim badge cast in the likeness of the veil that swabbed Christ's bloody face, marks him as a pilgrim rather than an ecclesiastical bureaucrat. In this brief introduction of the Pardoner, we see him heading from one pilgrimage center to another, intoning in hircine falsetto a love ballad with his hyperphallicized "freend," in language that intimates their sexual relationship through a pun involving one of the central symbols of the pilgrim enterprise. Moreover, the last time we hear of the Pardoner is after his conflict with the Host in Fragment VI, an altercation whose rhetoric also figures sodomy through images and practices associated with pilgrimage. Chaucer's linking of pilgrimage and homoeroticism could not be more straightforward and was not unusual in medieval Europe. This observation warrants a reconsideration of the Pardoner's place in the pilgrimage frame of the *Canterbury Tales.*

Most antihomophobic interpretations of the Pardoner that have drawn on a diverse group of texts collectively referred to as "queer theory" have seen him as a force that throws the heteronormative constitution of the pilgrim *compaignye* into crisis. These readings of the frame of the *Canterbury Tales* follow a similar narrative arc: from a not-quite-successful construction of a provisional but heteronormative social structure (the pilgrimage *compaignye*), to an return of the repressed element of that structure (in the form of the "queer" Pardoner) that calls into question its foundational assumptions, to a not-entirely-decisive containment of that "queer" epistemological challenge through the Pardoner's violent marginalization from and equivocal reintegration into the *compaignye.*[3] The assumption of a sexually normative pilgrimage is a heuristic convenience that has allowed scholars to impart crucial insights

[3] A list of the studies that have influenced me most includes: Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), and *Getting Medieval: Sexual Communities Pre- and Post Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Glenn Burger,*Chaucer's Queer Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Robert S. Sturges, *Chaucer's Pardoner and Gender Theory* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); H. Marshall Leicester Jr., *The Disenchanted Self: Representing the Subject in the "Canterbury Tales"* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990); Michael Calabrese, "Make a Mark that Shows: Orphean Song, Orphean Sexuality, and the Exile of Chaucer's Pardoner," *Viator* 24 (1993): 269–86; and Steven F. Kruger "Claiming the Pardoner: Toward a Gay Reading of the *Pardoner's Tale,*" *Exemplaria* 6 (1994): 112–39. All of these important analyses also draw on two pathbreaking views of the Pardoner by Monica McAlpine, "The Pardoner's Homosexuality and Why It Matters," *PMLA* 95 (1980): 8–22; and Donald Howard, *The Idea of the "Canterbury Tales"* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976).

into the Pardoner's "performance" as they have called it, but it is an assumption that reveals the extent to which the metaphysics of queer theory have obscured a vital aspect of Chaucer's depiction of social space. One of the most remarkable characteristics of these analyses is that they consider the Pardoner's queer "performance" outside of any particular spatial context. Yet, as the language of the Pardoner's portrait suggests, the pilgrimage setting is essential to understanding Chaucer's depiction of the Pardoner's gender and sexuality.

Moreover, in the conflict that erupts between the Host and the Pardoner at the end of Fragment VI, one observes that the pilgrimage trail of the *Canterbury Tales* is used as a setting for an exploration of the technologies of masculine embodiment not just of the Pardoner, but also of the Host. The conflict between the Host and the Pardoner at the conclusion of Fragment VI asks readers to consider the relationships between sexual perversion, masculinity, and pilgrimage, an issue that has been obscured by a lack of attention to the discourses and social practices surrounding medieval devotional travel. The theoretical paradigm about pilgrimage that is most readily available to medievalists, the notion of pilgrimage as a "liminal" or "liminoid" phenomenon, does allow some insight into masculine self-fashioning, but like the notion of "normativity," its strong metaphysical orientation and its sheer heuristic power have the potential to displace a consideration of medieval social practice. Although they might seem to have little in common, both "normativity" and "liminality" owe a great debt to a branch of anthropological theory that likens events in social life to drama. This analogy has been criticized within anthropological circles precisely for its overinvestment in the form of social phenomena and its inability to discuss the content of those phenomena.[4] In the case of Chaucer, the "content" that might be better understood is precisely the gender and sexual politics that inform and surround the Pardoner's performance and the Host's reaction to it. This essay acknowledges the strengths of "normativity" and "liminality" while also providing an indication of how comparing the *Canterbury Tales*' representations of lived spaces to those of

[4] Clifford Geertz writes of this analogy: "It can expose some of the profoundest features of social process, but at the expense of making vividly disparate matters drably homogeneous." Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology,* 3rd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2000), pp. 26–30, at 28.

other medieval texts might generate new insights into Chaucer's treatment of gender and devotional travel.[5]

## Strange Bedfellows

> And smale foweles maken melodye,
> That slepen al the nyght with open ye
> (So Priketh hem nature hir corages),
> Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages
> —Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales* (I.9–12)

> ROMEO Have not saints lips, and holy palmers, too?
> JULIET Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.
> —William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* (1.5.98–99)[6]

Carolyn Dinshaw has shown that the opening lines of the *General Prologue* (I.1–11) advance a vision of the cosmos as inescapably and pervasively heterosexual.[7] Dinshaw further suggests that, in shifting from the heterosexual cosmos to the pilgrimage trail in line 12 of the *General Prologue,* Chaucer's poem founds pilgrimage as a "humanly *heterosexual*" institution.[8] As David Wallace has observed of the same lines, the poem's abrupt shift from the unbridled cosmic eros of the dream vision to the finite spaces of Chaucer's England generates the "surprising" assertion that what "folk are said to 'longen' to do" is go on pilgrimage.[9] Both Dinshaw and Wallace alert us to the manner in which the juxtaposition of the abstract, universal space associated with courtly dream vision with the quotidian space of fourteenth-century England generates

[5] Morton W. Bloomfield was perhaps the first person to argue that reading the *Canterbury Tales* alongside nonfictional pilgrimage narrative might open up interesting vistas in his "Authenticating Realism and the Realism of Chaucer," *Thought* 39 (1964): 348. Donald Howard's *Writers and Pilgrims: Pilgrim Narrative and Its Posterity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980) and Christian K. Zacher's *Curiosity and Pilgrimage: The Literature of Discovery in Fourteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) took Bloomfield's lead and in the process showed the shortcomings of a narrowly allegorizing approach to the pilgrimage frame that reads it exclusively as a figuration of man's journey through life.

[6] Stephen Greenblatt, gen. ed., *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), p. 888.

[7] Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval,* pp. 117–21.

[8] Ibid., pp. 272–73 n. 9, emphasis is Dinshaw's.

[9] David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) p. 67.

the unexpected correlation of unbridled libidinous drive with the devotional practice of pilgrimage.

However, the "surprise" that Wallace detects in the yoking of *libido* and *peregrinatio* might not have constituted much of a novelty for Chaucer's readership. Reading the opening lines of the *General Prologue* alongside medieval representations of pilgrimage reveals a widespread association of holy travel with erotic desire, particularly types of desire that presented alternatives to clerical celibacy and marital monogamy. Rather than conceive of the Canterbury pilgrimage as an inherently heterosexual undertaking haunted by the marginalized figure of the Pardoner, I am interested in exploring what kind of readings of the Pardoner's place in the *Canterbury Tales* might result from denying ourselves recourse to the concept of "heteronormativity,"[10] and to a certain metanarrative in which the oppositional "queer" emerges from within and in opposition to an abstracted and unbounded "norm," the latter concept often serving to displace medieval texts' complex treatments of gender and desire as they relate to institutional and lived spaces, spaces like the road from Southwark to Canterbury.

Initially, there would seem to be considerable warrant to assume a view of pilgrimage as a metaphor for "heterosexual" erotics. Thanks in no small part to the celebrated first encounter between the two star-crossed protagonists of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet,* pilgrimage has become linked in the modern mind to heterosexual romance. Indeed, Shakespeare was heir to a venerable literary trope that figured heteroerotic pursuit as a pilgrimage. Book IX of *The Romance of the Rose* allegorizes the violent conquest of a virgin as a peregrination along a stubbornly narrow trail. Both poet Eustache Deschamps and priest Olivier Maillard argued that women went on pilgrimage for the express purpose of cuckolding their husbands; the former wrote in his *Miroir de Mariage:* "If I say; keep the house / She objects with pilgrimage. / She

[10] Karma Lochrie has questioned the utility of the concepts of "heteronormativity" and even "heterosexuality," for the study of the European Middle Ages. Modern medical and sexological notions of "normal" sexuality and the ideology of heteronormativity (both of which focus exclusively on the gender of the subject's sexual partner) bear little resemblance to medieval notions of sodomy, in which the gender of one's sexual partner was but one of many factors defining "unnatural" vs. "natural" sex. See her *Heterosyncrasies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn't* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), especially "Introduction: the Heterosyncratic," pp. xi–xxviii.

has to go to St. Denis! / There they mock married men."[11] Chaucer's English contemporaries looked askance at pilgrimage for similar reasons. William Langland's *Piers Plowman* depicts "Eremites on a hep with hokede staues" that "Wenten to Walsyngham and here wenches aftir" (Prologue, lines 51–52).[12] In 1407, Wycliffite preacher William Thorpe ran afoul of the Archbishop of Canterbury when he objected that pilgrimage was spiritually insalubrious because of the money that pilgrims spent on the services of innkeepers and prostitutes.[13] Chaucer's Wife of Bath confesses that she travels on pilgrimage to engage in "daliance" (III.565), and the Host asks the drunken Cook why he is so fatigued on the pilgrimage trail: "Hastow had fleen al nyght, or artow dronke? / Or hastow with some quene al nyght yswonke" (IX.17–18)? Margery Kempe reports that she and her husband became the objects of local gossip when they were suspected of using pilgrimage as a smokescreen for sexual congress after they had taken vows of marital celibacy.[14]

Other forms of medieval travel, particularly mercantile travel (one need think of Boccaccio's *Decameron* or Marco Polo's description of Asian brothels), were also understood as presenting the chance to engage in types of sexual congress not available at home, but it was the gap between the holy intentions of the pilgrim and his or her actions that is perhaps responsible for the singling out of pilgrimage as a vehicle for sexual transgression. The notion that the practice of pilgrimage might thwart the intentions with which the pilgrim undergoes the hardships of travel is evident in Guibert of Nogent's twelfth-century autobiography. Guibert relates an early version of what became a popular miracle. A man goes on pilgrimage to Santiago to atone for his venial sins. Among the items he carries are two of his female lover's undergarments, which Guibert intimates serve as props in the traveler's autoerotic sports. The

[11] Quoted in Jean Verdon, *Travel in the Middle Ages,* trans. George Holoch (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), p. 218. Verdon assembles similar viewpoints, mostly from late medieval France, and also presents fascinating anecdotes about the sexual transgressions of actual pilgrims, including a group of pilgrims reprimanded in Orléans for dancing in a church with women, one of them a known prostitute (see p. 217). For numerous English examples of sexually transgressive female pilgrims, see Susan Signe Morrison, *Women Pilgrims in Late Medieval England: Private Piety as Public Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 106–27.

[12] George Russell and George Kane, eds., *Piers Plowman: The C Version* (London: Athlone Press, 1997).

[13] Alfred Pollard, ed., *Fifteenth-Century Prose and Verse* (New York: A. Constable, 1903), p. 140.

[14] *The Book of Margery Kempe,* trans. and ed. Lynn Staley (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), p.31.

devil appears to the masturbating pilgrim disguised as Saint James and convinces him to castrate himself. The pilgrim dies as a result, but his corpse is revived thanks to the intercession of Saint James, although his sinful member is not.[15]

As the miracle of the masturbating pilgrim suggests, pilgrimage was frequently associated with sexual acts that would be grouped under the medieval category of sodomy, an expansive rubric, which, as Mark Jordan has shown, gathered under one umbrella term an astonishing array of previously unrelated sexual transgressions, including masturbation.[16] In tracing Shakespeare's use of the pilgrimage metaphor back to medieval poetic conventions and polemical concerns regarding the erotic opportunities available to pilgrims, it might be easy to lose sight of the fact that what all of these "heterosexual" conceptions of pilgrimage have in common is that they couple devotional travel with expressions of desire that transgress proper conjugal monogamy and sacerdotal celibacy: adultery, prostitution, clerical concubinage.

The link between sexual transgression and pilgrimage was pervasive in medieval Europe, and it is within this context that we should understand the "heterosexual" courtly poetics of pilgrimage to which Shakespeare is heir; they are part of a larger ideological armature that yoked together disparate forms of erotic transgression, many of them "sodomitical," with the practice of holy travel. In fact, nonfictional pilgrimage accounts frequently demonstrate a fascination with or intimate knowledge of sodomitical desire. Fifteenth-century knight and would-be international playboy Arnold Von Harff includes for his reader a series of phrases in Albanian, Turkish, Breton, Hebrew, and Arabic that should prove useful to the German-speaking traveler who might want to have sex with non-Christian women while having his clothes laundered.[17] In-

[15] Guibert of Nogent, *Self and Society in Medieval France,* ed. and trans. John F. Benton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp. 218–19. The idea that traveling men might use their lover's garments to masturbate on the road could be at play in another twelfth-century text, *The Life of Christina of Markyate.* When Christina's companion and confessor Geoffrey is called to Rome, he asks her for two of her undergarments "not for his pleasure but to mitigate the hardships of his journey" [*non ad voluptatem sed ad laboris relevandum sudorem*]. Christina ultimately refuses his request. See C. H. Talbot, ed. and trans., *The Life of Christina of Markyate, Twelfth-Century Recluse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), pp. 160–61.

[16] Mark Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Medieval Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[17] Malcom Letts, trans., *The Pilgrimage of Arnold Von Harff, Knight, from Cologne through Italy, Syria, Egypt, Arabia, Ethiopia, Nubia, Palestine, Turkey, France, and Spain, which he accomplished in the years 1496–1499* (London: Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society, 1946), pp. 77, 90–91, 249, 284.

tercourse between Christians and Jews or Muslims was, like only the most "unnatural" of sexual transgressions, routinely prohibited in medieval civic and Canon law on pain of death.[18] Felix Fabri, also traveling to Jerusalem at the end of the fifteenth century, anxiously reports rumors that Venetian galley slaves have sex with one another,[19] and Pero Tafur, also traveling in the fifteenth century, reported seeing the ruins of three Mediterranean cities that were destroyed because of their inhabitants' sodomitical practices.[20] In fact, the invitation to imagine homosex among the ruins of ancient cities was institutionalized as part of the Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem, which included an obligatory stop in Sodom and Gomorrah. The cities were such a must-see that when Tafur's company decided to bypass this part of their pilgrimage, he hired a guide to take him on a private tour of their ruins.[21]

The manner in which another text imagines the erotics of the pilgrimage trail, the *Codex Calixtinus,* which contains both an early version of the masturbating pilgrim miracle as well as a guide for pilgrims who wish to visit Santiago de Compostela, sheds light on some overlooked aspects of the *Canterbury Tale*s' poetics of male embodiment. The *Codex* exists in thirteen copies, dating from around 1130 to the early sixteenth century.[22] The *Guide* provides practical information for the aspiring pilgrim: the major roads that lead to Santiago, the shrines that can be

[18] James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 461–62; 518. See also David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: The Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 125–65.

[19] Aubrey Stewart, trans., *The Wanderings of Felix Fabri* (New York: Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society, 1896), vols. 7–10, p. 46.

[20] Pero Tafur, *Travels and Adventures,* ed. and trans. Malcom Letts (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1926), pp. 53, 142. See also Benjamin Liu, "Affined to Love the Moor: Sexual Misalliance and Cultural Mixing in the *Cantigas d'escarnho e de mal dezir,*" in *Queer Iberia,* ed. Gregory S. Hutcheson and Josiah Blackmore (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 48–72. Liu argues that travel to Muslim-controlled lands, including Jerusalem, was associated with sodomy in the satiric Galician-Portuguese poetry.

[21] Tafur, *Travels and Adventures,* p. 59.

[22] The *Codex* is also known as the *Liber Sancti Jacobi* and most copies of it contain the liturgy and miracles of Saint James, the pilgrim's guide, and the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle.* For the most part, copies of the earliest manuscript, housed at the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, seem to have been commissioned by bishops and monastic communities. See Paula Gerson, Jeanne Krochalis, and Alison Stone, eds., *The Pilgrim's Guide: A Critical Edition* (London: Henry Miller Publishers, 1998), for their discussion of the possible origins and the reception history of the pilgrim's guide and its accompanying texts. All citations of the *Codex Calixtinus* in Latin and in English are drawn from this edition and translation and will be cited parenthetically in the body of the essay.

visited along each one, the best places to buy provisions, and a description of the city and its cathedral; in this regard, it offers its readers information not unlike other medieval texts written for those planning a pilgrimage. Chapter Seven of the *Guide,* however, makes an atypical move. Entitled *De nominibus terrarum et qualitatibus gencium que in ytinere sancti iacobi habentur* ["The Names of the Lands and the Characteristics of the Peoples on the Road to Santiago"], the chapter takes an ethnographic turn, casting a scandalized yet palpably enthralled eye on the sexual perversions of the Gascon, Basque, and Navarrese inhabitants whom the pilgrim can expect to encounter on his way to Compostela. Of the Gascons, the author observes: "They eat and drink liberally and are poorly dressed, and they all lie down together on a bed of dirty rotting straw—the servants with the master and mistress" (23). The Basque and Navarrese stand accused of much more sordid offenses such as eating without utensils and exposing their genitals to one another in public (29). Moreover: "Nauarri etiam utuntur fornicatione incesta pecudibus. Seram enim Nauarrus ad mule sue et eque posteriora suspendere dicitur, ne alius accedat sed ipse. Vulue etiam mulieris et mule basia prebet libidinosa" (28). [The Navarrese even practice unchaste fornication with animals. For the Navarrese is said to hang a padlock behind his mule and his mare, so that none may come near her but himself. He even offers libidinous kisses to the vulva of woman and mule (29)]. The rustic pleasures paraded before the view of the would-be pilgrim alert him to the perfidy he will encounter in his travels, suggesting that he minimize his contact with the populations along the trail. Yet, the vivid detail with which the author issues his alarm, ostensibly intended to help readers arrive at their destination unscathed, might possibly incite from the *Guide's* readership as much longing as it does loathing. One can well imagine to what use the information about the sexual mores of the countryside could be put by the enterprising reader and pilgrim.

Although the twelfth-century *Guide* seems less than concerned about the erotics of reader relations, its construction of ethnographic authority proves to be a much more delicate enterprise,[23] particularly as it involves

[23] By "ethnographic authority" I mean the rhetorical tactics through which travelers convert their partial and power-charged contacts with other peoples into an authoritative and purportedly impartial representation of an entire "culture." Anthropologists in particular have been concerned with the manner in which their discipline has established and fiercely guarded research and writing conventions that efface the power negotiations between the professional ethnographer and his or her objects of study. See Johannes

the body of the pilgrim-author. On the one hand, the author bases the authority of his description of the "peoples along the road to Santiago" on having seen and heard them himself, thus allowing him to claim: "Si illos comedere uideres, canibus edentibus uel porcis eos computares. Sique illos loqui audieres, canum latrancium memorare" (28). [If you saw them eat, you would think them dogs and pigs. If you heard them speak, you would be reminded of the barking of dogs (29).] Yet, as we have already seen, when reporting the Navarrese attraction to farm animals, the author bases the truth of what he reports not on having witnessed it, but on having heard of it from unspecified sources (i.e., "It is said that . . ."). The shifting strategies by which the author positions himself as an authority on the sexual customs of the Gascons, Basques, and Navarrese in part secures the integrity of his own body while denigrating the bodies of those whom he has encountered in his travels. The impersonal grammatical construction "It is said that" makes it clear that the pilgrim-author did not see, watch, or enjoy the sight of man-on-mule action, but it also occludes the possible processes of inquiry through which he may have secured such information. This same chapter also offers a list of Basque words that is intended to demonstrate the barbarity of their language and culture (29), yet it also suggests that the author had more than passing contact with Basque people. In fact, like his knowledge of the eating and dwelling habits of the Basques, this diminutive Basque lexicon suggests the author's active pursuit of information about the peoples he encountered. The nature of that pursuit is obscured by the impersonal construction of "what is said about" the sexual practices of Navarrese men, rhetorically absolving the author of active probing of these matters and insulating his own body from sodomitical contact with those he encountered on the road to Santiago.

Such rhetorical strategies work to allay the fear that forms of sodomy that take animals and women as their objects might expand to interpo-

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Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), and two books by James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988) and *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997). The most far-reaching consideration of how such theoretical concerns affect the study of the Middle Ages is Kathleen Biddick's "The Devil's Anal Eye: Inquisitorial Optics and Ethnographic Authority," in *The Shock of Medievalism* (Durham: Duke University Press), pp. 105–34. See also Claire Sponsler, "Medieval Ethnography: Fieldwork in the European Past," *Assays: Critical Approaches to Medieval and Renaissance Texts* 7 (1992): 1–30.

late the male pilgrim. This anxiety is suggested more directly at various points in the *Guide:* "Et si quis transceuncium secundum eorum peticionem nummos illis dare noluerit, et iaculis illum percuciunt, et censum ab eo auferunt, exprobantes illum et usque ad femoralias exquirentes" (24). [And if someone passing through does not want to give them money in accordance with their demand, they both beat him with sticks and snatch away the assessed sum from him, upbraiding him and searching him down to his underwear (25).] The Basques not only rob male pilgrims, but also "uerum etiam ut asinos equitare et perimere solebant [were wont to ride them like donkeys and slay them]" (pp. 25–26).

Given the catalogue of perversions attributed to these people, the assertion that they are accustomed to ride (*equitare*) men like donkeys raises doubts about the literal register of this final accusation. Was the author subjected to the fondling and groping that he describes? Was he treated like a mule? How closely did he observe the customary genital exposure that he reports? Just how feculent *was* the straw in which master, mistress, and servant slept? These questions are held at bay through rhetorical techniques that distance the pilgrim-author's vulnerable flesh from the scene of intercultural encounter, an encounter (or rather a series of encounters) whose prose afterlife is authorized by the paradoxical assertion of its author's bodily *proximity to* the people that the *Guide* describes. Adultery, fornication, prostitution, homosexual encounter, masturbation, miscegenation, bestiality: medieval pilgrimage made for strange bedfellows.

Although the *Guide* was written some three centuries before Chaucer began his *Canterbury Tales,* its concern to shield the pilgrim's body from the taint of sodomy alerts us to a long-standing set of medieval assumptions about the carnal pleasures available in devotional travel and their destabilizing effects on the traveler's sense of identity, assumptions that must be kept in mind as we think about the Pardoner. Pilgrimage raises the possibility that one might become the object, or perhaps even the subject of, unspeakable urges, urges so transgressive that they confound the hierarchical binaries through which the traveling subject thinks itself: masculine/feminine, urban/rustic, literate/barbaric, human/animal, celibate/sodomite. This is a very different and much more dire image of pilgrimage than we see in devotional and conduct literature, and one much more similar to the pilgrimage frame of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* than would initially appear. Moralistic literature objects to the false pil-

grim who realizes a concealed passion far from the strictures of home, but the Santiago *Guide* suggests an awareness that the very same material conditions that enabled sexual experimentation on the pilgrimage trail also posed a challenge to one's sense of self as it had been cultivated through the ideologies and social practices of the traveler's home. Relative anonymity and distance from local forms of surveillance, improvisational social interactions, and ad hoc sleeping arrangements were just some of the factors that made pilgrimage so alluring, and so perilous.

Placing Chaucer's pilgrimage in the context of other medieval European depictions of devotional travel, it is hard to imagine a setting for the *Canterbury Tales* that would have been *less* conducive to a sexual or gender-normalizing project. The reading of the pilgrimage trail in the *Canterbury Tales* as "heteronormative" might obscure just how multiple, tentative, and fragile are the masculinities-in-transit that Chaucer's poem depicts. Granted degrees of social and erotic freedom unlikely to be had at home, yet also displaced from the institutional, civic, and domestic spaces under whose aegis they emerge, these pilgrim masculinities cannot rely on the familiar frames in which they are fashioned and validated, and must continue to rearticulate themselves, sometimes violently, on the road to Canterbury.

## Masculinities on the Road

> Voyaging smoothly is a becoming, and a difficult, uncertain becoming at that.
> —Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

> It must be our aim not to deny or disavow masculinity, but to disturb its manifest destiny—to draw attention to it as a prosthetic reality—a "prefixing" of the rules of gender and sexuality; an appendix or addition, that willy-nilly, supplements and suspends a "lack-in-being."
> —Homi K. Bhabha, "Are You a Man or a Mouse?"

Glenn Burger observes two impulses that are more present in Fragment VI of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* than anywhere else: the display of the male body and the foregrounding of the pilgrimage to Canterbury.[24] This is true from the outset of the Pardoner's confessional prologue, when he stops the pilgrimage to declare: "heere at this alestake / I wol bothe drynke and eten of a cake" (VI.321–22). Although the pilgrimage

[24] Burger, *Chaucer's Queer Nation,* p. 121; p. 242 n. 3.

frame normally registers time through cosmic or astrological discourses (as in the case of the opening lines of the *General Prologue* or in the Introduction of Fragment II, 1–14), or through recourse to monastic or liturgical time, here the time that it has taken for the Pardoner to speak his *Prologue* is registered as the time it has taken him to eat a cake and drink his ale; time on the pilgrimage trail is reckoned through the Pardoner's body.[25] Indeed, the two thematic tendencies that Burger detects in Fragment VI collide spectacularly in the wake of the Pardoner's infamous overture to the Host to "Unbokele anon thy purs" (945) and kiss his "relikes everychon, / Ye, for a grote" (944–45). The Host, suspecting some lascivious word-play in the nouns *purs* and *relikes* unleashes his fury:

> "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!"
> (VI.946–57)

The relics that the Pardoner offers up for the host's devotion are the forgeries that he carries over his crotch in his *male* (I.694). The violence of the Host's threat to sever the Pardoner's *coillons* and turn them into relics suggests that he understands the Pardoner's invitation to kiss all of his *relikes* to carry with it a sodomitic overture and in fact makes what is implicit in the Pardoner's address to him painfully concrete. Carolyn Dinshaw has demonstrated that Chaucer is drawing on an episode from the *Romance of the Rose* in which Raison and Amant dispute the former's glossing of "reliques" as "coilles."[26] Chaucer provides the modestly educated Host with a sensitive intertextual ear, and here the fiction of the

[25] This is especially interesting in light of Barbara Page's observation that it is the Host who is repeatedly depicted as obsessed with reckoning time on the pilgrimage trail, a characteristic that she suggests characterizes his bourgeois masculinity. See her "Concerning the Host," *ChauR* 4 (1970): 1–13.

[26] Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics,* p. 169.

Canterbury pilgrimage is, as many critics have pointed out, complicit in what we might call homophobic violence. Whether or not the Pardoner offers his relics in this manner, the Host seizes on the possibility of sodomitic encounter on the pilgrimage trail (and significantly, as we shall see, in an alehouse) to provide himself with the occasion for a drama of masculine self-definition, a performance that, like the posturing of the author of the *Guide to Santiago,* relies on the repudiation of sodomitic pleasure to cement his identity in the uncertain climate of the pilgrimage trail. More important, the Host's performance of masculinity has much more in common with the Pardoner's than has been generally acknowledged.

Queer readings of the Pardoner have offered intriguing insights into his performance of masculinity. Dinshaw characterizes him as a "fetishist" who "surrounds himself with objects—relics, sealed documents; even words, regarded as objects—which he substitutes for his own lacking wholeness."[27] Sturges, drawing on Dinshaw's interpretation, has seen the Host's threat of violence to the Pardoner as "a threat of exposure or unveiling," that "undermines the Pardoner's masculine authority . . . that deconstructs performative masculinity."[28] In Sturges's view, the Host's exposure of the Pardoner's fetishistic claim to phallic authority (what Dinshaw, via Freud, describes as the simultaneously naive and skeptical belief that the objects he carries can magically make him whole), secures the Host's masculinity by discrediting the Pardoner's.[29] Sturges sees this episode as a "symbolic castration," and the way he uses that Lacanian term differs from the way it is developed in the work of Slavoj Zizek, who argues that "symbolic castration" occurs not when someone is ritualistically divested of his or her phallic prop, but rather at the very moment in which the subject is invested with the power-generating phallic supplement, since this investment points to the gap between one's body and the power claims that one makes through it.[30] As I will suggest, Zizek's exegesis of Lacan provides another way to look at the violent episode that concludes the Pardoner's performance, and especially its setting on the pilgrimage trail.

An assumption common to many analyses of the Pardoner is that

[27] Ibid., p. 159.
[28] Sturges, *Chaucer's Pardoner and Gender Theory,* p. 75.
[29] Also see Kruger, "Claiming the Pardoner," p. 136.
[30] *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 87–93.

we can learn a lot about the construction of masculinity through his catastrophic bid for phallic authority, which brings to mind Judith Halberstam's observation that masculinity "becomes legible as masculinity when it leaves the white male middle-class body,"[31] that is to say, when it is claimed by bodies with which it is not routinely associated. Halberstam argues that the "naturalization" of masculinity, the manner in which it is seen to effortlessly inhere in the bodies of a small and empowered group of men, masks the manner in which that group's "heroic" masculinity depends "on the subordination of alternative masculinities"[32]—those of the poor, the nonwhite, the nonstraight, and the nonmale. One might see in the standoff between the Host and the Pardoner a gruesome allegory of Halberstam's theory. Readers of the *Canterbury Tales* could view the Host's threat as a window onto the more subtle strategies by which "heroic" or dominant masculinities parasitically feed on "alternative" ones. Although several analyses of the Host's tirade state that, as Halberstam demonstrates, there are multiple *masculinities,* they focus exclusively on the Pardoner's performance of masculinity as fetishistic, as stemming from a sense of bodily or psychological lack, while the Host's is read as antifetishistic, as following a much less tortuous path to self-realization. If, as both Halberstam and Bhabha have argued, dominant masculinities, like all masculinities, are essentially prosthetic, they secure their "manifest destiny" through denying their reliance on "prostheses" and projecting that reliance onto others. Following the logic of their compelling arguments, one must wonder if the critical propensity to focus on the "fetishistic" construction of the Pardoner's masculinity unintentionally perpetuates the ideologies that safeguard masculinity as the property of socially enfranchised, "biologically" male, bodies.[33] If modern Euro-American societies have strung a

[31] Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 2.

[32] Ibid., p. 1.

[33] In devoting an almost exclusive interest in the manner in which the Pardoner claims, or fails to claim, status as a masculine subject, antihomophobic readings run the risk of aligning themselves with inter- and trans-phobic assessments such as Eugene Vance's, who views the Pardoner's crotch as "deficient." Vance, "Chaucer's Pardoner: Relics, Discourse, and Frames of Propriety" in *NLH* 20 (1988–89): 741–43. In a fascinatingly sympathetic reading of the Pardoner, Lee Patterson argues that the Pardoner is "lacking sexual organs . . . that allow him to assert a straightforward gender identity," *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), p. 397. Patterson seems to assume that sexual organs are the sole basis upon which one can "assert a straightforward gender identity"—in this case, masculinity, which aligns his reading of the Pardoner with the logic that Halberstam dismantles, a logic that has also been critiqued by intersex and transgender theorists and activists.

velvet rope around Masculinity for an elite few to enjoy by discrediting alternative masculinities as derivative and prosthetic, all the while denying Masculinity's own reliance on both prostheses and the masculine variations that it impugns, then it would seem worthwhile to consider to what extent the Host's masculinity participates in the same fetishistic fantasies as the masculinity that it "unmasks," and why it is that its prosthetic nature has for so long evaded critical scrutiny.

In attempting to answer this question, I return to Burger's observation that the pilgrimage frame is brought to the fore in Fragment VI to a peculiar degree, and this is especially so in the confrontation between the Pardoner and the Host. Not only does the language of the Host's threat draw on images related to the pilgrimage (relics, monstrances, processions—and in its reference to the Pardoner's *breech* it may even refer to Saint Thomas's venerated hair pants at Canterbury),[34] but the Pardoner's overture to the Host is prefaced by an effort to convince his fellow pilgrims of the benefits of making an offering to his relics by highlighting the perils inherent in travel:

> 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 felaweshipe yfalle,
> That may assoile yow, bothe moore and lasse,
> Whan that the soule shal fro the body passe.
> (VI. 936–40)

Here, the Pardoner brandishes with little subtlety his "male" full of fetishes in an attempt to secure a degree of masculine authority above both the "moore" and the "lasse" (VI. 939). Indeed, his "male" resting in his lap assumes the appearance of the phallus as explicated by Slavoj Zizek: "And one has to think of the phallus not as the organ that immediately expresses the vital force of my being, my virility, and so forth but, precisely, as such an insignia [i.e., a royal scepter] . . . phallus is an 'organ without a body' that I put on, which gets attached to my body, without ever becoming its 'organic part,' namely, forever sticking out as its incoherent, excessive supplement."[35] That the Pardoner makes his

[34] Daniel Knapp, "The Relyk of a Seint: A Gloss on Chaucer's Pilgrimage," *ELH* 39 (1972): 1–26.

[35] *Organs Without Bodies,* p. 87.

boldest bid for masculine authority by pointing to his relic-laden male, that excessive supplement, at the same time that he draws attention to the perils that pilgrimage poses to the body; that the Host threatens the Pardoner's body through a rhetoric laden with images of objects and practices associated with pilgrimage warrant a closer examination of the implications that the pilgrimage setting has for the interpretation of the Host and Pardoner's below-the-belt imbroglio.

The Pardoner's phallic push, so to speak, is reminiscent of an encounter narrated in the nonfictional pilgrimage account of Pero Tafur, a Castilian knight who traveled to Constantinople and back in the 1430s. On his way back to Spain, Tafur has an altercation with a German noble who has confiscated his sword and claimed later to have lost it. Although Tafur's German foe offers to replace the lost sword with one of his own, Tafur threatens to return to Germany with fellow Spaniards to avenge this affront. For readers of Pero Tafur's narrative, his uncompromising insistence on having his sword and no other seems odd in light of his flexibility in other sumptuary matters: he dons Muslim dress to enter a mosque in Jerusalem, grows a beard so lengthy that it offends his compatriots, and dons his king's livery at strategic moments. Tafur's conflict in Germany is best understood as an attempt to assert his status as a Knight by insisting on the inseparability of his sword from his body; the sword becomes, in Zizek's words, an "incoherent, excessive supplement." Like Tafur, the Pardoner as a traveling subject positions himself relative to those he encounters along the way by cleaving fetishistically to the objects through which he is invested with institutional and masculine authority; in fact, the sword was as inseparable from knightly identity in fifteenth-century Castile as pardons were from Pardoners.[36] Just as Tafur's sword takes on an almost incomprehensible

[36] For this episode, see Tafur, *Travels and Adventures,* pp. 205–8. In fifteenth-century Castile, the ritual of the investment of arms had become the single most defining mark of knighthood. N. R. Porro, *La investidura de armas en Castilla del Rey Sabio a los católicos* (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 1998), pp. 30–37. Relics are another question entirely. Sigfried Wenzel, "Chaucer's Pardoner and His Relics," *SAC* 11 (1989), argues that the association of pardoners with fake relics was not as uncommon as scholars of Chaucer have maintained. Alfred L. Kellogg and Louis A. Haselmeyer, "Chaucer's Satire of the Pardoner," *PMLA* 66 (March 1951): 251–77, made the influential but mistaken argument that Chaucer's coupling of his Pardoner with fake relics was unique. Jill Mann cited several continental examples of this association in *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire: The Literature of Social Classes and the General Prologue of the "Canterbury Tales"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 149–51; and J. J. Jusserand, *English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages,* 2nd ed. (London: Unwin, 1920), cites several English examples on pp. 316–25.

importance in the dispute that he narrates, so too does the Pardoner's bag of tricks in the *Canterbury Tales.* Both travelers believe in the power of the objects that they annex to their bodies to constitute them as subjects and guarantee them recognition of their claims to social precedence on the basis of gender, estate, and other axes of social differentiation.

It might seem too obvious to cite Judith Butler's now-axiomatic assertion that gender identity is performative.[37] What is often not taken into account in elaborations of Butler's formulation is the fact that the gestures, utterances, and acts that create the illusion of a gendered subject rely crucially on the spaces in which they unfold.[38] In order for a

[37] Butler first explored these ideas in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1989), but her subsequent work over the last fifteen years has continued to revise and expand on the implications of her insight, most recently in *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[38] The community of literary scholars that has done so much to craft and advance queer-affirmative ways of reading Middle English literature faces a methodological challenge: some of the most heuristically powerful formulations of queer theory itself require a careful retooling when brought to bear on the embodied social practices of sexual dissidents and gender minorities. Judith Butler's argument about the performative nature of gender is essentially temporal: it seeks to revise the cause-and-effect narrative in which bodily "sex" precedes and provides the building blocks for "gender." The "disembodied" nature of much of Butler's theory has been discussed by her critics and acknowledged by Butler herself. See Butler's *Undoing Gender,* p. 198. Butler's influence on the study of gender and sexual desire in medieval literature has been, of course, enormous, and it is no coincidence that this body of criticism has focused to a great extent on questions of temporality rather than space. Carolyn Dinshaw's "touch across time" from *Getting Medieval* is a good example of the powerful way queer theory can be used to rethink affective sentiments across vast historical divides. See also the essays in *Queering the Middle Ages,* ed. Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), especially the editors' provocative introduction, pp. xi–xxiii. Equally influential in the study of Middle English literature has been Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), a book whose arguments harness their force from a culturally potent domestic-spatial metaphor whose universality has been called into question by the work of Gayatri Gopinath and José Quiroga, among others. Gopinath and Quiroga demonstrate the manner in which the critical commonplaces of queer theory, such as the "epistemology of the closet," are ill-equipped to deal with manifestations of queer desire and social practice in other societies, which emerge in relation to culturally distinct practices of dwelling and travel. See Gayatri Gopinath, "Homo-Economics: Queer Sexualities in a Transnational Frame," in *Burning Down the House: Recycling Domesticity,* ed. Rosemary Marangoly George (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998), pp. 102–26; and José Quiroga, *Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latino America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000). Quiroga demonstrates how Euro-American ideas about the space of the "closet," and particularly the coercive and normalizing injunction to "come out" of it, ignore the living conditions and cultural realities of queer Latin Americans and Latino/a immigrants, and Gopinath demonstrates how an uncritical acceptance of Western assumptions about the "closet" as a space of secrecy and abjection might lead to misrepresentations of the erotic practices of non-Western cultures. For a rare

core gender identity to congeal to the point that it assumes the appearance of the *cause* of all of the little performances of which it is actually the *effect,* those performances must be considered by a group of people familiar with the signifying conventions that the performances are, in various ways, exploiting. Travel removes the gendered subject from the spaces in which his or her gender identity is prompted, staged, interpreted, and confirmed, potentially leading to the traveler's disquieting awareness of the contingency of the quotidian—the ritualistic, routine, even boredom-inducing means through which certain men and women lay claim to and perform their power and prestige. In short, travel can reiterate one's own "symbolic castration," the yawning gap between one's body and the power that one claims, following Zizek, at the very moment that one annexes symbols of power to it. Under such circumstances, the prostheses of masculinity, "incoherent, excessive supplements" are liable to come under unprecedented scrutiny and need shoring up.

If becoming a man or a woman is difficult work, it is all the more so in transit. But it is not just the Pardoner who testifies to the varying degrees to which gender performance must be recalibrated according to one's location. Charting the Host's career in masculinity across the numerous spaces that it fugitively inhabits in the *Canterbury Tales* dramatizes this point. The *General Prologue* states:

> 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.
> (I.751–56)

Not only is the Host described in terms that index the distance between his robust "manhod" and that of the Pardoner, whose portrait precedes the Host's, but his masculinity is also made intelligible to Chaucer's

consideration of gender, sexual desire, and medieval space, see Susan Schibanoff's fascinating examination of one medieval woman's attempt to combat and come to terms with the patriarchally imposed separation from her female lover: Schibanoff, "Hildegard of Bingen and Richardis of Stade: The Discourses of Desire," in *Same Sex Love and Desire Among Women in the Middle Ages,* ed. Francesca Canadé Sautman and Pamela Sheingorn (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 49–85.

reader through reference to the spaces in which he would excel as a man: the aristocratic or royal "hall" and more specifically, in "Chepe," (Cheapside) London. If the aristocratic household or the urban topography of London provide the framework within which the Host's masculine authority is understood, it is perhaps because it is difficult to make a case for it at his home in Southwark.

Dispersed throughout the pilgrimage frame are references to the Host's wife Goodelief. The Host wishes she could have heard the tale of exemplary wifehood offered by the Clerk (IV.1212a–g), and later on aborts his "tale" about her abuses for fear that she will learn of his unflattering disclosure from one of the pilgrim company (IV.2419–40). The Host's abrupt discarding of the matter of his *tale* is probably not what most readers would expect from a man of such *boold* speech, yet Goodelief's shadow looms large on the pilgrimage trail to Canterbury, silencing the Host in a manner not unlike the manner in which we see him silence the Pardoner at the end of Fragment VI. Goodelief's mysterious power over the Host is clarified in his final description of their home life. He tells the pilgrim company that, when he fails to thrash their servants or when he does not assault the neighbors who fail to defer to her when she goes to Mass, Goodlief's ire is stirred to a fever pitch:

> Whan she comth hoom she rampeth in my face,
> And crieth, 'False coward, wrek thy wyf!
> By corpus bones, I wol have thy knyf,
> And thou shalt have my distaf and go spynne!'
> Fro day to nyght right thus she wol bigynne.
> . . . . . .
> For I am perilous with knyf in honde,
> Al be it that I dar nat hire withstonde,
> For she is byg in armes, by my feith:
> That shal he fynde that hire mysdooth or seith—
> But lat us passe awey fro this mateere.
> (VII.1904–8; 1919–23)

In yet another aborted speech regarding his wife, the Host reveals the phallic supplement through which he fetishistically supplements his "lack-in-being": his knife. Although in public, the Host is "perilous with knyf in honde," at home it not only does him no good, but it

actually becomes his greatest liability. Goodelief undermines her husband's masculine performance by suggesting that it is his knife alone that grants the Host his authority as man and as husband, that his body itself, evidently slight alongside hers, is no guarantee of that authority. In threatening to divest the Host of his knife and force him to take up the distaff, Goodelief comes close to enacting domestic mutiny.

Yet, the threat of wifely insurrection does not "unveil" the Host's fetishistic will-to-sufficiency. The revelation that the Host's claim to masculinity rests on rather shaky foundations does not annul that claim. Rather than deflating the Host's faith in his phallic insignia and the inevitability of the domestic and civic power that he claims through it, Goodelief's domestic "rebellion," in making explicit the brittle logic of her husband's masculine self-constitution, redoubles the power accorded to his phallic prop in the public sphere. It is, after all, to get the Host to perform masculinity in a certain way, to use his knife against the neighbors who have slighted his wife, that Goodelief demonstrates how much her husband stakes on so little. Although the scene described by the Host would seem to constitute a subversion of the power he claims through his masculinity within the home, it is within the domestic world that his phallic authority is scripted, and he is, at most, only its co-author.

One final but crucial point: as the Host's boast suggests, were Goodelief not so "byg in armes" he would silence her with his blade. Goodelief's comic belittling of her husband is conservative—even reactionary—in that it harnesses and ultimately confirms the power of a violent masculinity. What Chaucer offers here is a comic variation on a much more sinister and pervasive cultural understanding, in which public masculinities depend on the confirmation of their power through the exercise of violence in the domestic realm. Goodelief constitutes a phobic distortion of a domestic sphere, traditionally gendered as the realm of the (compliant and submissive) feminine, in which women (and servants [*knaves*], as the Host makes clear) live with the reality of violent coercion and retribution by those who claim phallic authority in the public sphere, whose claim to that public authority rests, in part, on their roles as master, husband, father. This reading of the spatial constructions of the Host's masculinity should not overlook the way that Chaucer's poem creates a domestic threat to masculinity that is, in fact, no more of a threat than the incalculable number of women, children,

and servants who have had and continue to suffer violence in the places they call "home."

Inscribed by the *General Prologue* as displacement from courtly and civic spaces, assuming its contours in its movements between household and city, the Host's masculinity, like those of the Pardoner and of Pero Tafur, finds itself at a loss on the road, unmoored from the sites in and through which it thinks, performs, and enacts its power. If the Host's masculine prerogative is acknowledged in Southwark, it is because he successfully shuttles his performance of masculinity back and forth between the masculinized sphere of the street and the feminized world of the home. On the pilgrimage trail, the Host is far away from these markedly local spaces in which he negotiates his power (Southwark home and street) and in which the poem defines it (aristocratic hall, Cheapside). Under these conditions of displacement, the Host's knife, like the Pardoner's *male,* this "organ without a body," takes on an almost unconscionable centrality to his self-definition. It is the process of this "difficult, uncertain becoming" between Southwark and Canterbury that a focus on the spatial practices of the Host's masculinity asks us to entertain when we return our attention to the explosive conclusion of Fragment VI.

What escapes the notice of most analyses of this scene is that it is not only the Pardoner whose reliance on props is exposed, but also the Host's. His threat to cut off the *coillons* of the Pardoner implies the use of the phallic supplement through and around which he negotiates his masculine authority at home and in the public world of Southwark. Yes, the Pardoner's body is not enough to claim masculinity, but this is not because of his anatomical anomalies or his erotic disposition. In reaching for his knife, the Host demonstrates that no body is sufficient to claim masculinity in and of itself. This claim is crucially dependent on phallic props and a fetishistic relationship to them, that is to say, one that believes in their power as a source of plenitude yet also refuses to acknowledge dependence on them. The Host insists on the trumped-up nature of the Pardoner's masculinity, but the manner in which this passage of Fragment VI implies the use of the Host's knife without ever actually bringing it into sight suggests Chaucer's complicity in the degradation of the Pardoner. As we have seen, the most cherished stratagem through which masculinities orchestrate their transparency is by exposing other masculinities' reliance on bodily supplements while disavowing their own. We see such a dynamic at work in the Host's silencing of the

Pardoner, and the implicit presence of the Host's knife is part of a textual optic that foregrounds the prostheses of the "weakest link" in the chain of masculinity, while bringing into sight only flickers of the prosthesis of its "superior." For all of this, it would be shortsighted to assume that the Host ensconces himself amid this phallic panoply on the throne of heroic masculinity. This dubious honor must go to the Knight, who, in breaking up this fight, not only points out the excessive nature of the Host's reliance on his knife, but seemingly does so without any discernable phallic propping up:

> But right anon the worthy Knyght bigan
> Whan that he saugh that al the peple lough,
> "Namoore of this for it is right ynough!
> Sire Pardoner, be glad and myrie of cheere;
> And ye, sire Hoost, that been to me so deere,
> I prey yow that ye kisse the Pardoner.
> And Pardoner, I prey thee, drawe thee neer,
> And, as we diden, lat us laughe and pleye."
> Anon they kiste, and ryden forth hir weye.
> (VI.960–68)

Initially, it would appear that the Knight saves the day through his appeal to good manners alone. Yet, the language of his intervention creates a textual echo that suggests that he is using much more than a call for decorum to put an end to this conflict. The heated argument between the Host and the Pardoner is halted by the Knight's "Namoore," an interjection that takes us back to the Knight's *Tale,* at the point in which Theseus puts an end to Palamoun and Arcite's near-fatal struggle:

> And at a stert he was bitwix hem two,
> And pulled out a swerd and cride, "Hoo!
> Namoore, up peyne of lesynge of youre heed"
> (1.1705–8)![39]

The repetition of the imperative "Namoore" represents the Knight's fantastic invocation of the authority of the "fictional" Theseus, whom he himself has created, and who brandishes his sword to squelch the

[39] I would like to thank Frank Grady for this suggestion.

conflict between Palamoun and Arcite. The Knight's role-playing and the linguistic repetition on which it is founded calls oblique attention to his own lethal skill in arms, something that the *General Prologue* dwells on at great length. Even more indirectly than the Host, the Knight claims authority through alluding to the phallic prop (his weaponry) on which his masculinity is founded. The Pardoner's Prologue, Tale, and Epilogue move from the Pardoner, who calls attention to the technologies that found his masculinity, to the Host, who alludes obliquely to the technologies of his masculinity through a threat of violence against the Pardoner, to the Knight, who might implicitly threaten the armed violence associated with chivalric masculinities through the textual citation of his own *Tale.* This progression represents an increasing subtlety of self-assertion and disavowal, and suggests an understanding that the force of any masculinity derives in no small part from the stealth with which it appeals to its fetishes.

Fragment VI invites a consideration of the masculine body as a traveling body, as a body suspended between the institutional, domestic, and civic spaces in which it symbolically and materially justifies and exercises its power, and stages the delicate attempts at maintaining and making sense of that power away from home. In charting the articulations of the Host's masculine authority across the spaces of the household, the city street, and the pilgrimage trail, we are able to view the fetishistic logic that provides its foundation. By highlighting the similarities of this logic with the logic that underwrites the Pardoner's, and even the Knight's, claims to masculinity, we challenge the often unspoken conceptions of what counts as a "real" man, which have historically bristled with racist, sexist, class-based, and homo- and transphobic, bias.

Yet, in spite of these similarities between the Pardoner's and the Host's phallicizing tactics, they enact them in and as very different spatial maneuvers. Characterized predominately by kinesis, the Pardoner's masculinity takes shape between and among far-flung rural, civic, and institutional spaces. If the Host's gender identity is one that is unsettled by his occasional movement away from the urban center and domestic space of its origin, the Pardoner's is one that, owing to the nature of his profession, exists in an almost permanent state of movement between spaces, none of which can be posited as a site of origin.[40] The Pardoner

[40] In fact, the depiction of the Pardoner's traveling practices, devotional and professional alike, is central to Chaucer's overall strategy of creating this corrupt figure. Christian Zacher argues that the seriousness with which each of the pilgrims undertakes the

and the Host are, in effect, two sides of the same coin; both are figures through which Chaucer stages the challenge that travel poses to socially recognized expressions of phallic authority, the latter as an example of the limitations of locally fashioned masculinities and the former as evidence of travel's ability to give rise to new, socially pernicious gender identities.

The sense of dizzying kinesis that attends the Pardoner's gender performance is mirrored structurally in the circularity of his con act. The credence accorded to his bulls and relics rests on his tales of where he has been, tales that, in turn, gain credence through his presentation of the bulls and relics. In the Host, the *Canterbury Tales* offers a version of masculinity so enmeshed in modes of urban dwelling that its chain of citation strains as it is pulled away from its accustomed spatial frame. In the Pardoner, one observes a masculinity without a spatial frame at all, one that emerges in the interstices of institutional and jurisdictional spaces, one whose chain of citation unabashedly and troublingly loops back on itself. The Pardoner is associated with Rouncivale, a hospital at Charing Cross, but unlike the Host, his *General Prologue* portrait as well as his confessional monologue focuses more on his movement between spaces than it does his mode of dwelling in the city; in fact, the allusion to Rouncivale, an institution that became the subject of scandal in the later fourteenth century, reveals less about the Pardoner as an occupant of a city or an institution than it does about his perambulations.[41] According to the *General Prologue,* the Pardoner travels the length and breadth of England swindling lay people and clerics alike:

> But with thise relikes, whan that he fond
> A povre person dwellynge upon lond,
> Upon a day he gat hym moore moneye

pilgrimage is a good index of how Chaucer meant to portray them, and thus argues that the Wife of Bath and the Pardoner, as "negative" examples of pilgrimage, are the most outré of the Canterbury company. Rather than viewing Chaucer as a conservative apologist for the embattled institution of pilgrimage who uses the character of the Pardoner as a negative example of devotional travel, my reading focuses on the spatial trajectory of the Pardoner, the networks of mobility, and the practices of dwelling, in which Chaucer accomplishes the embodiment of this singular literary creation. Zacher, p. 93. See also David Lawton's "Chaucer's Two Ways: The Pilgrimage Frame of the *Canterbury Tales,*" SAC 9 (1987): 3–40, who argues that the use of the pilgrimage frame dramatizes the immorality of pilgrims such as the Wife of Bath and the Pardoner (p. 33).

[41] Kellogg and Haselmeyer, "Chaucer's Satire," pp. 251–77.

> Than that the person gat in monthes tweye;
> And thus, with feyned flaterye and japes,
> He made the person and the peple his apes.
> (I.701–5)

Although the countryside that provides the stage for the Pardoner's sacramental graft is here gendered masculine through the phonetic convergence of *person* (a gender-neutral noun meaning "person") and *person* (an always masculine noun meaning "parson"), this same countryside and the poverty by which it is defined is gendered feminine in the Pardoner's confessional prologue through its association with women and children:

> I wol have moneie, wolle, chese, and whete,
> Al were it yeven of the povereste page,
> Or of the povereste wydwe in a village,
> Al sholde hir children sterve for famine.
> Nay, I wol drynke licour of the vyne
> And have a joly wenche in every toun.
> (VI.448–53)

The human face that the Pardoner puts on the poverty of the "village" indexes the exorbitance of his greed, but it also demonstrates the manner in which his livelihood and his claim to phallic authority relies on the exploitation of disempowered women and children scattered throughout England.[42]

Chaucer's Pardoner avails himself of a logic that has prevailed in almost every culture until the late twentieth century: the gendering of voluntary travel as masculine and of dwelling as feminine. As Eric J. Leed's survey of the Western literary tradition has shown, masculinity has traditionally been associated with, and even *defined by,* the ability to cross political borders at will, while the hallmark of femininity has been

[42] David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity,* discusses Chaucer's representations of what he calls the "powers of the countryside," the violent and sometimes miraculous means by which country folk in the *Canterbury Tales* resist the exploitation of city dwellers. The Pardoner's self-presentation vis-à-vis the rural world is more in line with the examples of unchallenged urban supremacy from Boccaccio's *Decameron,* also analyzed by Wallace, pp. 125–55.

"sessility," rootedness in the home.[43] The Pardoner draws on the association of travel with masculine power and of dwelling with disempowerment to conceive of his claims to authority over his victims, whom he figures resolutely as *dwellers:*

> First I pronounce whennes that I come,
> And thane my bulles shewe I, alle and some.
> 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 thane telle I forth my tales;
> Bulles of popes and of cardynales,
> Of patriarkes and bishopes I shewe,
> And in Latyn I speke a wordes fewe,
> To saffron with my predicacioun,
> And for to stire hem to devocioun.
> (VI.335–46)

It is the Pardoner's purported access to distant centers of ecclesiastical power that opens the door of the parish churches in which he bilks the poor and naive, in the process diverting the offerings that would go to the local parish priest into his swelling coffers. The priests and clerks that would object to the Pardoner's diversion of their parishes' revenues are forced to acquiesce to him because he has visited bishoprics and papal courts. The Pardoner's various bulls and seals attest to his having traveled to the courts of the highest-ranking members of the ecclesiasti-

[43] Eric J. Leed, *The Mind of the Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism* (New York: Basic Books, 1991); Teresa de Lauretis has argued that the masculine monopoly on travel has not simply made it difficult for women to leave home on their own accord, but has formatively shaped Western epistemology and narratology. See her *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1984). Janet Wolff and Caren Kaplan have both argued against the widespread use of travel metaphors in critical theory on the basis that the masculinist history of travel compromises the theoretical tools that would explain and critique Western cultural production. Wolff, "On the Road Again: Metaphors of Travel in Cultural Criticism," in *Cultural Studies* 7 (May 1993): 224–39, and Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996). Pilgrimage, especially to local shrines, is an exception to this rule, as the figure of Chaucer's Wife of Bath suggests. What is important here is the manner in which the Pardoner's speech positions him as an institutional traveler, while Chaucer's narrative casts him as a devotional traveler, perhaps suggesting Chaucer's undermining of the Pardoner's masculine self-fashioning through travel.

cal elite. These documents, like the *vernycle* he wears on his cap, are material proof of a mobility that his victims do not share and to which they must, on pain of institutional violence, defer. The physical proof of his travels "warente," or guarantee, the safety of the Pardoner's body from the physical violence of the provincial prelacy; it secures his phallic authority through the disempowerment of local priests and clerks. The first thing I do, says the Pardoner, is "pronounce whennes I come"—the Pardoner's traffic in relics and indulgences is enabled by his traffic in travel narrative. In these rural settings, the Pardoner usurps the thoroughly masculine discourse of the sermon (*predicacioun*), complete with its Latin tag phrases, from parish priests through a phallicizing discourse of travel narrative.[44] The Pardoner, in spite of the physical vulnerability or possibly "deficient" anatomy of his body, fashions a masculine identity in and through travel from civic and ecclesiastical centers to a remote and emasculated world of villages and towns.

The Pardoner's performance and its aftermath provide the occasion for the *Canterbury Tales'* most sustained exploration of the vulnerability of the types of masculine self-constitution that rely on quotidian forms of violence to achieve their sense coherence and to enforce their social precedence. Although most explorations of the Pardoner's gender have focused on the question of his anatomy or his sexual disposition, his appearance in Fragment VI precipitates a consideration, if not exactly a critique, of masculinity's dependence on its unabashed dominance of femininity and its less frequently acknowledged dominance of other masculinities. Indeed, in the context of Fragment VI, the Pardoner's sexuality is subsumed under his desire for dominance: the "wenches" he claims to desire are just one more example of the goods and privileges that he commands in the course of his coercive journeys. The Pardoner's

[44] As Kellogg and Haselmeyer showed, the medieval Papacy was concerned about the abuses of the Pardoner's real-life counterparts. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) forbade Pardoners from preaching, and canon law emphatically defined pardoners as messengers who linked ecclesiastical centers and rural peripheries, not as preachers. See "Chaucer's Satire," pp. 255–61. Pardoners were, in fact, subject to the violent repulsion of local clerics, who questioned the latitude of their powers. It is within this context that I read the Pardoner's sermon as an usurpation. See also Alan J. Fletcher, "The Preaching of the Pardoner," *SAC* 11 (1989): 15–36, who argues that the form of the Pardoner's sermon would have caused suspicion among Chaucer's readers in the England of the 1390s. Alastair Minnis has pointed out that the Pardoner also usurps the ability to absolve sinners, a prerogative that belonged exclusively to ordained priests. See Minnis, "Reclaiming the Pardoners" *JMEMS* 33 (Spring 2003): 311–34. One can see the performative speech act of absolution as yet another way in which the Pardoner constructs himself as a gendered subject.

clash with the Host and its resolution at the hands of the Knight suggest an understanding of masculinity that is not principally defined by anatomy or what we would call sexual preference, although both play a role in the two combatants' self-fashioning and their sparring with each other. In short, pilgrimage presents each character with unique opportunities and challenges in the articulation of his identity. Each has a distinct relationship to pilgrimage, and their differential positions vis-à-vis pilgrimage suggest that pilgrims' liberation from conventionally defined hierarchies does not necessarily contribute to social harmony. The alehouse row of Fragment VI complicates one of the most influential theories regarding the relationship between self-fashioning and devotional travel: Victor and Edith Turners' characterization of Christian pilgrimage as a "liminoid" or "liminal" social practice.[45] Although the concept of "liminality" is routinely and usefully invoked, it is yet another example of a powerful theoretical tool whose metaphysics tend to overshadow a consideration of the specific ways that Chaucer represents medieval uses of space, and to cloud an understanding of his depiction of the gender politics of devotional travel, especially the experiences of women.

## The Absent Tapster (The Limits of "Liminality")

"Once traveling is foregrounded as a cultural practice, then dwelling too needs to be reconceived—no longer simply the ground from which traveling departs and to which it returns."

—James Clifford[46]

A pilgrim is one who divests himself of the mundane concomitants of religion—which become entangled with its practice in the local situation—to confront, in a special "far" milieu, the basic elements and structures of his faith in their unshielded, virgin radiance.

—Victor and Edith Turner.[47]

The "liminality" of pilgrimage is something that readers of Chaucer and other medieval representations of devotional travel have long taken for granted. Victor and Edith Turner influentially argued that pilgrimage is akin to primitive rites of initiation that dramatized and ratified a

[45] Victor Turner and Edith L. Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).
[46] Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century,* p. 44.
[47] Witter and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture,* p. 15.

change in status, for example, the transition from boyhood to manhood. Taking their cue from anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, the Turners posited three stages for such "social dramas": separation, margin or limen, and reaggregation.[48] According to the Turners, the pilgrim experience is universal: pilgrims leave behind the social hierarchies and conflicts of their home to participate in a corporate spiritual enterprise. In the time between their departure from and return to home (i.e., the "liminal" phase), there is a potential for forms of self-fashioning that are not held in thrall to the power structures of the pilgrims' homes and, under certain circumstances, might even subvert them entirely. More specifically, the pilgrim company is offered as an example of *communitas,* a "spontaneous" "liminal phenomenon" conspicuous for its "undifferentiated" and "egalitarian" social bonds.[49] In literary studies, recourse to the idea of "liminality" is both routine and uncritical of the ways that the Turners' theories have been received, critiqued, modified, and adapted in other disciplines. Anthropologists and historians have made two far-reaching criticisms of the concept of pilgrimage-as-liminoid-phenomenon: (1) in the way that this theory focuses on the institutional intentions behind pilgrimage rather than on the social practice of actual pilgrims, it tends to homogenize the spaces that the pilgrim traverses in the course of his or her journey, rendering invisible the differences in the ways that pilgrims can and do use specific spaces;[50] and (2) it distorts the understanding of women's roles in purportedly "liminoid" social practices, which are qualitatively so different from men's that they often

[48] Ibid, p. 249.

[49] Ibid., pp. 250–51.

[50] The fieldwork of anthropologist Michael Sallnow at rural pilgrimage shrines in the Peruvian Andes suggests that the Turners' ideas about the status-leveling inherent in the liminoid experience of pilgrimage not only would have distorted the evidence he had gathered, but were—quite simply—wrong. Sallnow found that pilgrimage led to an *intensification* of pilgrims' claims to social precedence over one another and was characterized by power-charged conflicts between the elites responsible for the maintenance of the shrines and the pilgrims who came to worship at them, which is to say that the shrine, more than any other space, was the setting for the most contentious identitarian and social struggles. Sallnow's conclusions call into question both the hypothesis of the suspension social contest in Christian pilgrimage, and also the suggestion that all spaces through which the pilgrim passes are equally "liminal." See Michael J. Sallnow, *Pilgrims of the Andes: Regional Cults in Cusco* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987). A collection of essays by anthropologists has suggested ways to correct and expand on the Turners' view of pilgrimage as a liminoid phenomenon. See John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow, eds., *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

cannot be recognized as "liminal" at all.[51] Although each critic approaches the Turners' influential theory from a different disciplinary standpoint, collectively their work poses the question of what is left of that theory once we take into account the social forces and practices that militate against the suspension of social hierarchy in pilgrimage. Together they show that, if pilgrimage can be called a liminal experience, then it is liminal at specific junctures, under certain conditions, and for certain people.

These objections to the universal claims of the Turners' theory raise two important questions for evaluating the frame of Chaucer's fictional pilgrimage: Are certain spaces more "liminal" than others, and if so, then for whom? The alehouse of Fragment VI is a place where such questions might be productively advanced. Paul Strohm has singled out the alehouse as a space that could, like its cousins the inn and the tavern, serve as a fraught setting for "occasion[s] of social redefinition."[52] Per-

[51] Caroline Bynum has argued against the imposition of the Turners' concept of liminality on the life-stories of female saints, stating that the apparent universality of their theory masks the fact that it is a theory derived from evidence left behind by "educated elites, aristocratic elites, and male elites." See her "Women's Stories, Women's Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality," in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays of Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), pp. 27–53. Bynum also observes that, while the writing of elite males often organizes the life of its subject as a series of dramatic transitions and upward changes in status, women's life-writing is not as formatively shaped by the themes of "climax, conversion, reintegration, and triumph," but are rather quite conspicuous for their emphasis on the continuity of women's status, which she interprets as a symptom of women's "insignificance" to many medieval power structures. "Women's lives," argues Bynum, "are not liminal to women" (p. 32). Darlene M. Juschka's anthropological research suggests that there are material and cultural reasons why medieval women such as Margery Kempe might not have produced a pilgrimage account that unfolded as a classic narrative of separation, limen, and reaggregation. See Juschka, "Who's Turn Is It to Cook? Communitas and Pilgrimage Questioned," *Mosaic* 36 (December 2003): 189–204. For Juschka, the concept of *communitas* presupposes "a self unfettered by history, capable of being cast off temporarily in the experience of a more universal humanity," a fantasy that Juschka argues is not attainable for women, who are, even on the pilgrimage trail, reminded constantly in ways both nettling and traumatic of their subordinate status as women.

[52] Paul Strohm, "Three London Itineraries: Aesthetic Purity and the Composing Process," in *Theory and the Premodern Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 10. Strohm shows how taverns play a decisive role in social constitution in three late medieval English texts. On the technical-legal differences between inns, taverns, and alehouses (often blurred in reality), see Peter Clark, *The English Alehouse: A Social History, 1200–1830* (London: Longman, 1983), p. 20. Donald Howard argued that the unnamed alehouse was an "abstract" marker in the landscape; unlike other Fragments, Fragment VI has no references to towns that help place it before or after any other another fragment and thus belonged, with its unsavory Pardoner, "to the no-man's land where it is." While the reference to the alehouse does not allow us to deter-

haps because they brought together transient persons for brief periods of time into novel situations of intimacy, alehouses, taverns, and inns seem especially apt stages for the types of egalitarian social bonds that the Turners characterize as typical of Christian pilgrimage.[53] However, when we compare Chaucer's depiction of the alehouse conflict of Fragment VI to other medieval depictions of taverns, alehouses, and inns, it would seem that "liminality" or *communitas* fail to illuminate several troubling facets of the gender politics of self-fashioning and communal bonding on the pilgrimage trail. Indeed, by comparing Chaucer's alehouse to other literary representations of drinking and sleeping establishments, one appreciates just how little the frame of the *Canterbury Tales,* like the Turners' anthropological study, has to say about the way pilgrims inhabit specific spaces in the course of their travels or the difference that gender makes in the way one experiences "liminality" or *communitas.*

Like Fragment VI of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales,* Day 2 Novella 3 of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* tantalizes its readers with the possibility that there is something queer afoot. It also offers what could be considered a textbook case of male self-fashioning in the liminal space of an inn. In Boccaccio's narrative, Alessandro, a young man from a finan-

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mine the proper placement of Fragment VI, it does, however, represent the only time that the pilgrim company stops at a specified location to listen to one of the pilgrim's performances and is significant because it serves as the setting for the most violent conflict of the Canterbury pilgrimage. Howard, *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales,* p. 338.

[53] Taverns, alehouses, and inns provide a strategic way to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the Turnerian concept of liminality precisely because such institutions, frequented by almost all medieval travelers, confound easy distinctions between travel and dwelling, a strict division on which the Turners' theory depends. Victor and Edith Turner characterize medieval Europe as a culture of decided stasis, in which pilgrimage affords Christians one of the only opportunities to leave the confines of the feudal village. See the Introduction of their *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture,* pp. 1–39. The Europe of the Middle Ages was, as the Turners point out, more "localized" than it was in the twentieth century, in the sense that it was, for the most part, a collection of societies that thought allegiance and exercised power in political units that might be called pre- or subnational. However, the Turners' conception of a "localized" medieval Europe has an Epcot-like quality, painting it as an archipelago of self-contained rural backwaters. Through this spatializing fiction, the Turners fashion a "native" for their anthropological consideration of medieval pilgrimage, a maneuver that, in the discipline of academic ethnography, has often served to erase the cosmopolitan experiences of the people studied in the process of creating an "authentic" *ethnos* uncontaminated by cross-cultural contact. For a critique of anthropology's desire for a culturally isolated and pure "native," see Arjun Appaduri, "Putting Hierarchy in Its Place," *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 1 (1988): 36–49. Appaduri observes, "Natives, people confined to and by the places to which they belong, groups unsullied by contact with a larger world, have probably never existed" (p. 39).

cially troubled Florentine family, marries the daughter of the King of England. He first encounters his future wife when she is on her way to Rome, while she is masquerading as an abbot. Like the young merchant protagonist of *Decameron* 2.3, the reader is not aware that there is more to this abbot than meets the eye. Boccaccio teases his unknowing readers with intimations that the abbot's exchanges with Alessandro on the road to Rome are not quite platonic: "eventually [the Abbot] found himself level with Alessandro, who was very young, exceedingly good-looking and well-built, and the most well-mannered, agreeable and finely-spoken person you can imagine. The Abbot's first glimpse of Alessandro gave him more genuine pleasure than anything he had ever seen in his life."[54] Things do not really heat up until the traveling companions come upon "a town not very richly endowed with inns" (131).[55] Alessandro eventually secures lodging in a small *albergo,* whose tight quarters make it necessary for him to lie down next to the Abbot:

> The Abbot, far from being asleep, was locked in meditation on the subject of certain newly aroused longings of his. . . . Having firmly made up his mind, he waited for complete silence to descend on the inn, then called out to Alessandro in a low voice, and firmly brushing aside the latter's numerous excuses, persuaded him to undress and lie down at his side. The Abbot placed one of his hands on Alessandro's chest, and then, to Alessandro's great astonishment, began to caress him in the manner of a young girl fondling her lover, causing Alessandro to suspect, since there seemed to be no other explanation for this extraordinary behavior, that the youth was possibly in the grip of some impure passion. (132)[56]

Alessandro's groping of the Abbot reveals to both him and Boccaccio's reader that the Abbot is a she, and a comely she at that. The two travel-

[54] Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron,* trans. G. H. McWilliam (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 130. Subsequent citations will appear in the body of this essay. The Italian reads: *gli venne nel cammino presso di sé veduto Alessandro, il quale era giovane assai, di persona e di viso bellissimo, e, quanto alcuno altro esser potesse, costumato e piacevole e di bella maniera; il quale maravigliosamente nella prima vista gli piacque quanto mai alcuna altra cosa gli fosse piaciuta.* Italian cited from *The Decameron,* ed. Vittore Branca (Milan: Mondadori, 1985), p. 108.

[55] *a una villa la quale non era troppo riccamente fornita d'alberghi,* p. 108.

[56] *L'abate, il quale non dormiva anzi alli suoi nuovi disii fieramente pensava. . . . E diliberatosi del tutto di prenderlo, parendogli ogni cosa cheta per l'albergo, con sommessa voce chiamò Alessandro e gli disse che appresso lui si coricasse: il quale, dopo molte disdette spogliatosi, vi si coricò. L'abate, postagli la mano sopra il petto, lo 'ncominciò a toccare non altramenti che sogliano fare le vaghe giovani i loro amanti: di che Alessandro si maravigliò forte e dubitò non forse l'abate, da disonesto amor preso, si movesse a cosí fattamente toccarlo,* pp. 109–10.

ing companions vow to marry one another and then spend the night making love. Upon reaching Rome, the disguised bride reveals herself as the daughter of the king of England, whom she has fled in order to avoid an unwanted marriage with the aged king of Scotland. The pope ratifies the princess's marriage to Alessandro, who then brings his merchant family out of debt and one day inherits and rules over his father-in-law's realm.

Although the road to Rome is where Boccaccio first raises the possibility of homoerotic desire, the inn is where an attempt to realize it is staged and repudiated, its containment bringing about a new social identity for its male protagonist and an entirely new political order in England. The inn is more or differently "liminal" than other spaces in *Decameron* 2.3—it is where people whose social stations would normally prevent their coming into such close contact come together to inaugurate an entirely new dynasty. Equally important, it is a space that is asymmetrically "liminal" for its male and female protagonists. Alessandro enters the inn a merchant and leaves it a king, a poster child for the revisionist potential of liminality (also, his sexual congress with a woman above his social station is made possible by the kind of suspension of social hierarchy that the Turners associated with liminality). The princess of England, on the other hand, experiences a different kind of change, one of life cycle rather than status[57]: from daughter to wife. As the reader experiences the events in the *albergo,* the very same vow and sexual act that effect Alessandro's dramatic social ascent reveal and restore his wife's gender identity. The inn is a stage for Alessandro's transformation, but for his wife it is the space in which she becomes, to borrow Caroline Bynum's phrase, "what [she] is most deeply."[58] More specifically, the *Decameron* makes the king's daughter part of the machinery of the liminality—as a mechanism, or perhaps insofar as she acts on her desire, an agent of liminality—not hers, but someone else's. Both Chaucer's alehouse and Boccaccio's *albergo* are the settings for the destabilization and rearticulation of masculine identity around a perceived

[57] Kim M. Phillips has discussed the drastic differences in medieval understandings of men's and women's life cycles. See her "Margery Kempe and the Ages of Women," in *A Companion to "The Book of Margery Kempe,"* ed. John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 17–34. Phillips observes: "A male *puer, adolescens,* or *senex* is defined by nothing more than his own age in body and mind. Female life stages [maid, wife, widow], on the other hand, have meaning only in relationship to men" (p. 33).

[58] Bynum, "Women's Stories, Women's Symbols," pp. 48–49.

threat of sodomy. Neither author's comic tale is especially concerned about the manner in which its female characters fashion gender identity in spaces such as taverns or alehouses.

Depending on how we interpret the Knight's "resolution" of the argument between the Pardoner and the Host, we might see the alehouse as a space in which *communitas* that was forged in the Host's Tabard is put to the test and ultimately redeemed, or a space in which its illusory quality and its fragility are most emphatically underlined, a space that it must flee to remain intact. Rather different from Boccaccio's *albergo,* the extent to which the alehouse constitutes a liminal space for the male pilgrims involved in this conflict is an open question. In the case of the Pardoner's performance in Fragment VI, the relationship between women's roles in alehouses to the liminality that men might or might not experience in them is even less directly represented than it is in *Decameron* 2.3. Not only does Chaucer's episode make no reference to the female pilgrims of the company, but, in the Pardoner's mention of the ale and cake that he consumes, it also chooses to imply rather than directly represent women's work in the alehouse. The production and provision of ale and perhaps even the cakes that accompanied it was work that, in Chaucer's England, fell primarily to women.[59] In particular, the job of tapster was gendered female and carried with it a set of sexual prejudices.[60] The stigmatized labor of alewives and tapsters is purged from the alehouse of Fragment VI, and its omission suggests a larger cultural disavowal of the importance of that labor to what I would call the "liminality effects" that the Turners see as inherent to and inevitable in Christian pilgrimage. Turning to another fourteenth-century depiction of an alehouse, I want to question the assumption of the "spontaneity" and egalitarian nature of pilgrimage *communitas,* the "liminal" status of pilgrimage, and the meaning of "pilgrimage" itself.

In late September 1394, the town of Burford in Oxfordshire played host to an improbable visitor. Alighting in this provincial wool-market town, one Eleanor Rykener took up residence with a man named John

[59] Judith M. Bennett, *Ale, Beer, and Brewsters in England: Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300–1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[60] The character of Kit from the anonymous *Tale of Beryn,* a fifteenth-century interpolation into the *Canterbury Tales,* is a prime example. For a thorough list of Middle English depictions of taverns and tapsters, see Ralph Hanna III, "Brewing Trouble: On Literature and History—and Alewives," in *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England,* ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 1–18.

Clerk at a tavern called the Swan and worked there as a tapster. As she had done in Oxford for the previous five weeks, where she had found work as an embroideress, Eleanor supplemented her meager wages through sex work. In her six-week tenure at the Swan, Eleanor's services where solicited by two Franciscans, a Carmelite, and six foreign men. Unknown to at least some of her clients, Eleanor had learned both embroidery and prostitution in London, where she/he had lived as a man named John. What is implicit in the fictional confrontation between the Pardoner and the Host is made quite explicit by John/Eleanor's travels: in transient and erotically charged spaces such as alehouses, taverns, and inns, gender was remarkably open for negotiation, and not just for the men who passed through them.

The story of John/Eleanor Rykener is by now familiar to many medievalists through a memorandum produced at a legal inquest at the Guild Hall in London in 1394. This Latin document summarizes the interrogation of "John Britby, of the county of York, and John Rykener, who calls himself Eleanor, and who appeared before the Mayor and Aldermen in women's clothing."[61] According to the scribe's account, Britby and Rykener were "found last Sunday in a certain stall in Soper's Lane, committing that detestable, unmentionable and ignominious vice" (p. 111). At the hearing, John Britby (who seems to have been a visitor to London) confessed to propositioning Rykener, whom he had mistaken for a woman. Eleanor consented, but insisted that she be paid for her services. Britby agreed and the two repaired to the Cheapside market stalls where they were apprehended. What follows is a lengthy account of John/Eleanor's career as a prostitute, a confession that implicates numerous men, women, locals, foreigners, priests, monks, whores, wives, and nuns from England and the Continent. The result of the inquest is unknown.

The scribal account of John/Eleanor's confession has attracted scholarly attention in the excellent studies of Ruth Mazo Karras and David Lorenzo Boyd, and Carolyn Dinshaw.[62] These studies have analyzed the

[61] All citations of this document and its English translation come from Ruth Mazzo Karras and David Lorenzo Boyd, "Ut Cum Muliere: A Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth-Century London," in *Premodern Sexualities,* ed. Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 99–116. The document is translated on pages 111–12. All other citations of this translation appear parenthetically in the body of the article.

[62] Karras and Boyd, "Ut Cum Muliere," and Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval,* pp. 100–142.

legal terms used in the memorandum and have contextualized its rhetoric within the uncertain political and theological environment of London in the 1390s. There is no doubt that this document must be thought of in the context of London politics and society, both because that is the environment in which it was written and in which it attempted to make some sort of social intervention, and also because it was in London that John acquired the skills and the dispositions that would motivate and make possible his future life as Eleanor. Yet, as the document makes clear, larger circuits of travel and exchange that exceed "London" and indeed "England" also gave rise to the conditions in which "Eleanor" emerged. The Guild Hall memorandum of the Rykener trial reveals that the unlikely existence of John/Eleanor was made possible by the intersection of at least three distinct but articulated vectors of human mobility: (1) the institutionally related travels of members of the clergy, both domestic and international; (2) regional and international mercantile travel to such places as Burford and London; and (3) the economically motivated migration of poor single women to cities and market towns.[63]

During her salacious stint in Oxfordshire, "Eleanor" engaged in the types of low-paying vocations (as an embroideress and a tapster) that migrant women frequently supplemented with the wages won in sex work. Even though it does not disclose the motives for the journey, her

[63] Indeed, an awareness of the working conditions of economically disenfranchised women affords an informative vista onto Rykener's career. Ruth Mazo Karras has shown that in late medieval England urban prostitutes did not make their living from sex work alone, but rather survived by working in several unskilled temporary positions at the same time, supplementing their anemic wages with prostitution. Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Furthermore, the work of Maryane Kowaleski on Exeter and P. J. P. Goldberg on York suggests that women who moved from the city of their birth were likely to engage in such temporary and poorly remunerated work, and therefore prostitution as well. Kowaleski, "Women's Work in the Market Town: Exeter in the Late Fourteenth Century," in *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe,* ed. Barbara Hanawalt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986). Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Lifecycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire, c. 1300–1520* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). While migrant women's lack of access to steady employment might, as Goldberg has suggested, be explained by regional chauvinism, it seems an equally decisive explanation would lie the manner in which most women's participation in the late medieval economy was gained through the home, as Judith M. Bennett suggests. Bennett, *Ale, Beer, and Brewsters in England: Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300–1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). A single woman arriving in a market town or city where she did not have relatives also lacked economic opportunities, such as the production and sale of wool, eggs, ale, or bread, that were often available to daughters, wives, and widows who lived in households.

testimony suggests the complex manner in which Eleanor's erotic and wage-earning pursuits enabled and, on the other hand, were complicated by, his/her resourceful and strategic crossings of the gender binary that governed the social horizons of the migrant poor. John/Eleanor Rykener's life as a woman was dependent on a degree of anonymity, and by implication, mobility. The range of gender expression and erotic possibilities evident in Rykener's life in Oxford, Burford, and then London was not likely thinkable in the orbit of social formations such as his/her familial household, church, parish, or town. Rykener's choice of the name "Eleanor" may itself reveal his/her awareness of the manner in which his/her strategic movements across political boundaries authorized him/her to circumvent surveillance of his/her erotic desire and gender expression. Citing twelfth-century puns on Eleanor of Aquitaine's name, Carolyn Dinshaw has suggested that Rykener's adoption of the name "Eleanor" may have been a pun on "alien," someone or something foreign, strange, or, perhaps most interestingly, someone from far away.[64] John's reinvention as Eleanor was made possible by his/her ability to move from one place where she was known as John to another where she was not and by the hard-won self-sufficiency that characterized the tedious and undervalued labor of the migrant woman.[65]

[64] Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval,* p. 103. For a consideration of this pun on Eleanor of Aquitaine's name, see Margaret Aziza Pappano, "Marie de France, Aliénor d'Aquitaine, and the Alien Queen," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady,* ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John C. Parsons (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 337–68. Karras notes that prostitutes sometimes worked under names that exotically positioned them as natives of a faraway place. She cites the example of "Spanish Nell," who perhaps traded on the eroticism of her Iberian origin to increase demand for her services. See *Common Women,* p. 56.

[65] Rykener's career gives us reason to qualify David M. Halperin's suggestion that the historical study of lesbianism, as opposed to the study of male homosexuality, must develop conceptual tools that take into account the historical continuity of men's traffic in women; as I have been suggesting, one cannot historicize "male homosexuals" like the Pardoner or John/Eleanor without taking into account the traffic in low-status women, a fact that would suggest the centrality of this traffic to the history of male and female "homosexuality" alike. Halperin in his *How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) writes: "To see the historical dimensions of the social construction of same-sex relations among women, we need a new optic that will reveal specific historical variations in a phenomenon that necessarily exists in a constant and inescapable relation to the institutionalized structures of male dominance. . . . Histories of lesbianism need to reckon with this quite specific dimension of lesbian existence, which has potentially far-reaching implications for how we understand the different temporalities of female and male homosexuality" (p. 79). Halperin draws on Gayle Rubin's essay, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women,* ed. Raina R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157–210. One sees a similar interrelationship between poor, "effeminate" men and the world of female prostitution in many historical contexts. For a contemporary example from Brazil, see Don Kulick's *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture*

In the way that Rykener's story complicates easy distinctions between dwelling and travel, being and becoming, old and new self, it poses a challenge to anyone who would try to parse it out by the light of the Turners' notion of liminality. One of the most fascinating things about the Guildhall document is that it suggests that the status-leveling and potential for self-reinvention that the Turners associated with pilgrimage also seem to characterize other forms of travel. But there is an important ethical point to make as well: "pilgrimage," like all forms of travel, is a social practice that is something unfathomably larger than the experience of the person who leaves his or her home. Although travelers and the people who write about them tend to define the experience of the person who crosses political boundaries *as* travel, the ability to get from place to place, to sleep, to eat, to drink abroad depends on the existence of workers who may never leave home. Without the labor of these people, who themselves gain vast amounts of cultural knowledge from their social interactions with travelers, there could be no travel. John/Eleanor's experiences with wayfaring men suggests the ways that "travel" provides enticements and chances for self-fashioning even for those who might be in the places in which they live. What the career and institutional discipline of John/Eleanor suggests is that the "local" gender and sexual norms of "home" exist in alternatively productive and defensive tension with the regional, national, and international movement of bodies. Ideal expressions of gender and desire, even when they appear culturally and spatially bound, are in transformative dialogue or even in competition with emergent alternatives generated by the social practices (some calculating and tactical, others improvisational and unknowing) of people in transit.

Chaucer, in saturating the depiction of his Pardoner with so many images of pilgrimage, seems to have understood the great potential for social innovation in travel. Yet, when the alehouse scene of the *Canterbury Tales* is read alongside the record of the Rykener inquest, it is clear that Chaucer, like the Turners, somehow stops short of imagining the potential that a journey might have for those who, like the absent tap-

*Among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). It is possible that Halperin doesn't make this connection because for him "women" functions as an analytical concept unmarked by race and class; Hortense Spillers has highlighted the limitations of Rubin's model of the traffic in "women" when it is brought to bear on the historical realities of U.S. slavery and particularly that institution's attempt to dismantle kinship structures. See Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 65–81.

ster of Fragment VI, sustained the fragile lives of medieval pilgrims. Moreover, while the Pardoner rhetorically positions himself as a traveler and fixes women and poverty as immobile and inescapably provincial, John/Eleanor was able to think and live his/her gender differently thanks to the unprecedented mobility of the working poor after the Black Death and also the movements of men such as the Pardoner. To what extent does travel provide opportunities for social reinvention for women like the absent tapster of Fragment VI? To what extent is Christian pilgrimage "liminal" for the residents of any of the devotional centers about which the Turners write? The Turners' fieldwork provides such a convenient vantage point for reading Chaucer's fiction perhaps because both implicitly define the experiences of the pilgrim as "pilgrimage," and both suggest that the liminal effects of pilgrimage are set into motion by the pilgrim's departure from the place where he lives. A more ecological approach to theorizing pilgrimage would ask to what extent the people who mend pilgrims' clothing, prepare their food, serve their ale, who sustain some of the most "liminal" spaces of the pilgrimage trail, also participate in the social life of devotional travel. One perhaps might even argue that it is these people's labor that makes possible the *communitas* that, in the Turners' paradigm, seems to spring out of nowhere. Throughout medieval Europe many—perhaps even most—of these laborers were women.[66]

As I have been suggesting, the pilgrimage frame of the *Canterbury Tales* exhibits an almost exclusive interest in the undermining and forging of masculinities on the road and provides a much more limited vista onto the strategies of and dangers to feminine self-fashioning. The other character that Chaucer associates with pilgrimage is, of course, the Wife of Bath, who journeys in order to gratify her sexual urges. In the course

[66] Most eating and lodging establishments were owned by married couples probably because the labor involved would or could not have been performed by men. For a discussion of the everyday workings of medieval French inns, see Verdon, *Travel in the Middle Ages,* pp. 109–17. For a discussion of women's work in English taverns, see Barbara A. Hanawalt, "The Host, the Law and the Ambiguous Space of Medieval London Taverns," in *Medieval Crime and Social Control,* ed. Hanawalt and Wallace (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), pp. 204–23, esp. pp. 206–10. As Rykener's tenure in a tavern suggests, another reason that women worked in medieval taverns and inns was because they provided sexual services. Such was the case in the medieval Arab Mediterranean as well, where the *funduq* (an inn and warehouse for merchants) was associated with drinking and prostitution. See Olivia Remie Constable, *Housing the Stranger in the Mediterranean World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 100–103. The depiction of female workers in inns as loose in sexual virtue can be seen in a text as late as Cervantes's *Don Quixote.*

of her travels, she becomes more fully what she already is at home—a bad, lascivious wife. Unlike the Pardoner, whose perverse gender emerges within and thanks to devotional travel, the Wife of Bath does not need pilgrimage to become what she is; her wanderings are just another example of the wayward nature she exhibits at home. To articulate the difference in terms that look back to some of the texts we have already considered: the Wife of Bath's relationship to pilgrimage is drawn from the types of moralistic and conduct literature that condemn the hypocrisy of going on pilgrimage for false motives, while the Pardoner's is closer to the view of pilgrimage found in the *Guide to Santiago:* the sexual opportunities available in devotional travel are not simply immoral, but also pose the threat of the integrity of masculinity itself. The Wife of Bath is an example of what a dissolute woman will do if she goes on pilgrimage; the Pardoner is a cautionary embodiment of travel's socially destabilizing potential. Pilgrimage does not provide the Wife with the potential to revise her gender identity or to fashion a new kind of femininity. The potentiality that the Turners attribute to the liminal social practice of pilgrimage is just not there for the Wife of Bath, and seemingly much less so for the Prioress or Second Nun.

For the most part, the frame of the *Canterbury Tales* offers no consideration of the potential of pilgrimage or other forms of travel to expand the possibilities of femininity or to bring it into crisis—it is for masculinity that geographical displacement poses a problem. The one possible exception to this observation would be Goodelief, a woman whose body and role in her marriage defy gender expectations. Suggestively, she is the wife of an innkeeper. Yet, as a conceptual tool, "liminality," with its focus on those who leave home, who become members of a pilgrim *communitas,* and who return home transformed somehow by the experience, does not provide a vantage point from which we might begin to evaluate the way that Goodelief's lodging and provisioning of pilgrims—that is to say, the way "pilgrimage" itself—contributes to her unique gender performance. In the final analysis, liminality is better for talking about certain figures (Boccaccio's Alessandro and perhaps Chaucer's Pardoner and Host) than others (John/Eleanor Rykener, the Wife of Bath). The way in which and the extent to which the Turners' hypotheses will illuminate Chaucer's pilgrimage frame cannot be assumed in advance. There still seems much to be gained by supplementing our most venerated theoretical paradigms with a consideration of the ways that *The Canterbury Tales* depicts the uses—and abuses—of social space.