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Leann Stuber '09

*Illinois Wesleyan University*

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## The Contradiction of Masculinity in the Middle Ages

Leann Stuber

In the Middle Ages, masculinity was defined in contradictory ways, depending on the man's role in society. Such contradictions are evident in the literature of the time, especially within Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer defies the reader's expectations for certain male characters to demonstrate the conflicting messages sent to men at the time. The surprise comes from the fact that Chaucer's male pilgrims are identifying themselves with more than one definition of masculinity, rather than the definition expected based on the pilgrim's status and occupation. Among the pilgrims that deviate from the expected "male" gender role, the Friar and Pardoner both excellently illustrate the contradictory definitions of masculinity. Although there are pilgrims, such as the Man of Law, that may not defy their gender definition based on occupation, there are ambiguities in the Man of Law's characteristics, meaning that he may break from the expected gender definition. In addition, the characters and ideas presented in the Man of Law's tale illustrate the contradictions present in society.

### Historical Context

*A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. -1Timothy 2:11-12*

In the Middle Ages, ideas surrounding masculinity were inherited from classical literature and the Bible. These sources supported male claims to superiority over women. However, as the social system developed and changed, several new occupations and societal groups needed definitions, especially in terms of

gender roles and expectations. As a result, men were given conflicting definitions of masculinity, based on a secular or sacred occupation. In retrospect, the definitions of masculinity can be further narrowed into four distinct categories: heroic, Christian, courtly lover, and intellectual.

Concepts of male superiority from classical literature were incorporated into Christian doctrine, creating a definition of masculinity based purely on male dominance and virility. For instance, Aristotle supported the belief that men were intellectually and morally superior to women, founded on the fact that males of each species are more advanced, or larger, stronger and more agile, than the females. As a result, Aristotle believed that male domination was the will of nature, which supported both community and individual interests (Bullough 31). The idea that male domination was the will of nature was also supported by the Bible. Since men were made in the image of God, they were naturally inclined to rule. However, original sin caused men to tend towards violence, if uncontrolled by a superior force. Thus, the Church helped to support the societal belief that a natural hierarchy of order must exist (Laskaya 19-20). Another important belief dealt with each gender's intellect and the possibility of escaping gender definitions. The philosopher Philo helped to formulate this belief with his teachings that men were superior to women because males symbolized the more rational parts of a person, mainly the soul, whereas women represented the irrational, like the body or bodily functions and desires. In order for a woman to progress intellectually or spiritually, she must give up almost every aspect of female gender, including the material world and her sexuality. These views were incorporated into Christianity, illustrated by St. Jerome, who wrote, "as long as woman is for birth and children, she is different from men as body is from the soul. But when she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman and will be called

man” (Bullough 32). From these ideals, masculinity was based purely on three factors: impregnating women, protecting dependents and providing for one’s family. In addition, males who failed to live up to the set standards were labeled as “feminine” and weak, and would lose status within the community (Bullough 34). With these ideas firmly established in medieval culture, masculinity was connected with dominance, particularly over women. However, as medieval society changed, the concepts associated with masculinity had to be restructured.

By the middle of the eleventh century, an expanding population created new professions, especially in urban areas, as yet without gender definitions. These new occupations included many positions within the church and the secular government. These male occupation roles could not be gendered in the same manner because most were filled by celibate men (McNamara 4-5). In addition, the absence of women from these occupations raised two important issues. The first was that men in these occupations could not use women to assert their masculinity, whether through supporting a dependent female or impregnating her to show virility. Secondly, celibacy imposed on a growing number of men meant that there would be a surplus of unmarried women, who would be “unprotected, uncontrolled, and undefined” (McNamara 5). Thus, many of these unmarried women also joined the clergy, which allowed men and women to associate with one another without the involvement of gender roles. As a result, women were able to gain power, given the right circumstances. For instance, some women had access to knowledge or could take over the process of educating men, particularly common in reclusive communities (McNamara 14). With the previous gender system drastically changing, men needed to restore the boundaries between men and women. One means of doing so was to restore the concept of “man’s raging, uncontrollable lust” (McNamara 14) and the threat of women’s “insatiable sexuality” (McNamara 10).

Such ideas called for men to exclude or forcefully control females and trained women to be afraid of provoking men and their sex drive. Another means of reasserting gender definitions was to promote marriage, giving the institution a sacramental status. Thus, social changes produced a binary society composed of celibate clergy and married laymen. By reinforcing notions of male superiority and the threat of female sexuality, clerical men and women were segregated, and women were denied access to higher positions within the church. In addition, marriage was supported by moralists, literature, and canon law, as long as the man was still dominant within this realm (McNamara 19-22).

With the changing social structure, the social hierarchy and power relationships also began to be questioned and manipulated. Previously, power had been connected with land ownership and the estate one was born into. However, with the increasing urban population and occupations produced in these areas, the feudal society began to convert to a capitalistic one. Thus, wealth became a man's symbol of power (Laskaya 28-29). In addition, economic advancement and therefore social advancement became possible, placing a greater stress on the social hierarchy. The medieval social code prompted men to be obedient and humble towards men with more power. However, this caused a great deal of violence within the lower classes. Indeed, the trend was, "where men had little, they had little to lose by engaging in violent behavior. Where they had wealth and power, they could lose a great deal" (Laskaya 25). In addition, lower class men were often mistreated by their superiors, with the legal system rarely prosecuting men of an upper class. As a means of recompense, lower class males often stole from their superiors (Laskaya 24-25). Unfortunately, the culture of the time saw violence as a means of control, thereby encouraging men to control disobedient subordinates through violence. For instance, torturing and beating were encouraged and clergymen often gave sermons counseling men to beat their wives

(Laskaya 26). Such an examination of power and control became crucial to a man's definition and perception of masculinity, since "masculinity in the fourteenth century, involved, then, exerting power and control over women, over other men, the world and oneself" (Laskaya 30).

Although medieval society was viewed as dual natured, retrospectively several other gender definitions could be found within the society. One such examination by Anne Laskaya detailed four distinct definitions of masculinity: heroic, Christian, courtly lover and intellectual. The heroic male was based on the ideals for pre-Christian warriors and rulers. In this case, men were expected to be physically strong, intelligent and both willing and able to conquer and maintain rule over others, whether in a domestic or community setting. Other qualities associated with heroic masculinity are very similar to characteristics expected of a knight: prowess and skill in competition, courage, and loyalty: first and foremost to the leader, then to male comrades, and finally to family (Laskaya 15). In essence, heroic men were encouraged to win, whether battling over land, political power, or women (Laskaya 16). In terms of social hierarchy, heroic men were encouraged to control others through force or by their wealth and status (Laskaya 30). The Christian category was based on the life of Christ, encouraging a non-competitive, nonviolent attitude. Christian males renounced their sexuality, placing greater value on the spiritual, rather than physical world. In addition, the main goal for such men was not "earthly fame and achievement," but instead "heavenly reward," with a great deal of focus on service to others (Laskaya 16). Also, Christian men were to control subordinates by conversion or asserting power over their souls (Laskaya 30). For the courtly lover category, men were to willingly endure hardships to prove themselves worthy of their ladies, suffering both psychologically and physically to meet this goal. Numerous characteristics associated with this category were also used to

define heroic males, such as bravery and loyalty, with new additions like faithfulness to one woman and meticulous manners (Laskaya 16-17). Most importantly, courtly lovers were to “hold women as the source of inspiration, the worthy cause of hardship, and as a superior reason for action in the world” (Laskaya 17). Courtly men controlled others as heroic males did, through physical means or wealth and status (Laskaya 30). Similar to the Christian male, the intellectual male valued the mind, or inner world, over the body. However, intellectual masculinity viewed the mind and knowledge as a means of gaining power and controlling the world. Men within this category strove to achieve intellectual goals and perfect their own intellect through rigorous studies. In addition, the process of learning was viewed not as a means of pleasure, but as a way to eradicate false opinions and knowledge. Also, women were seen as distractions to study, causing them to be barred from entering universities (Laskaya 18-19). Overall, each category of masculinity was defined by three specific factors: a goal, a means of achieving this goal, and a definite attitude towards women. Although some characteristics are shared between categories, each of the three main defining factors differs greatly, causing the contradictions present within medieval society.

### Contradictions within *The Canterbury Tales*

In Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, male pilgrims both deviate from and appear to follow the expected masculinity definition. However, even males who fit the definition of masculinity based on their occupation demonstrate the contradictions within male gender definitions in their tales. Considering the Man of Law, the Friar, and the Pardoner, the reader expects each man to fit the Christian male gender role; yet,

deviations appear with the pilgrims themselves or with characters in their tales.

### Prudent and Wise: The Man of Law

The Man of Law was a member of the most elite and powerful group of lawyers, called the Order of the Coif. With a rank equal to that of a knight, lawyers in the Order would have spent sixteen years studying and practicing law. This long period of education often indicated a wealthy background, and membership in the Order signified a wealthy lifestyle (Eberle 811). From his General Prologue portrait, the Man of Law appears to be a decent model of the Christian male, however, there are several shortcomings depicted. Described as "Discreet...and of greet reverence- / He seemed swich, his wordes weren so wise" (1.A.312-13), the reader immediately sees that the Man of Law is a respectable and admirable man. In addition, he "rood but hoomly in a medlee cote, / Girt with a ceint of silk, with barres smale" (1.A.328-29). Such an outfit was never worn by people above the class of knight. Thus, the Man of Law prefers to wear simpler clothes, rather than a more expensive outfit or a robe, which would indicate his rank and prosperity. Thus, the Man of Law appears to prefer a simpler existence, rather than a materialistic one. Yet, the reader is told that "of fees and robes hadde he many oon" (1.A.317). The fees and robes refer to the Man of Law's salary and robe, usually received at Christmas (Eberle 812). Both items signify the Man of Law's wealth and status, especially because he owns many robes, detracting from his appearance of simplicity. Although the reader learns that the Man of Law executes his job flawlessly, he is also "so greet a purchasour was nowher noon: / Al was fee symple to hym in effect; / His purchasyng myghte nat beer effect" (1.A.318-20). This means that the Man of Law purchased land, the process of which required obtaining a writ, and no one



could invalidate his writs (Eberle 812). However, Chaucer the pilgrim does not tell the reader if the Man of Law's purchases are for a client, himself, or for illegal means. Thus, the Man of Law attempts to be a good Christian by appearing simplistic and wise, yet his wealth and ambiguous business dealings taint the Christian image. Indeed, such characteristics fit with the heroic male definition. Also, the Man of Law uses intelligence, or his infallible writs and knowledge of law, to gain power, placing him in the intellectual male category. As the reader moves from the Man of Law's General Prologue portrait to his tale, the Man of Law still attempts to reflect ideals associated with the Christian male. However, his depictions of male Christian converts reveal the contradictions seen in definitions of masculinity.

Within the Man of Law's Tale, the Man of Law shows his Christian nature by demonstrating his faith in God and giving small sermons on the ills of drinking and the evil of women. At several instances in the tale, the Man of Law praises God's miracles. For example, when Custance is set upon the ocean in a rudderless boat, the Man of Law notes that Custance survives because "God liste to shewe his wonderful myracle / In hire" (2.B.477-78). The Man of Law follows this with citations of God's miracles, like Daniel in the lion's den and Jonah and the whale (2.B.473-87). This demonstrates the Man of Law's familiarity with scripture, as well as his readiness to praise God and persuade others to do so. Also, by encouraging others to worship, the Man of Law exerts power as a Christian male should. Another instance where praise of God occurs is when God's hand literally smites a knight who falsely claims that Custance murdered two innocent people (2.B.669-76). The Man of Law again displays characteristics of a Christian male when he lists the ills of drunkenness. The Man of Law states:

O messenger, fulfild of dronkenesse,  
Strong is thy breeth, thy lymes faltren ay,

And thou biwreyest all secreenesse,

Thy mynde is lorn, thou janglest as a jay. (2.B.771-774)

Hence, he shows distaste for the excess and gluttony involved in drinking. This also indicates the Man of Law's preference to the inner world, represented by the mind and the ability to withhold important information, rather than the physical, a world of pleasure where one might carelessly indulge and lose control of his or her limbs, mind, and tongue. Plus, a negative depiction of drunkenness would encourage the pilgrims to not do so, which would be beneficial to their morality. Thus, the Man of Law again controls others according to the Christian model. Another aspect of the Christian definition of masculinity was to view women negatively, even as the root of evil. The Man of Law demonstrates such misogynistic feelings in his tale. For instance, he notes that the "serpent under femynynytee [is] / Lik to the serpent depe in helle ybunde" (2.B.360-61) and later that Satan "thyn instrument... / Makestow of wommen, whan thou wolt bigile" (2.B.370-71). In addition, the two characters within the tale that most strongly oppose the conversion from paganism to Christianity are the Syrian sultan's mother and Alla's mother Donegild (2.B.323-43,694-700). Thus, the Man of Law takes the distinctive clerical position towards women, which reflects the natural evil influence of women and the moral superiority of men. By placing his opinions and praise of God in the text, the Man of Law also exerts power as a Christian man would, by trying to appeal to and influence the religious nature of each pilgrim.

In his tale, the Man of Law details the conversion from paganism to Christianity of two men, the Syrian sultan and Alla the king of Northumberland. As he characterizes each male, with more attention given to Alla, the Man of Law reveals the contradictions within societal definitions of masculinity. Non-Christian males were viewed by the church as feminized and weak (Kruger 20-21), which is reflected by Alla's compassion and tears

for Custance when she is accused of murder (2.B.659-61). Once Alla converts to Christianity, he displays characteristics within the definitions of heroic, Christian, and courtly masculinity. For example, Alla fulfills the "heroic" male duties by consummating his marriage and "on [Custance] he gat a knave child" (2.B.715). In addition, Alla willingly tortures a messenger for information and "his mooder slow...for that she traitour was to hire ligeance" (2.B.885-95). Thus, Alla proves his virility by producing a male heir, as well as a willingness to rule over others, seen in his judgment and justice of traitors. However, Alla fulfils the Christian male role when he "upon a day fil in such repentance...To Rome he comth to receyven his penance / And putte hym in the Popes ordinance" (2.B.989-91). Although Alla shows himself to be a capable leader, he is also concerned with the spiritual world, shown by his conversion and repentance. When Alla and Custance are finally reunited, Alla "faire he hire grette, / And weep that it was routhe for to see" (2.B.1051-52). Then, Alla is forgiven and reaccepted by Custance when she determines that "Alla gitleeles was of hir wo" (2.B.1073). Such a devotion to Custance follows the ideals of a courtly lover, who must be faithful to and suffer for his lady. Thus, the ambiguities seen in the Man of Law's masculinity are even more clearly depicted within his tale, particularly by Alla, who follows three categories of masculinity.

A Worthy Limiter: The Friar

When reading *The Canterbury Tales*, the reader expects other male clerical pilgrims to somewhat follow the category of Christian masculinity, as the Man of Law does. The Friar is one of the exceptions to this case, in his great departure from the Christian model. The four mendicant orders of the time, with the Friar often identified as Franciscan, were supposed to practice apostolic poverty and aid the poor of an area. (Richardson 808). In his General Prologue portrait, rather than following the Christian ideals of his occupation, the Friar appears to display traits of both

heroic males and courtly lovers. For instance, the Friar's hood is "farsed ful of knyves / And pynnes, for to yeven faire wyves" (1.A.233-34). Thus, the Friar is willing to use force and display his strength, like a heroic male should, but he also gives gifts to pretty women, respecting women as a courtly lover would. However, being that these women are married, the Friar's gifts could be viewed as a means of winning women, again following the heroic pattern. Another indication of the Friar's "heroic" qualities is in his business practices. The Friar felt that it:

Acorded nat, as by his facultee,  
To have with sike lazars aqueyntaunce.  
It is nat honest, it may nat avaunce,  
For to deelen with no swich poraille,  
But all with riche selleres of vitaille.

And over al, ther as profit sholde arise. (1.A.244-49)

The Friar would rather be familiar with the wealthy merchants of the area because that would be more profitable to him than to minister to lepers, which ironically was what St. Francis practiced (Richardson 808). Thus, the reader discovers that not only does the Friar fail to live up to the Christian ideals of service to others and renunciation of the physical world, but the Friar's main concern in life is to make a profit, following the heroic ideal of winning. Also, by associating wealth with power, the Friar again aligns himself with the heroic definition of masculinity. In a similar manner, the Friar "lisped...To make his Englissh sweete upon his tonge" (1.A.264-65) and "was not lyk a cloysterer / With a thredbare cope...But he was lyk a maister or a pope. / Of double worstede was his semycope" (1.A.259-62). The Friar's lisp and manner of dress make him more appealing, particularly to women, going along with the courtly lover definition of masculinity. In addition, these characteristics further reinforce the Friar's connection to the physical, rather than spiritual world. Plus, "double worstede" was an expensive cloth and the title "maister"

indicated a “lavish expenditure of money” (Richardson 808). Thus, the Friar shows off his wealth as a heroic male would to indicate power. Also, the Friar “hadde maad ful many a mariage / Of yonge wommen at his owene cost” (1.A.212-13). These lines are often believed to indicate that the Friar was arranging marriages for women who he had seduced (Richardson 808). Again, seducing women then marrying them off to other men is a heroic male ideal, treating women as objects to be won then set aside. Thus, Chaucer uses his descriptions to illustrate the Friar’s failure to be a proper Christian male, as well as his affinity to the heroic and courtly definitions of masculinity. The contradictions demonstrated by the Friar are further reinforced with the main character in his tale, a summoner.

Although the prologue to the Friar’s tale depicts his rivalry with the pilgrim Summoner, the Friar’s main character, a summoner, shares numerous characteristics with the Friar, specifically because the summoner follows the characteristics of a heroic male and not a Christian. For example, the summoner “hadde his espiaille, / That taughte hym wel wher that hym myghte availle” (3.D.1323-24). Thus, the summoner is willing to use spies and deceit because it will tell him where the most money can be made. The Friar further capitalizes on the summoner’s desire for gain when he notes that the summoner willingly associates with lechers, adulterers, and concubines because these people make of the “fruyt of al his rente” (3.D.1371-73). Such concerns over income rather than the morality of those involved indicate the summoner’s heroic masculine qualities, which contrast with the expected Christian characteristics. This contrast is sharply defined when the summoner and fiend are discussing the means of making a profit. The summoner states, ““Teche me...In myn office how that I may moost wyne; / And spareth nat for conscience ne synne”” (3.D.1418-22). The summoner, much like the Friar himself, is concerned with profits and winning, fitting the heroic

male category, rather than the spiritual world and his own morality as would suit a Christian male. The summoner again demonstrates heroic qualities when he agrees to maintain the oath of trouthe to the fiend, which was pledged before the summoner knew his companion was a fiend (3.D.1521-34). In this situation, the emphasis placed on loyalty and maintaining an oath of trouthe directly violates the Christian rejection of Satan. Even though the Friar looks down upon summoners, the character he constructs is similar to himself, particularly in the overt renunciation of Christian ideals and the adherence to heroic characteristics, especially in terms of winning.

### A Noble Ecclesiastic: The Pardoner

Another clerical pilgrim who deviates from the Christian definition of masculinity is the Pardoner. Pardoners were members of the church given the power to pass on indulgences. Indulgences were to be given only to those who truly repented of sins. This would be proven by giving alms to the church and submitting to some punishment, either on earth or in the afterlife (Hilary 823). The Pardoner of *The Canterbury Tales* is employed by the Hospita of St. Mary Rouncesval at Charing Cross in London, historically a place that was criticized for the great number of indulgences its members sold (Hilary 824). The Pardoner's General Prologue portrait and prologue to his tale display characteristics that follow the courtly or heroic male categories and oppose the Christian model. The Pardoner is concerned with appearing fashionable, riding without a hood to display his hair (1.A.675-83). Such concerns with appearance reflect the courtly lover, who would want to be considered in fashion to impress women, rather than a Christian male who would reject such "worldly" notions. In addition, the Pardoner has glaring eyes like a hare and a small voice similar to that of a goat (1.A.684, 688). In medieval times,

glaring eyes indicated “a man given to folly, a glutton, a libertine, and a drunkard” (Hilary 824). On top of this, the hare was believed to be hermaphroditic, and a small goat-like voice was a sign of eunuchism (Hilary 824-25). Thus, the Pardoner is characterized by excesses, which goes against Christian ideals of a simplistic life. These characteristics would also follow the heroic ideals of power and winning. Plus, by associating the Pardoner with emasculate qualities, the Pardoner defies all definitions of masculinity, but particularly Christian since the Church frowned upon such behavior. Reinforcing this concept, the narrator states, “No berd hadde he, ne nevere sholde have; / As smothe it was as it were late shave. / I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare” (1.A.689-91). Again, beardlessness and “gelding” indicate eunuchism, while a “mare” suggests homosexuality (Hilary 825). Even though the Pardoner is definitely a male, his sexual orientation is questionable. Such an ambiguity would directly conflict with Christian views of the times, as well as any other definition of masculinity. In the General Prologue, the reader first learns that:

He [the Pardoner] hadde a croys of latoun ful of stones,  
And in a glas he hadde pigges bones.  
But with thise relikes, whan that he fond  
A povre person dwellynge upon lond,  
Upon a day he gat hym moore moneye  
Than that the person gat in monthes tweye;  
And thus, with feyned flaterye and japes,  
He made the person and the peple his apes. (1.A.699-706)

Hence, the Pardoner shows his willingness to take from the poor and deceive people for personal gain. The Pardoner himself admits to these practices, for instance telling the other pilgrims, “myn entente is nat but for to wynne, / And nothing for correccioun of synne” (6.C.403-04). Thus, the Pardoner rejects the Christian ideals of living simply and serving others. Instead, he follows the heroic category by focusing on personal profits and

displaying his “wins,” or wealth and power, to the other pilgrims. In addition, the Pardoner states he will “have a joly wenche in every toun” (6.C.453), which follows the heroic pattern of “winning” women rather than the Christian model of chastity. The Pardoner’s General Prologue portrait and prologue, much like the Friar’s, illustrates his adherence to a definition of masculinity as opposed to the expected Christian model.

In contrast to his prologue and General Prologue portrait, the Pardoner’s tale demonstrates his attempts to appear to be a good Christian male by sermonizing and offering to absolve the other pilgrims of their sins. The Pardoner’s tale begins with four sermons detailing the sins of gluttony, drunkenness, gambling, and false oaths or swearing. However, the reader realizes that the Pardoner is guilty of practicing gluttony and possibly drunkenness. In his prologue, the Pardoner says, “I wol have moneie, wolfe, chese, and whete / Al were it yeven of the povereste page” (6.C.448-49) and later “I wol drynke licour of the vyne / And have a joly wenche in every toun” (6.C.452-53). The Pardoner’s concerns over having money and food, even if it means taking them from someone in need, reflect a greedy, selfish attitude. Similarly, his desires to drink and meet women in every town again show his gluttonous nature. Also, the Pardoner’s statement about drinking in every town, coupled with the fact that he had “dronke a draughte of corny ale” (6.C.456) before beginning the tale, could indicate that the Pardoner also commits the sin of drunkenness. In addition, the Pardoner ends his tale by offering “Myn hooley pardoun may yow alle warice, / So that ye offre nobles or sterlynges, / Or elles silver brooches, spoones, rynges” (6.C.906-08). The Pardoner even states that once the pilgrims have paid him for his pardons, “Youre names I entre heer in my rolle anon; / Into the blisse of hevene shul ye gon” (6.C.911-12). However, these statements directly oppose comments the Pardoner makes in his prologue, for instance “I rekke nevere, whan that



[those he has pardoned] been beryed, / Though that hir soules goon a-blakebereyed!" (6.C.405-06). Again, the Pardoner does not care about the souls of those he deals with, his "entente is nat but for to wynne" (6.C.403). Although the Pardoner attempts to fulfill the Christian male role by offering pardons and relics to the pilgrims, his heroic male qualities have already been demonstrated, making his claims to Christianity appear false.

Throughout the Middle Ages, gender distinctions were seen as necessary to promote social order and stability. At the time, masculinity was defined in terms of occupation, either sacred or secular. However, retrospectively there are four distinct definitions of masculinity: heroic, Christian, courtly, and intellectual. The varying definitions of masculinity created numerous contradictions for men in medieval society. Chaucer himself experienced this firsthand, since his various occupations placed him within the boundaries of nobles, clerics, and the bourgeoisie. Thus, Chaucer not only witnessed the contradictions in definitions of masculinity, but was given different definitions based on his various roles in society. This concept is reflected in *The Canterbury Tales* in that the pilgrims do not necessarily fit the definition of masculinity based on occupation. For instance, in examining the Man of Law, Friar, and Pardoner, the reader sees the conflicting messages sent to men because all follow multiple categories of masculinity or attempt to follow one but fall short of doing so. Chaucer's works reflect these overlapping gender identities and the tensions produced. Perhaps by doing so, Chaucer was criticizing medieval society for its unrealistic expectations of men, particularly the clergy. In a society that placed a great deal of emphasis on wealth and power, traditionally derived from physical force, it was nearly impossible for a male to have a prominent place in society without displaying one or both. Also, Chaucer would have been aware of the binary division of society and may have felt that such a rigid division was unattainable. From his

personal experience, Chaucer would have realized that the division of sacred and secular, or retrospectively the quaternary division of heroic, Christian, courtly, and intellectual, can never happen because crossing over will always occur, resulting in the contradictions and tensions seen within medieval society.

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