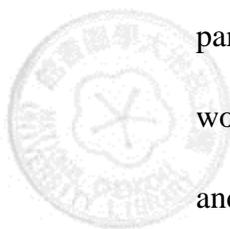


Chapter Three

Mimicry in *The Pardoner's Tale*

In a sense, and in so far as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves—the role we are striving to live up to—this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be. In the end, our conception of our role becomes second nature and an integral part of our personality. We come into the world as individuals, achieve character, and become persons. (Robert Ezra Park 250)



When it comes to mimicry, most of us are reminded of Bhabha's mimicry, which is supposed to be discussed in the cultural sense. However, in the domain of game theory, mimicry has much to do with "make-believe." In fact, mimicry takes its derivation from the mask worn in the aboriginal tribal ritual. In a ritual held to conjure the spirits, people who are thought to possess mystical power wear masks to feign people other than themselves. Masks "transform the officiants into gods, spirits, animal ancestor, and all types of terrifying and creative supernatural powers" (Caillois 87). By virtue of wearing masks, people try to make believe or make others believe that they become other beings. This enactment is a kind of role-playing. During the

course of feigning, they temporarily identify themselves with the spirits. However, the major purpose of mimicry is not to deceive, but to “inspire fear in others” (Caillois 20). As we know, familiarity breeds contempt. We do not usually respect people with whom we are too familiar. As Erving Goffman reminds us, “[. . .] restrictions placed upon contact, the maintenance of social distance, provide a way in which awe can be generated and sustained in the audience” (*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* 67). Therefore, in order to distinguish themselves from everyday images and to cause the effect of defamiliarization, people who engage in the sacred ritual of primitive society wear masks. By wearing masks, they temporarily become other mystical beings, and thus bring about the effect of inspiring fears in others. The custom of mimicry is handed down and transfigured into all kinds of performance and presentation, like drama or opera. As Gadamer argues, “Human play comes to its true consummation in being arts” (Gadamer 110). Masks, a vestige of sacred objects, however, become toys, just like kites, which are originally used to fly people’s souls in some rites of certain tribes.

Since performance and presentation can be put under the category of mimicry, this chapter finds the frame of reference from Erving Goffman’s theory of performance and presentation to espouse the original foundation of game. Having recourse to theory of presentation and performance, the analysis of the *Pardoner’s Tale* in this chapter may be more solid. The discussion will focus mainly on the Pardoner himself rather than on his tale *per se*, for it seems that the Pardoner’s sermon, not his exemplifying story, is the hub of the tale. Of course, both his sermon and the tale will be discussed. It is just a matter of proportion.

Goffman's key work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (or, *PSEL*), draws upon the metaphor of theatrical performance to plumb the depth of human interplay. He compares human everyday life to theatrical performance, in which everyone more or less tries to manipulate and lead others' impression of him. Generally speaking, a person is acting more often than not, even if there is no specific audience or spectator watching him. For example, when we are walking on the street, it is not unlikely that we look more straight-faced than at home. In order to leave an impression on others, we have to employ some expressions as techniques, including two aspects: "The expressiveness of the individual (and therefore his capacity to give impressions) appears to involve two radically different kinds of sign activity: the expression that he *gives*, and the expression that he *gives off*" (*PSEL* 2). When we give the expression, it follows that we use verbal signs as vehicles to carry the message. When we give off the expression, it means that we try to influence others' impression of us through our behavior, manners, gestures, facial expressions, dressings, and so forth, all of which can be called *front*, "the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individuals during his performance" (*PSEL* 22). By means of the two aspects, we effectively define the situation on the spot. In other words, we draw the bottom line to let others know to what degree we anticipate them to look upon us, and vice versa. However, the expressions we give or give off are not always authentic. As Goffman tells us, "The individual does of course intentionally convey misinformation by means of both of these types of communication, the first involving deceit, the second feigning" (*PSEL* 2). If we rethink the two types of expression, we would find them pseudo-communication. Effective pattern of

communication should be interactive, but both of the two types are one-way outputs. The agent packs the message he wants to convey, and directly transports the message to the receiver, who, upon receiving the message, unpacks it and gets no room for negotiation. However, meaning is supposed to be gradually formed in the process of incessant dialectic to and fro, not through one-way instill. The image created to impose upon others is a kind of control:

This kind of control upon the part of the individual reinstates the symmetry of the communication process, and sets the stage for a kind of information game—a potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation, and rediscovery. (*PSEL* 8)

Regardless of whether a performer of everyday life gives and gives off his expression out of good will or not, it is inevitable that his expression is tinged with disguise or pretence to a certain extent. The audience is not supposed to disclose the feigning part; otherwise, the performance cannot continue. There exists a kind of tacit agreement between the performer and the audience, which Goffman terms “working consensus” (*PSEL* 10). When you perform on the stage, you are temporarily making believe that you are a certain being. You are creating a second reality. In this sphere of fiction, all definitions fitting, a game is initiated. The moment someone gauchely or tactlessly points out the fictiveness, the game is over: welcome back to reality. Few people would deliberately be wet blankets in a game, if they want to enjoy the playfulness. Likewise, few people would be so naive as to disclose the feigning nature of self-presentation performed by the person in front of them. People would seldom run the risk of ruining the personal relationship and thus stir the troubled water of being

isolated. Social intercourse has to move on, so does the performance of everyday life.

As noted before, mimicry is the origin of all presentation and performance. We may first analyze the Pardoner from the perspective of mimicry, and then integrate this part to his performance and presentation. In the *Pardoner's Tale*, the air of mimicry is apparent. The Pardoner, insofar as vocation is concerned, can be regarded as a medieval version of shaman who conjures the spirits. In this version, the mask is replaced by the license he receives from the lord bishop:

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 cler,
 Me to destourbe of Cristes hooly werk. (VI. 335-339)

Upon showing his license, he is endued with certain power, just like the conjurer on mask endowed with mystical power. No one would dare reproach him. Besides, the other certifications and documents are “Bulles of popes and of cardynales” (VI. 342), which also help him to put up his front and “to stire hem (them) to devocioun” (VI. 346). The replacement of mask by other objects is a necessary progress. The license is just a medieval embodiment of the primitive mask.

The abolition of mask can be regarded as a development of disenchantment. We may mention here that another difference between Huizinga and Caillois is that the former views play as a phenomenon of mystification whereas the latter sees it as a process of disenchantment: “In a word, play tends to remove the very nature of the

mysterious” (Caillois 4). Ironically, mask is unmasked, but the essence of human nature remains the same. At any rate, the function of mask will be replaced by other objects. The license which the Pardoner shows off still serves as a sacred object to make himself look awesome and to inspire fear in the other pilgrims. As the shamans identify themselves with the spirits, the Pardoner identifies himself with a second reality. The shamans make believe that they become other beings when they conjure the spirits, whereas the Pardoner makes believe that he is the spokesman of God when he delivers his sermon. His state of mind is perverted. On one hand, he knows the general standard of morality and he in fact cares about how others evaluate him. On the other hand, he cannot achieve the principle of morality and he knows people would thus look down upon him for his greedy deeds. He says, “For though myself be a ful vicious man, / A moral tale yet I yow telle kan” (VI. 459-460). We may surmise that his logic goes like this, “Since all of you are scornful of me for my avarice, I would ironically confess that I indeed make money by being greedy, and I will furthermore teach you how insidious greed is and tell you a tale about the sin of greed.” Through delivering a moral sermon, he temporarily enters a realm of second reality and senses the vicarious jouissance of being a moral person, a hypocrite, though. As the epigram in the very beginning of this chapter notes, the mask is what a person would like to live up to. Wearing a mask, a person identifies himself with an ideal which he cannot achieve in reality. If a shaman is not awesome enough to inspire fear in others in daily life, he can be fearful when he conjures with the mask on. If the Pardoner cannot make others respect him in ordinary days, he can do so when he addresses his audience with a radical and astounding sermon. “Even the Pardoner’s

physical ugliness might serve him by inspiring an occupational useful awe” (Peggy Knapp 78).

As mimicry is the mother of all arts of presentation, the Pardoner’s practice of mimicry also fosters the air of presentation and justifies his role as a performer. Through dramatic lines and personal front, he sets the tavern where he preaches as a stage and makes a show of competence. Donald Howard holds the opinion that the essence of the *Pardoner’s Tale* is a performance: “[. . .] in the Pardoner we are given a representation of *an actor*” (Howard 340; italics original); “The Pardoner’s sermon is a performance” (Howard 342). Carl Lindahl also asserts that the Pardoner’s enactment of oratorical strategies is a “performance of a performance” (Lindahl 68). His presentation fits into Goffman’s theory introduced before. In order to effectively define the situation, he has to let others know his bottom line. The mutual anticipation is supposed to be constructed. When the Host asks him to tell an interesting tale, he reacts in the affirmative but with a proviso:

“Telle us som myrthe or japes right anon.”

“It shal be doon,” quod he, “by Seint Ronyon!

But first,” quod he, “here at this alestake

I wol bothe drynke and eten of a cake.” (VI. 319-22; italics mine)

When the other pilgrims ask him to tell some moral lessons, he also replies to the requirement with a premise:

“Nay, lat hym telle us of no ribaudye!

Tell us som moral thing, that we may leere

Som wit, and thane wol we gladly here.”

I graunte, ywis,” quod he, “*but* I moot thynke

Upon som honest thing while that I drynke.” (VI. 324-28; italics mine)

Once the situation is defined, he may more easily manipulate or influence others’ opinions of him and let them know who the boss is. The drink and cake are both parts of his “settings” without which he will not start to perform: “A setting tends to stay put, geographically speaking, so that those who would use a particular setting as a part of their performance cannot begin their act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place” (*PSEL* 22). After the preparation is done, he begins his astonishing sermon. From the beginning, he gives off his expression as an oration:

“Lordynges,” quod he, “in chirches whan I preche,

I peyne me to han an hauteyn speche,

And rynges it out as round as gooth a belle,

For I kan al by rote that I telle.

My theme is alwey oon, and evere was—

Radix malorum est Cupiditas. (VI. 329-34)

This kind of beginning is tricky. Everybody is regarded as an equal comrade. When each individual is conceptualized as an abstract subject, brainwashing goes smoothly. This oratorical device is often used in effectively instilling ideology. The Pardoner knows its efficiency and employs the device to begin his sermon.

The Pardoner’s mentality, as shown before, is perverted. His impersonation of a preacher offering a sermon compensates for his lacking in the morality which he claims. He in fact wants to be assessed as a moral person, but he realizes that it is impossible. Consequently, he acts in the opposite way through the mechanism of

compensation. If the other pilgrims plumb into the depth of his subtle recesses, they would find that he really craves for what he accentuates yet meanwhile despises over and over again in his sermon. As Goffman tells us, “[. . .] an individual who implicitly or explicitly signifies that he has certain social characteristics ought in fact to be what he claims he is” (*PSEL* 13). As a matter of fact, he wants to be seen the way he claims, or, implies, though it is an unattainable wish.

The Pardoner plays more than one roles on the stage. When addressing the pilgrims, he seems to engross himself in the roles he used to play. He used to play the role of a salesman advertising the water in which the “sholder-boon” of an “hooly Jewes sheep” was dipped (VI. 350-351). The water is said to be able to cure jealousy and make the cattle and stock multiply. He also sells a mitten of miracle: “Heere is a miteyn eek, that ye may se. / He that his hand wol putte in this mitayn, / He shal have multiplying of his grayn” (VI. 372-374). He plays the role of a pardoner promoting his pardon as well. By buying these pardons, he declares, people would be absolved: “And I assoille him by the auctoritee / Which that by bulle ygraunted was to me” (VI. 387-388). When he makes a candid self-revelation of his avarice, he is also like a magician doing the most honest art of performance, as Elbert Hubbard says:

I love magicians because they are such honest people. They tell you they are going to fool you and then they proceed to do it. But no matter what happens at the show—when you get home you will still have your watch, your wallet, and your appendix. (qtd. in Andre Kole 7)

Before the Pardoner offers the sermon, he honestly admits the strategy he adopts. He warns his audience in advance, and then proceeds to do what he claims. Both the

magician and the Pardoner “honestly” deceive their audience, but the former will not really take anything from his audience yet the latter may in the long run cause the loss of his audience. Through his persuasive eloquence and dramatic performance, his audience may still be willing to contribute their money to the so-called pardon. If eloquence is silver, he can turn it into gold with a touch of magical wand. His perverted state of mind makes him a cynic, who looks at the world with a kind of disinvolvement, and through such a professional¹ performance, he can get pleasure and sense of achievement from it:

It should be understood that the cynic, with all his professional disinvolvement, may obtain unprofessional pleasures from his masquerade, experiencing a kind of gleeful spiritual aggression from the fact that he can toy at will with something his audience must take seriously. (*PSEL* 18)

The reason that the Pardoner tries to experience this “spiritual aggression,” besides his perverted mindset, also results from two other aspects: sense of inferiority and situation of isolation. His candor yet startling self-revelation, according to Derek Antona Traversi, mainly springs from “deficiencies in his own nature” and “lack of relationship” (Traversi 170). As widely known, he is the last person portrayed in the General Prologue, from which we may know he belongs to the bottom rung of the social ladder. He is depicted as an eerie person. His hair is “as yellow as wax” (I. 675); he has “Swiche glarynge eyen” (I. 684); his voice is “as small as hath a goot” (I. 688). The most protrusive feature of his appearance is the lacking of masculinity: “No berd

¹ “The Pardoner makes his living telling stories. He is the one thoroughly professional oral artist of the lot” (Alfred David, qtd. in Lindahl 68).

hadde he, ne nevere sholde have; / As smothe it was as it were late shave” (I. 689-90).

All of these refer to his mannerism as “effeminate” or “feminine” (Howard 344).

There are two possibilities: he is either a eunuch or a homosexual person. No matter which kind of person he may be, he is doomed to be labeled as a weird person.

His physical deficiency is a “sign of a deeper fruitlessness which pertains to him in the spirit” (Traversi 163), and, in turn, his futility in spirit may be regarded as a curse upon his physical deficiency. This viewpoint of vicious circle held by the public probably causes his abnormality. Sense of inferiority, taken to the extreme, becomes megalomania. “[. . .] it is his purpose to *shock*² his hearers and so to assert his indifference to what he knows to be their judgment of him” (Traversi 170; italics original). He “makes a deliberate show of meeting his enemy” to show that “he is perfectly capable of playing the ‘pilgrimage’ game” (Traversi 167). As a renowned saying puts it, “Revenge is a dish best served cold,” the Pardoner does not take direct assault. He tactically turns his disadvantage into advantage, and employs femininity as his weapon. It is widely believed that the effeminate are usually stereotyped as natural-born performers, whose manners, voices, gestures, and body languages are full of histrionic effect. The Pardoner makes best use of his (dis)advantages to give off the expression that matches the stereotyped impression. He then uses this impression as his weapon.

Hardly can we cast doubt on the Pardoner’s isolated and low position. He is the last group to be mentioned in the General Prologue: “Ther was also, / a REVE, and a

² Here, “shock” to some degree echoes the original purpose of mimicry: to inspire fear in others.

MILLERE, / A SOMNOUR, and a PARDONER also, / A MAUNCIPLE, and myself—ther were namo” (I. 542-4). Except the Summoner, who is “equally *grotesque* and equally corrupt” (Traversi 163, italics mine), the Pardoner seems peerless in the company. And the grotesque element in the Middle Ages “was at the periphery, but there it was permitted to exist and did exist” (Howard 338). The Pardoner is a marginal figure, but he contrives to situate himself close to the center, where he can get the spotlight. However, his struggle for the chance to assert himself perhaps worsens the situation of being isolated. He is too self-conscious, as Traversi observes, “‘I wol’ is repeated no less than seven times in the fourteen lines quoted (VI. 439-53)” (Traversi 174). According to Goffman, there are four forms of alienation, one of which is self-consciousness, “[. . .] the individual may focus his attention more than he ought upon himself” (*Interaction Ritual* 118). To be brief, the symptom befalls the Pardoner is self-centeredness. In order to sufficiently draw the attention, he has to timely control the situation and settle the emotional context. Before he really begins the tale, he requires everybody to be quiet: “Now hold youre pees! My tale I wol bigynne” (VI. 462). Due to a long term of alienation from others, he requires that other people center around him and treat him as the leading character. His intention to perform is not difficult to comprehend.

With the lapse of time, the Pardoner begins his tale. The moral of this tale is very simple: greed is the root of all sins. Three rogues come to a tavern. No sooner had they sat down than they heard the bell clinking outside. It turns out to be the passing of a hearse. One of the three revelers asks the tavern boy who the dead is. The boy replies that the dead is one of the revelers’ old friends killed by a thief whose name is

Death. The three revelers swear to find out Death and kill him. On their way in quest of Death, they run into an old man, who directs them to the grove under a tree.

Thereabouts they find a gold florin. Out of greed, two of them act in complicity to murder the youngest one, who, in turn, also kills them by poison.

This exemplary tale is impregnated with the atmosphere of mimicry as well.

Mimicry, to be general, encompasses all enactments of role-playing. The game of mimicry, for sure, is a game of role-playing. We may justify the tale as a game first.

To begin with, the three rogues' decision to be in quest of Death is voluntary. One of them makes the proposition, and the other two are in. They even pledge allegiance to one another: "Togidres han thise thre hir trouthes plight / To lyve and dyen ech of hem for oother, / As though he were his owene ybore brother" (VI. 702-04). Apart from free will, the journey of quest is separate. One of them demarcates the space and time: "I shal hym seke by wey and eek by strete" (VI. 694), "By Goddes dignitee, er it be nyght" (VI. 701). The uncertainty of the result is pointed out: "Deeth shal be deed, *if* that they may hym hente" (VI. 710; italics mine). In other words, they may or may not find Death. The whole process is unproductive. Regardless of whether they find Death or not, they do not "produce" anything. Even the gold florin is not produced. They just find it. Last but not least, they make believe that they are heroes fighting the devil. It is not strange that one of the definitions of game, rule, does not fit the three rogues' situation, since it is noted in the previous chapter that "rule" and "make-believe" more often than not exclude each other in a game. Role-playing games are often played with the absence of rules. "[. . .] in a role-playing activity, the participant typically leaves his or her own creative stamp on the execution of the role" (Margaret Gredler

175). Since rules usually constrain creativity, it is comprehensible that “rule” and “make-believe” are usually exclusive of each other. In conclusion, their journey in quest of Death can be viewed as a game, which is a game of mimicry involving role-playing.

In this tale, Death is illustrated dramatically. He does not appear directly. Instead, his image is constituted through the mouthpiece of a tavern boy, whose indirect descriptions of him lead to the effect of mystification. In the beginning, the menacing atmosphere is brought out by the spooky clinking: “And as they sat, they herde a belle clynke / Biforn a cors, was carried to his grave” (VI. 664-65). It is certainly spine-chilling and ominous to hear a hearse passing by the moment they just sit down. The Pardoner knows very well the art of tale-telling. The climax has to be achieved by an appropriate prelude. After setting up the stage, the Pardoner goes on to make a description of Death. Death is described as a relentless thief, who could kill anybody at any time and any place. He uses a spear to cut people’s hearts in pieces mercilessly. Moreover, he acts calmly and silently even when he just commits a murder.

Ther cam a privee thief men clepeth Deeth,
 That in this contree al the people sleeth,
 And with his spere he smoot his herte atwo,
 And wente his wey withouten wordes mo. (VI. 675-78)

The abstract concept of Death is personified by a concrete image as a cold-blooded thief. Universally speaking, it is easier for people to accept a concrete image. The fact that Death is personified would invoke fear in people more easily. The concept of Death is not threatening, but the personification of Death is cut out for posing a threat

upon human beings.

On the way, the three rakes come across a poor old man, on whom rarely can we cast doubt about his identity as Death in disguise. His disguise is a kind of performance to strengthen the dramatic effect and tension. In fact, he can slay the three rakes easily, but he chooses to kill them in a tortuous way. This old man gives his expression as a meek and pious elder: “This olde man ful meekly hem grette, / And seyde thus, ‘Now, lordes, God yow see’” (VI. 714-15). He is a wolf in a sheep’s skin. He tries to misdirect their judgments and put them under the impression that a poor old man who speaks of God would do no harm to them. Besides, he also gives off the expression as mysterious. He is “al forwrapped” (VI. 718) except his face. By adding the element of mystery to himself, Death wants them to know that he is not easy to deal with, albeit he looks like a humble old man. He wants to maintain the basic authority.

When the three rakes behave impolitely, Death defines the situation and lets them know his bottom line: “But, sires, to yow it is no curteisye / To speken to an old man vileynye, / But he trespasse in word or elles in dede” (VI. 739-41). Death does not feel consented and continues to pin his position down and warns them:

Wherefore I yeve yow reed,

Ne dooth unto an oold man noon harm now

Namooore than that ye wolde men did to yow

In age, if that ye so longe abyde. (VI. 744-47)

If they are so naive as to believe that the death of Death means the lives of the alive, then he wants to scare them by stating that “Ne Deeth, allas, ne wol nat han my lyf”

(VI. 727).

The three rakes' death can be seen as a penalty for their breaking the "working consensus." As mentioned before, when the relationship between the performer and the audience is established, a kind of protocol comes into being. In this tale, since Death in the first place attempts to appear in disguise, it is tellingly that he defines himself as a potential performer. It is certainly annoying that his presentation is challenged when the three rakes try to unveil his false identity. Although the second of the rakes only mistakes him for a spy of Death, not Death himself, the rake still believes that the old man is a fake. Once challenged, Death tries to victimize them as soon as possible, and directs them to the way leading to death.

The three rakes also make a show of self-presentation. It is not a normal reaction to inquire who the dead is upon hearing a hearse passing by. However, in order to leave onlookers with the impression that he is concerned about everything happening in the town, one of the rakes sends the tavern boy to get the dead person's name: "And looke that thou reporte his name weel" (VI. 669). It is none of his business, but he wants to interfere so as to make others believe that he can deal with everything in the town.

Knowing that the murderer is Death who can slay thousands of people easily, the three rakes still behave as if they are heroes. It is common sense that nearly nobody could defeat Death. None of the three are really stupid, but they pretend to be brave enough to face Death lest they should become the standing jests. They are only fine-weather-day friends who fool around all day long together with groundless friendship. However, it is ironic that they swear they will die for one another. Their

ritual of pledge only bears the characteristic of a performance. What is more ironical, at last, they really die *for* one another. They die *because of* one another's pretending sincerity and fidelity.

After the Pardoner finishes his tale, principally speaking, his show time is over. “[. . .] the game must stop at a preordained time so that the player may resume ordinary responsibilities, where the liberating and isolating rules of play no longer are applicable” (Caillois 50). The Pardoner, however, seems unable to get rid of his role in the game. He continues to promote his pardon to the other pilgrims. The violation of the game of mimicry resides in the fact that the performer almost completely identifies himself with the role he plays and thus refuses to retreat to the ordinary life. A performer has to know when to stop. As Caillois asserts, “Applause is not merely approval and reward. It marks the end of illusion and play” (Caillois 49). Not only does the Pardoner challenge the game by prolonging his time of display, he also blurs the boundary between reality and fiction by announcing the Host's sin outside the game: “I rede that oure Hoost here shal bigynne, / For he is moost envoluped in synne” (VI. 941-42). To blur the boundary between reality and fiction is a taboo in a game. A game is an activity held outside the ordinary life in fictional magic area. Once the boundary between reality and fiction is broken, a game will be drawn back to ordinary life. In the same vein, when the Pardoner announces the Host's sin outside the game, the boundary between reality and fiction is blurred, and the story-telling contest game is on the verge of collapse. Therefore, when challenged, the Host of Tabard Inn, also the host of the game, shouts, “I wol no lenger pleye / With thee, ne with noon oother angry man” (VI. 958-59). It is not until the Knight intervenes that

the game keeps going:

“Namooore 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 neere,

And, as we diden, lat us laughe and pleye.” (VI. 962-67; emphasis added)

As a member of the group, the Knight here serves as a mediator conciliating the quarrel between the Host and the Pardoner. Since the Knight is also a player of the game, he is somehow obligated to keep the game going. As Goffman tells us, “When the individual intentionally or unintentionally breaks a rule of etiquette, others present may mobilize themselves to restore the ceremonial order” (*Interaction Ritual* 114). The fact that the mediator is the Knight rather than other members is not without reason. “The Knight’s success in returning the *compaignye* to social equilibrium matches the Wycliffite call for the knightly class to effect the restoration of order in England” (Knapp 84, italics original). To be brief, when the game derails, somebody who has obvious authority over others has to readjust the situation in the long run. Otherwise, the game will be totally out of order.

As a performer, the Pardoner is persuasive. However, as a player, he is a violator. Perhaps we may see his offensive behavior from a positive perspective. It is widely believed that no conflicts, no drama. Since the Pardoner’s performance smacks of the features of drama, his offensive behavior can be regarded as a kind of conflict that only enriches the dramatic essence and broadens the dimension of the tale.