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Review Article

[Un]Licensed Riot: Prodigality, Hypocrisy, and Guild Discourse in Chaucer's *Cook's Tale*

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Abstract

Chaucer's *Cook's Tale* demonstrates the characterization of a riotous apprentice, the narrative depiction of conflict between that apprentice and his master, and that master's issuing of a questionable "*papir*" of "*acquitance*" (4404 & 4411) to suggest provocatively linked definitions of class and depictions of order and transgression specific to the guild-oriented mercantile culture of Chaucer's fourteenth-century London. Considered within the context of the *General Prologue*'s depiction of Roger the Cook who tells the tale, and the description of the Four Guildsmen who employ him, the narrative suggests the emergence of the binary pairing of prodigality and hypocrisy, both of which contribute to the breakdown of the social cohesion and concept of "*degree*" so important to Chaucer's *Canterbury* frame tale. Considered against the backdrop of what William Woods' (1996) analysis of *The Cook's Tale* describes as a "social structure defined by commerce" (190), and in relation to general work on Chaucer's use of language (Cannon 1998) and terminology specific to *The Cook's Tale* (Blenner-Hassett 1942; Call 1943), it becomes clear that Chaucer's fragment indicts both the laterally mobile prodigal apprentice and the decadent hypocrisy of the Master through the linked subversion of license and guild authority.

Keywords: Middle English, Chaucer, Marxist Theory, Spatial Theory, Medieval Guilds

Chaucer's *Cook's Tale* fragment uses the characterization of a riotous apprentice, the narrative depiction of conflict between that apprentice and his master, and that master's issuing of a questionable "*papir*" of "*acquitance*" (4404 & 4411),[1] to suggest provocatively linked definitions of class and depictions of order and transgression specific to the guild-oriented mercantile culture of Chaucer's fourteenth-century London. The action of the fragment, considered within the context of the *General Prologue*'s depiction of Roger the

Cook who tells the tale, and the description of the Four Guildsmen who employ him, enables the emergence of the binary pairing of prodigality and hypocrisy, both of which contribute to the breakdown of the social cohesion and concept of "*degree*" so important to Chaucer's *Canterbury* frame tale. Considered against the backdrop of what William Woods' (1996) analysis of *The Cook's Tale* describes as a "social structure defined by commerce" (190), and in relation to general work on Chaucer's use of language (Cannon 1998) and terminology specific to *The Cook's Tale* (Blenner-Hassett 1942; Call 1943), it becomes clear that Chaucer's fragment indicts both the laterally mobile prodigal apprentice and the decadent hypocrisy of the Master through the linked subversion of license and guild authority.

The Cook's Tale's dictum, that "*Revel and trouthe, as in lowe degree,/They been ful wrothe al day, as men may see*" (4397-98), develops its class distinction and conflict through the idea of "*lowe degree*" versus mercantile "*trouthe*," and as such, represent the larger issue of class distinction embodied in the representation of character and culture within the defining space of London. It is within this cityscape that distinctions of "trouthe" and right action break down, where an apprentice "*loved bet the taverne than the shoppe*" (4376), and distinguishes himself, not through the performance of his designated duties, but through gambling: "*For in the toune nas ther no prentys/That fairer koude caste a paire of dys/Than Perkyn koude*" (4385-87). The moral and fiscal decadence of London is observed by Woods (1996), who notes "the decay of social and commercial norms that pervades the thriving London marketplace, the heart of plenty" (191). As such, linking "*lowe degree*" with London street culture functions as a parallel to the dissociation occurring within mercantile space as well. In the *Prologue* to *The Cook's Tale*, the class distinction of "*lowe degree"* is utilized when Roger the Cook prefaces his offering with the provision that "*if ye vouche-sauf to heere/A tale of me, that am a povre man,/I wol yow telle, as wel as evere I kan*" (4340-42). Although on its surface the statement is an example of the modesty formula found in classical and medieval rhetoric, Roger's classification of his tale hinges upon class identification, linking "*povre*" and "*oure cite*" (4343). London, as urban space, provides the definitive locale for the characters and tale Roger intends to communicate to the Canterbury pilgrims; a world that exists as distinct from the rivalries of the ownership-class and rural agrarian environment as depicted in *The Miller Tale* and *Reeve's Tale*, ultimately drawing its substance from the riotous street culture of London itself:

> *A prentys whilom dwelled in oure cite,*
> *And of a craft of vitailliers was hee.*
> *Gaillard he was as goldfinch in the shawe,*
> *Broun as a berye, a proper short felawe,*
> *With lokkes blake, ykembd ful fetisly.*
> *Dauncen he koude so wel and jolily*
> *That he was cleped Perkyn Revelour.*
> *He was as ful of love and paramour*
> *As is the hyve of hony sweete;*
> *Wel was the wenche with hym myghte meete.*
> *At every bridale wolde he synge and hoppe;*
> *He loved bet the taverne than the shoppe.*

For whan ther any ridyng was in Chepe,
Out of the shoppe thider wolde he lepe—
Til that he hadde al the sighte yseyn,
And daunced wel, he wolde nat come ayeyn--
And gadered hym a meynee of his sort
To hoppe and synge and maken swich disport;
And ther they setten stevene for to meete,
To pleyen at the dys in swich a streete. (4365-84)

The description of Perkyn Revelour's interactions with urban space is a calculated deconstruction of the guild discourse of the text, with the definitive terms "*prentys*" and "*craft*" dissolving into the counter definitive frenzy of dancing, singing, gambling, and paramour. In the application of figurative language, Chaucer's Cook depicts Revelour's compulsive desire for street life as catapulting him out of the internal space of the shop, "*Out of the shoppe thider wolde he lepe*," and out of the spatially defined identity of "worker." Woods (1996) describes Perkyn as

> a male version of [*The Miller's Tale's*] Alysoun, a dapper, restless, bird-like youth whose nature simply can not be pent up "narwe in cage"—or in his master's shop. Like Alysoun's housewifery, every aspect of Perkyn's social and even professional conduct is indirectly an expression of his sexuality. His dancing is such a recurrent, characteristic feature of his behavior that it seems a compulsion, like a fever in the blood that will not subside until he has danced it all away. (4)

While Woods' diagnosis of Perkyn's social and "professional conduct" is intriguing, one is forced to ask: "What professional conduct?" As the introductory section of *The Cook's Tale* (4365-84) indicates, the master's victualler's shop is simply a springboard for Perkyn's revelry, enabling his extracurricular activities through identification with the apprentice class and access to the capital he steals from the shop. In addition, what Woods perceives as a sexual "fever in the blood" which motivates all of Perkyn's actions is more likely Chaucer's attempt to echo the dynamics of *The General Prologue*, with the apprentice's agitated state paralleling the "piercing" and "pricking" action of Nature in lines one and eleven respectively, the shared references to "sweetness," and the movement out into the London streets mirroring the folks that long "to goon on pilgrimages" (12). Although there is certainly a sexual dynamic present in the description of Perkyn and his activities, of primary importance is the degree to which urban space defines these activities, and how this urban space is in turn defined.

> Such an examination, concerned as it is with the social definition of space—with the recreation of place as significant space, the translation of physical topography into a cultural topology—must begin with the recognition that the late Medieval and Renaissance city was shaped not by the dictates or urban planning and population control but by the varied rites of initiation, celebration, and exclusion through which a ceremonial social order defined, maintained, and manifested itself, in time and space. (Mullaney 18)

The defining space of the London streets, named locales such as "Chepe" (4377), or Cheapside, which was "a favorite place for processions and festivals" (Gray 853), or an unnamed "streete" (4384), the meeting place for those who wish to play "dys" (4384), suggests that street life in London functions as an alternate form of ritual space in opposition to the definitive space and activity of the mercantile shop and craft guild. As such, the riotous camaraderie offered by "taverne" and "streete" functions as an alternate form of fellowship--a counter-craft guild as it were--wherein Perkyn can distinguish himself. The very streets, at one moment crammed with public activity, dancing, processionals, and festivals of misrule, close inwards, like the exclusive halls of the craft masters, allowing Perkyn to "dys" in "place of pryvetee" (4386 & 4388). Ultimately, the opposing constructs of shop and street, or shop and tavern, juxtapose the time and labor of the mercantile sphere with what Eric Wilson (1995) terms a "differentially inhabited space" (4), where the experiences of the street "constitute the city as an ongoing event" (4). From the standpoint of the circulation of capital between and through these spaces, the victualler's shop feeds the festive space of the city, receives capital in exchange for its service, and this capital is then appropriated by Perkyn Revelour—in violation of the rules of the mercantile space—to feed his own participation in the festivities of the streets.

In Howard's (1987) brief discussion of *The Cook's Tale*, it is noted that the decadence of the tale "suggests how pessimistic Chaucer was at this time about his little corner of the world" (417) at the time of the tale's compoisition. While Chaucer's *Cook's Tale* demonstrates a degree of pessimism about the London environment, his indictment of urban living also extends to the "*degree*" of persons who inhabit the place. In light of the vivid description of London street life (4365-90), and the potential narrative that might have taken place in the brothel had Chaucer completed the tale, the decadence of London and the "*lowe degree*" of those citizens who inhabit its margins would no doubt have provided the dominant flavor of *The Cook's Tale*:

> Each society defines its own margins, and that of the late medieval town, threatened by innumerable rootless and unskilled immigrants, drew an increasingly firm line which left petty criminals, prostitutes, cripples and the permanently unemployed beyond the pale. In this harshly unglamorous world on the edge—symbolically, it was generally found to be concentrated on the urban fringes, in the suburbs—few, if any, forms of association appear to have moderated the grim realities of poverty and disease. (Rosser 29)[2]

The absent "forms of association" in *The Cook's Tale* are, specifically, the guild-based supervision represented by the master's shop and the larger London marketplace. The mercantile space of the shop environment, touching generally on the larger themes of exchange, greed, and common profit developed throughout *The Canterbury Tales*, would have resonated for Chaucer's audience, since the "mid-fourteenth century, in particular, marked a rapid period of the growth for the guilds" (Burrage 375).[3] *The Cook's Tale*'s victualler's master, too, would have summoned up thoughts concerning recent political events, in which "victualers became predominant in the city government" (Myers 92). The ideal vision of the craft guild, as a means of quality control and the protection of worker's

and patron's rights (Boissonnade 211-17) had existed as incidental to larger agencies of social control, the limitation of workforce, and control of product pricing and availability. By the close of the fourteenth century, the disenfranchisement of the workers, and the pressures caused by economic and military issues, resulted in eruptions of unrest, with "polarization between…masters and journeymen" resulting in "clashes between bodies of workers who chose to identify themselves in these terms" (Rosser 4). At the same time, "the middle and lower ranks of the bourgeoisie, and even urban artisans, followed the example of the great bourgeois, coveted land, and appropriated numerous holdings" (Boissonnade 320). Barbara Tuchman, too, in her narrative history of the Middle Ages, *A Distant Mirror* (1978), noted that

> tension and antagonisms brewed in urban society by capitalist development. Once united by a common craft, the guild masters, journeymen, and apprentices had spread apart into entrepreneurs and hired hands divided by class hatred. (39)

Issues of class conflict within the London marketplace certainly inform the depictions of riotous festivity we observe in *The Cook's Tale* itself, as well as the passive-aggressive conflict represented in *The Cook's Tale*'s master-apprentice relationship.

Even in *The General Prologue*, the employment of Roger the cook as personal chef to the five guildsmen carries with it associations of guild-based conflict, paring these five upwardly-mobile guild masters with a diseased cook whose circumstances either allow or require that he hire himself out to private citizens. The guildsmen, less concerned with their craft then with being landlords, "*For catel hadde they ynogh and rente" (373), aspire not to the workshop but to be "in a yeldehalle on a deys*" (370). Each of them "*Was shaply for to been an alderman*" (372), and as such embody the emerging urban bourgeoisie, their interests gravitating towards spheres of local political power. Gerald Morgan (1978) notes the evocative political associations of Chaucer's Guildsmen, who appear to be "extremely prosperous tradesmen…belonging to some of the more important gilds of the second rank in the late fourteenth century, and hence likely to have been directly involved in the constitutional struggles in London during the 1370s and 1380s" (494). This political conflict,[4] in part the result of what Britton Harwood (1987) describes as "the opposition between commercial and productive capital" (339), is also represented in *The General Prologue*'s Guildsmen's desire to turn material into capital for the purpose of purchasing status.[5] Their identity as absentee business owners, like The Cook's Tale's victual master whose capital is repeatedly stolen by his own apprentice, suggests the subversive of the realignment of class made possible through the accumulation of capital. Mutability of status, paradoxically, leads to a loss of stability and control.

Interestingly, S. R. Epstein (1998) notes, in a study of the changing roles of guilds and apprenticeship, the "vast number of …false workers and women who set up business in the expanding town suburbs beyond guild jurisdiction" (689). Perkyn's movement from his master's control follows this arc rather closely, moving him to another location more suited to his social class, a place beyond guild supervision where the disenfranchised, the criminal, and the female[6] set up businesses and work for their "*sustenance*."

> By contrast, the master's shop would remain the moral center and the commercial norm of the *Cook's Tale*, were it not that Perkyn's life in the

> streets appears characteristic, even normal to the London that we are allowed to see in this tale. Contrasted with its urban background of communal gambling, dancing, singing, riding and (*in place of privetee*) fornicating, the master's shop seems proper enough but rather bleak in comparison. (Woods 195)

As space representative of the "moral center" of mercantile society, Perkyn's movement out of his apprenticeship and into the brothel replicates his earlier movement into the activities defined by the streets of London. The internal space of the victualler's shop, initially subverted by the ritualized space of the city at large, is now replaced entirely by the new shop and its marginalized—now centralized—craft and proprietor. Thus, after a long indenture as an apprentice in London, the apprentice of "lowe degree" has finally gone back where he belongs.

The "lowe degree" of the aptly named Perkyn Revelour becomes the focus of several proverbial indictments, offered by both the master charged with his education, as well the Cook-narrator, who states:

> *For sikerly a prentys revelour*
> *That haunteth dys, riot, and paramour,*
> *His maister shal it in his shoppe abye,*
> *Al have he no part of mynstralcye.*
> *For thefte and riot, they been convertible,*
> *Al konne pleye on gyterne or ribble.*
> *Revel and trouthe, as in a lowe degree,*
> *They been ful wrothe al day, as men may see.*
> (4391-98)

As is made plain by the example above, the apprentice's love of "*riot*" is synonymous with "*thefte*." The apprentice, too, is convertible, as the Cook transforms Perkyn's surname from proper noun into basic noun, suggesting that he is of a particular type, that is, a person who engages in revelry, and is apprenticed to that "*craft*" as well as the "craft of vitaillers" (4366). Perkyn's low moral character, aligned with gambling ("dys"), debauched behavior ("riot"), and womanizing ("paramour"), is both an indicator and tendency of his social identity, which gravitates towards "revel" and away from "trouthe," symptomatic of his "lowe degree." The tendency here is to suggest that Perkyn's negative behavior is part of his social role, that when "gadered hym a meynee of his sort/To hoppe and singe and maken swich disport" (4381-82) he is doing what comes naturally to him in the presence of those who are like him. By implication, when he is ultimately discharged from his apprenticeship at the victualler's shop, his lateral move is again towards his own social class:

> And for ther is no theef withoute a lowke,
> That helpeth hym to wasten and sowke
> Of that he brybe kan or borwe may,
> Anon he sente his bed and his array
> Unto a compeer of his owene sort,

> That lovede dys, and revel, and disport,
> And hade a wyf that heeld for contenance
> A shoppe, and swyved for hir sustenance.
> (4415-22)

The lateral move from the victualler's shop, a place of employment from which he stole, to a "shoppe" that is used as a front ("contenance") for prostitution, finds Perkyn amongst his "owene sort," those who enjoy gambling and debauched activities. The wayward apprentice's relocation also offers the promise that his previous irresponsibility and dishonest behavior can now blossom into outright crime, through the proverbial application of "ther is no theef withoute a lowke" ("there is no thief without an accomplice"),[7] use of the term "brybe," and the masterful analogy suggested by his leaving behind the victualler's craft, a shop that specializes in the provision of food stuff, for the company of a woman who "swyved for hir sustenance," literally whoring for her food. The comparison inherent in the shifting of mercantile locales also suggests that the whore is simultaneously a corollary of, and a polar opposite of, the craft master. Indeed, an initial consideration of the characterization of the master of the victualler's shop indicates that his role is exemplary in nature, and that his own work ethic is used to contrast that of his apprentice.

Having completed the primary elements of his portrait of the apprentice, the Cook segues from his vaguely proverbial indictment (4391-96) of the apprentice's repeated thefts from his master, "For often tyme he foond his box ful bare" (4390), to a comparative statement that establishes the master's moral and fiscal superiority: "His master shal it in his shoppe abye,/Al have he no part of the mynstralcye" (4393-94). The intention here is to communicate that although the master has no part in Perkyn's lifestyle, the stolen profits from his shop pay for the apprentice's "dys, riot, and paramour" (4392). Woods (1996) acknowledges the anonymous master of Perkyn's place of employment as foil to the apprentice's riotous personality, suggesting that the master's shop is a "domain of merchant's 'trouthe'" (195), an "Eden where the controlled, profitable, but tedious labor is in harmony with—coupled with—the demand of riot and paramour that reigns in the streets to which Perkyn was always escaping" (194). The association of the master with an idealized role is repeated in Burakov (2002), whose study of the fragment suggests "Perkyn Revelour's relentless pursuit of pleasure…emulates the trajectory of Adam's fall and his subsequent banishment from paradise" (2), and reads the master as "an impersonal embodiment of the moral values, primarily an authority that provides an antithetical frame of reference to Perkyn's insatiable sensuality" (3). While the text's fragmentary state makes Burakov's Biblical allegory difficult to discern, and what the text does provide does not demonstrate the clear corollaries required for allegory, one cannot help but wonder if the apprentice's character suggests a Biblical reference more applicable to its espoused "work ethic." It is clear from the evidence above that the master and his apprentice, although both members of the class of "mediocres, which was a large group that included retailers, journeymen, apprentices" (Woods 198), are differentiated by one's adherence to "*trouthe*" and the other's desire for "*revel*." The characterization of Perkyn as prodigal, though lacking the moment of recognition required to make moral sense of such a version of the tale, does offer the attractive detail that, like the prodigal son of Luke 15, the apprenticeship of Perkyn functions as a type of indentured labor.[8] Of course, whereas the

prodigal son runs away from his obligations to his own "master," Perkyn requests his walking papers openly.

Such conjecture aside, it is clear that the text's basic plot supports the master's moral superiority, both through the master's application of the proverbial condemnation "Wel bet is rotten appul out of hoord/Than that it rotie al the remenaunt" (4406-07), implying his apprehension at the potential contagiousness of Perkyn's polluted moral state, as well as his release of the apprentice from his indenture (4411) with the parting curse "And bad hym go, with sorwe and with meschaunce!" (4412). However, the depiction of conflict between the apprentice and his master, and that master's issuing of a questionable "papir" of "acquitance" (4404 & 4411) suggests that the master himself is not beyond reproach.

In his edition of *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (1894), Skeat interpreted "whan he his papir soghte" (4404) as describing the master "referring to his account book" (Skeat 130) and finding grounds for dismissing the apprentice. However, Blenner-Hassett (1942) interprets "papir" as "an apprentice's indenture" (34). Call (1943) concurs, reading "papir" as "documentary proof of his apprenticeship" (169). Additionally, Call characterizes "his master yaf him acquitance" (4411) as documentation that Perkyn's apprenticeship is now complete: "This word was used in the Middle Ages invariably in connection with business dealings and in actions at law. It is most often used to show satisfaction of a debt" (173). At this point, because of the importance of this factor to our suggested reading of *The Cook's Tale*, it is important to provide a closer examination of Chaucer's use of the term "acquitance." As Christopher Cannon suggests, in his *The Making of Chaucer's English: A Study of Words* (1998), what at first appears to be innovative and novel appropriations of loan words (83-8), as in the case of the Old French term "acquitance," is really a byproduct of the chronological arrangement of Chaucer's works (98). The "stasis" that Cannon uses to describe Chaucer's lexis (98), would appear to be part of a process whereby Chaucer's desire to translate (79-82) results in a codifying of thought within a specific and limited vocabulary. If our reading of Cannon's theory is correct, then Chaucer's very use of the term "aquitance," and its relevant variant forms, suggests the value described by the work of Blenner-Hassett (1942) and Call (1943) considered above.

What becomes clear, as one reviews the uses of the term in Chaucer's *ABC*, *Parson's Tale*, *Clerk's Tale*, and *Friar's Tale*, is that issues of exchange and the legal context of the term, both in relation to secular and sacred law, flavor the various applications of "acquitance" in Chaucer's writing. As Cannon points out, the term first appears in Chaucer's own work in his devotional poem *ABC*, and appears as the standard Old French form of the word (241). In this plea by a debilitated narrator to the Holy Virgin to act as mediatrix between himself and God, the text provides some 184 lines of poetry loaded with legal jargon and terminology. Within this context, the crucifixion is couched in terms of litigation and exchange: "And with his precious blood he wrot the bille/Upon the crois as general acquitance" (59-60). This type of use is echoed in The *Parson's Tale*, where the statement "And forasmuche as a man may acquiten himself biforn God by penitence in this world, and not by tresor" (178) notes the discrepancy between temporal payment of legal debt and payment made to God though the "biwaillen" of one's "trespass" (178). Interestingly, this particular section of *The Parson's Tale* references Job, as does the portion of *The Clerk's Tale* that states "Ther kan no man in humblesse hym acquite/As

woman kan" (936-37). Issues of exchange united with the enactment—or abuse—of Church law informs the use of the term in *The Friar's Tale*, with the statement from the "somonour character" requesting "Twelf pens to me, and I wol thee acquite" (1599) from the old woman. In light of what appears to be the legal implications of the master's issuing of the paper of "acquitance," it is clear that the master's decision in this process must be called into question.

Call argues that the master's issuing the "acquitance," a sign that Perkyn's apprenticeship is completed, must be qualified by cleansing the negative portrait of Perkyn that makes up the bulk of the fragment. Call states that "there is evidence to show that Perkyn's revelry was not unusual in the London of his time" (176), and that the master "was not throwing him out because he was a rioter; rather, Perkyn wanted to go" (176). The issue at hand, however, is that the master acknowledges Perkyn's negative presence in his shop, "wel bet is roten appul out of hoord/Than that it rotie al the remenaunt" (4406-07), and releases him with his certificate of completion. To phrase this more forcefully, the master has provided a fraudulent certificate to a riotous worker simply because he wants to excise the thief from his shop. The master's action, therefore, places fiscal security before social order and his responsibilities as a member of his guild. If we accept the portrait of the guild system as "part of a complex social and economic system" (Smith 449), and that part of the purpose of that system was to "reflect the order that authorities wished to see imposed on society, a hierarchical and above all male-oriented order" (Swanson 120), then the master's actions ultimately subvert the very authority that he is supposed to represent. Even on the most basic level, the importance that the guilds "attached to the moral character of their members" (Hibbert 2000) would call into question the master's actions, especially in light of the fact that the master-apprentice relationship was ultimately an educational relationship (Smith 449). Yet, so concerned is he about the hemorrhaging of his shop's capital, the master victualer has now hemorrhaged a license of sorts to thieving Perkyn Revelour. Perkyn's decadence is a reflection of the decadence of his master. In light of Paul Strohm's (1989) statement that the "tales of the Pardoner, Friar, and Summoner all suggest that the driving force behind the debasement of sworn relationships is the allure of singular or personal profit" (100), one must include *The Cook's Tale* in this equation, and add that the maintaining of capital profit, too, undermines the craft master's relationship as educator to Perkyn, and as guardian of the educational process in his relationship to the guild itself.

The urban process of economic alignment and social upheaval suggested in Chaucer's *Cook's Tale* is characterized by the pairing of the upward social mobility of master craftsmen with the outward mutability and riotousness of prodigal characters typically of the lower working class apprentice type. The subsequent blurring of identity that accompanies the dynamics of mobility and mutability is accentuated through the use of fraudulent contracts and licenses. The resultant destabilization of social order is farcically remedied through the normalizing of hypocrisy and the transformation of riot into festivity. That this festive riot makes up the street traffic of the one glimpse that Chaucer gives us of the London environment is surely important. Chaucer's appropriation of guild discourse addresses social idealization of management against labor force, deconstructing labor-identity through the blurring of the craft/bourgeoisie class, thereby dramatizing the breakdown of the normalizing action of the guilds in response to the accumulation of capital and power. The anxiety associated with shifting class and status

concerns the role which capital plays in the process of realignment. For the craft master, like *The General Prologue*'s guildsmen, self-fashioning is a process of purchase; the exchange of money for the outward trappings of rank and movement outside of the shop environment. This process is not entirely different from the practice of thieving Perkyn Revelour, a prodigal "prentys whilom dwelled in oure citee" (I.4365), who can be "free/Of his dispense" (4387-88) with money he has worked to produce but which is not his. This prodigal, who leaves his irate master and moves in with a couple who run a brothel out of a storefront, functions in direct contrast to the Guild Masters; yet like the Guild Masters, Perkyn's own sense of emergent identity gravitates to other pastimes than to the toil of the shop, and is realignment is enabled through the circulation of capital. For masters and their apprentices, definitive movement upwards within London's mercantile space, or prodigal movement outwards through the city's streets to its social margins, represent acts of self-fashioning which disrupt previously conceived distinctions of role and rank. Thus, Chaucer's fragmentary *Cook's Tale*, like many of the completed portions of his unfinished Canterbury frame, challenges expectation in its depiction of a society in flux. Additionally, *The Cook's Tale*'s uniquely urban setting functions as a backdrop to those social and economic events through which the medieval idea of "degree" was forever remade by the London marketplace.

NOTES

[1] All citation of Chaucer's work, unless noted otherwise, are drawn from The Riverside Chaucer. Third ed. Ed. Larry D. Benson, et. al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). Parenthetical numerical references indicate line numbers in that edition.

[2] Rosser, Gervase. "Crafts, Guilds and the Negotiation of Work in the Medieval Town." Past and Present. No. 154 (Feb. 1997), 3-31.

[3] Additional material may be found in two helpful studies, one by Roy Porter (1994), especially pages 29-32, and in Timothy Baker (1970), pages 167-81; also see Paul Strohm (1992), pages 172-75.

[4] For an entertaining narrative history of these conflicts in relation to the merchant and craft guilds, see Charles Pendrill (1925), pages 133-69).

[5] Their desire for temporal wealth and status, intrinsic to their portrait, is key to Chaucer's indictment of their bourgeois value system. As Derek Brewer (1968) notes, "there is no doubt that there is some satire of the Gildsmen's wives as social climbers, and perhaps of the Gildsmen themselves" (293). Peter Lisca (1955) concurs, stating that their portrait in The General Prologue is "done in the dry point of satire, with the burgeoning respectability of the nouveau riche in every stroke—their dress, their ambitions, their cook" (321). Lisca's argument, hinging on the portrait of the diseased Cook as an indication that the poor judgment of the Guildsmen, reads the text as Chaucer's masterful indictment of the vanity of men who have achieved financial success without the grace and taste afforded to true aristocrats:

> It seems quite possible, therefore, that this cook is the final satiric touch in the portrait of the gildsmen, who are so eager to put on a good appearance with their new livery, their silver-trimmed knives, their social ambitions, and their High-Class but vitally defective cook. (323)

To accept the application of satire in the portrait of the Guildsmen raises the issue of motivation, and the suggestion that Chaucer's assault on them hinges on more than their boorish taste. These emergent members of the urban bourgeoisie are representations of the mutability of class occurring with the London marketplace.

[6] See the comparison of The Cook's Tale's whore and the Craft Master on page 12 of this essay. For additional material and the larger role of women in the marginalized mercantile spaces of London, see A. Abram (1916), Katherine L. French (1998), and Barbara Hanawalt (1998).

[7] Note, Riverside Chaucer (86).

[8] See J. Albert Harrill (1996) on the issue of the indentured labor of the prodigal son.

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