

# The pardoner's tale and accepting the inevitable lie

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Stories are built on trust. But who or what we put our trust in is relative. Pardoner's Tale is a story about a corrupt pardoner telling his interesting story. The Pardoner makes sure that the audience knows that he is a liar, driven by avarice above all else and that his intentions are foul. I will argue in this paper that no matter what the Pardoner's intentions are, or how controversial his dishonesty is, he achieved something positive by completing a moral story. I will also claim that the listener/audience should always put their trust in the actual story itself, not to the storyteller. This method negates both the intention and honesty of the storyteller since these things do not matter if the story is the listener's main focus and also makes the distinct separation of lying and deceiving.

Pardoner is a craftsman of building trust but why and how he is building this trust is quite interesting. Pardoner aims to gain money or in other words styles, his moves to makes sure that his avarice is sustained. Unlike a common liar or a counterfeit storyteller, he says or makes nothing to promote or legitimize his story because all he needs is to make sure that people are believing in him not particularly to his story. He is just using the moral of the story to impact a heavy strike to the heart of the audience and exploit them. However, he succeeds to give to the audience the actual moral of the story. In lines, 22-24 Pardoner states that by 'preaching' he wouldn't do any 'honest' work (Chaucer). The choice of words is predominantly important in these lines since preaching is often associated with storytelling. These lines are the only lines that specify that this story is dishonest. All the other lines about this story before the actual beginning, like lines 15-20 is about getting 'silver for the things I teach' or 'living in poverty' these all are

closely connected with the Pardoner being an exploiting and sordid man and these lines indicate nothing about the legitimacy of the story (Chaucer). In conclusion, the lack of specification indicates that one cannot reach a certain result if this story is honest or not. This specific situation is promoting my point by giving us no proof of a dishonest story and drawing our focus on what the story is trying to tell. By doing this Pardoner creates an unintentional trust towards his story. Both the reader and the actual listener seem to be affected by this condition. This is quite a positive thing since one should not trust the storyteller but the story that they are listening to. This way Pardoner makes sure -although unintentionally- that his claims of being a liar have no effect on both the reader and the listener.

Deception is a common term that is frequently confused with lying. Although they are closely related, they are not the same. In Pardoner's story, Death is personified as a thief and since the Age is suitable this so-called thief is "stealing" a lot of lives in the disguise of plaques (Lines 65-71 Chaucer). There is a brief summary-like mini-story amid the actual tale. The storyteller of this mini-story is an old man that Death seems to have forgotten. This old man gives a summary like the story of his life and directs the actual vengeful 'heroes' of the story towards Death but what they find is, in fact, a pile of gold. What is important with this deception like story is how the truth was completely relative. Morally, the old man in fact not lied. This small conditional deception, however, does not destroy or negate the reality of his brief story. His deceptive ways will and did indeed damaged the credibility of his story however there is no indicator or reason to suggest his story was not true. The old man's deception is a common feature of all stories. They

suggest a moral point and they will almost always have exaggeration in them. These exaggerations are a form of deception. However, this form of deception is not directly lying and thus does not indicate a trust problem. We have no reason not to believe that the old man's story was not true. Our heroes' reaction to the pile of gold is also important. When presented with something much better they forgot and neglected the actual deception. This is much like the original listeners of the Pardoner's Tale. They are listening even though they have been told more than once that the storyteller of the story is not trustworthy. The continued listening can be explained by this particular situation. They were presented with something far more interesting than a corrupt Pardoner talking about how dishonest he is, and they took it.

On the matter of lying, the very storytellers we adore and keep a close eye on are inevitably liars. Even though they are not certified liars, they did in fact at a point in their lives lie. We as always are continuing to give credit and trust to their stories even though we know they are liars. Ageless Literature can give us examples of writers and storytellers that were not good people and were driven by greed by today we are giving credit to them. This modern example is also a perfect way to understand why people are listening to the story of the Pardoner. Literature is often built on these small deceptive ways. Even other forms of literature will almost always have this small deceptive factor in them. Pardoner's Tale is a particularly good example of showing us how this plot-twist like deceiving is the main element of teaching. Even though the old man's story had a deathly conclusion it still can teach a greater moral to a greater audience.

## **Works Cited**

- Chaucer, Geoffrey, and Nevill Coghill. *The Canterbury Tales*. London; New York: Penguin Books, 2003.