

The Defence of Religious Orthodoxy in John Heywood's

The Pardoner and the Frere

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John Heywood was undoubtedly an exceptional entertainer at the court of Henry VIII and, as one of his epigrams testifies, he wished to be remembered as 'Heywood with the mad merry wit'.¹ In this chapter, however, I want to focus on his 'serious' side, that is, on the political implications of one of his 'many mad plaies'. In the 1520s Heywood devoted a number of witty interludes to serious religious, political and social issues. It was not unusual for Tudor dramatists to join in the political and religious debates taking place at court; they assumed an audience open to persuasion and, in pursuing their goals, felt free to offer counsel that was not entirely devoid of criticism or reproach.²

The Pardoner and the Frere is a perfect example of such an attitude, though critics have often considered it as mere entertainment. Robert W. Bolwell, for example, in 1921 declared that in *The Pardoner and the Frere* Heywood's 'purpose was to entertain, to make fun, not to denounce' and that 'the purpose of the play is entertainment, not edification'.³ In 1964, T. W. Craik still felt that 'Heywood seems to have written this play wholly for the sake of its straightforward amusing situation'.⁴ And in the following decade Joel B. Altman, in his classic study *The Tudor Play of Mind* (1978), ranked *The Pardoner and the Frere* with *Johan Johan* and argued that the two plays, 'though highly entertaining and nondidactic, are essentially irreverent farces'.⁵ In the present discussion, however, I will explore how *The Pardoner and the*

Frere, though farcical, combines an attack on religious abuses with a positive belief in the church and a defence of the Catholic faith: corrupt churchmen are satirized; the need for religious reform is stressed; and King Henry VIII is called upon for support in a way that, on closer examination, appears ambiguous and potentially critical.

The necessity for reform to put an end to the moral decay of the church without trespassing the limits of religious orthodoxy was a central commitment for the Christian humanists belonging to the so-called 'More circle'. Sir Thomas More, John Colet and Desiderius Erasmus (who spent three long periods in England,⁶ becoming a life-long friend of More and Colet) relentlessly attacked ecclesiastical abuses in their writings, on occasions with the resources of irony and satire. In his works and in his letters, More repeatedly inveighed against clerical superstition and ignorance, and friars seemed to be his favourite target;⁷ whereas Erasmus's *Moriae Encomium* is a perfect example of how the satirical method could be usefully employed to censure the perversions of the evangelical message the author found in contemporary religious institutions.⁸

However, even if their criticism could sometimes sound harsh, for both More and Erasmus the condemnation of abuses was inseparable from, or rather took its origin in, an unwavering devotion to the Catholic Church. Their attacks were invariably directed at the abuse of respected institutions, not at the institutions themselves: as More asserted in *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, it is 'lawful to any man to mislike the misuse of every good thing'.⁹ How a bitter, even irreverent, criticism of its abuses need not challenge loyalty to the ecclesiastical institution was explained by More in his defence of Erasmus's *Moriae Encomium*: 'For god be thanked, I never had that mind in my life to have holy saints, images or their holy relics out of reverence [. . .]. Howbeit, that book of *Moria* doth indeed but jest upon

the abuses of such things, after the maner of the disours [*i.e.* jester's] part in a play.'¹⁰

The Pardoner and the Frere and its companion play, *The Foure PP*, reflect the aims and the spirit that moved the Christian humanists of More's circle to which Heywood was related, having married the daughter of Sir Thomas More's sister. Mingling sincere devotion and unflinching loyalty to the Catholic Church with an ironic and debunking spirit was, as we have seen, far from alien to humanists like More and Erasmus. At the core of *The Pardoner and the Frere* is persuasion. Persuasion is, first of all, the theme of the play which presents a contest between two shady individuals for the attention (and the money) of the congregation they are addressing. Both the Pardoner and the Frere are skilful manipulators of crowds and make relentless use of rhetorical, argumentative and pragmatic strategies to attain their goal. The Frere's sermon, for example, opens with a blessing that is intended as a *captatio benevolentiae* (lines 1–2); it then follows with an extremely elaborate rhetorical pattern, made up of anaphora, protracted parallelism (on one occasion of nine lines), litotes and antithesis.¹¹ Next, the Frere quotes the gospel in support of his argument (lines 37–53) and, immediately after, threatens the audience with imperative verbs, that is, speech acts of considerable illocutionary force:

Wherfore, my frendes, to this text take ye hede.

Beware how ye despyse the pore freres,

Which ar in this worlde Crystes mynysters;

But do them with an harty chere receyve,

Leste they happen your houses for to leve –

And than God wyll take vengeance in his yre.

(lines 54–59)

The Frere concludes his appeal for attention¹² with a prayer to God to make the congregation receptive to His Word.

The impact on the spectators of such manipulative energy is undoubtedly enormous, the more so because in *The Pardoner and the Frere* the fictitious and the real audience overlap. Those attending the performance would certainly find the efforts of the two shameless cheaters amusing; but, at the same time, they are the chosen victims, they are their prey. This heightens the didactic import of the interlude, since such scandalous behaviour cannot but prompt the spectators to go beyond the joke and catch the moral significance of what they are witnessing. However, in a play that is in itself an exercise in persuasion, we can trace various acts of persuasion, aimed at different objectives and different interlocutors, but all moved by a single intent: to see the abuses in the ecclesiastical institution reformed. But what a deeply-committed Catholic like John Heywood advocates is reform from within, and, paradoxically, the more obnoxious the guilt exposed, the better it works in support of the ‘Churche Vniuersall’.

The key figure in the play’s defence of orthodoxy is the Pardoner. As the vast number of documents aimed at censoring their abuses and disciplining their practices demonstrate, pardoners had been the black sheep of the church since the Middle Ages. Three popes – Innocent III in 1215, Clement IV in 1267 and Clement V in 1311 – took steps to lay down strict rules of conduct for pardoners to follow. The first set of rules provided that the ‘questor, vulgariter vocatus *perdoner*’ was not to be permitted to preach to the congregation (and so display his persuasive skill, as Heywood’s Pardoner does), but only to read the papal or episcopal letters that he carried with him. Clement V’s *Abusionibus*, which is a full-scale catalogue of the abuses practised by

pardoners, empowered bishops to examine the credentials of pardoners before granting them permission to collect money within the dioceses, and to punish transgressing pardoners.

Although canon law was very strict in defining the pardoner's duties and in regulating his activities, it was frequently side-stepped, because the church was perennially in need of funds for building or repairing churches and providing relief for the poor and sick; and collectors, even if tending to employ unorthodox methods, proved useful insofar as they were an inexhaustible source of money. Furthermore, bribery at various levels was not an uncommon practice. According to Gerald Owst, the most prominent abuses connected with pardoners were of three kinds. First of all, the pardoner might be false in that he did not have the authority of the Church and might be the bearer of counterfeit letters. As a result, many documents of the period insist upon any potential clients examining his credentials closely. Second, the collector might stretch the efficacy of the indulgence and promise absolution *a poena et a culpa* from all kinds of sins both to the living and the dead. But plenary indulgences that absolved from both punishment and guilt had become, by the sixteenth century, exceptional, and church doctrine emphasized that the remission of guilt could only be achieved through contrition and confession: the indulgence could only remit the penalty after God had forgiven the guilt.¹³ Lastly, pardoners often came into conflict with other preachers over possession of the parish pulpit itself, causing disturbances and scandals.¹⁴

Evidence shows that the church was extremely concerned about corrupt pardoners and their abuses. Both documents and sermons during the late Middle Ages use markedly strong language when describing their notorious practices. An article of the 'Oxford Petition' (1414) entitled 'contra falsas predicationes quaestorum', for

example, reads:

Whereas the shameless pardoners purchase their vile traffic in farm with Simon, sell Indulgences with Gehazi, and squander their gains in disgraceful fashion with the Prodigal Son: but what is more detestable still, although not in holy orders, they preach publicly, and pretend falsely that they have full powers of absolving both living and dead alike from punishment and guilt, along with other blasphemies, by means of which they plunder and seduce the people, and in all probability drag them down with their own person to the infernal regions, by affording them frivolous hope and an audacity to commit sin: therefore, let the abuses of this pestilential sect be blotted out from the threshold of the Church.¹⁵

And in a vernacular sermon, the only one, according to Owst, in which their abuses are mentioned,¹⁶ pardoners are straightforwardly listed among thieves:

Sothell theves beth the men that slyly can robbe men with many queynt sotell wordes, and with fals behestynge; and sum with fals letters and seeles, with crosses, and reliques that thei bere abowten them, and sei that thei be of seyntes bones or of holy mens clothinge, and behoteth myche mede that will offre to hem, and hire the letters of pardon, ichon of other, as a kowe or a nox that man lat to hure; the wiche thei sell all for the penny, and fo no mans mede, with many fals lesynges, as the feend here maister techeth hem, for to robbe the pore pepull sotelly of ther goodes. And therfore said Crist, '*Beware of false prophets* [. . .]'.¹⁷

But even if such disreputable figures were very common, they were only a deviation from the system, and the ecclesiastical institution considered them simply as impostors. Thus, Heywood's Pardoner, who is indeed a summation of the abuses mentioned above, does not represent a danger for religious orthodoxy. Even if his conduct is scandalous, the audience is constantly made aware that he is just a fraud. Presenting an individual who is so blatantly a cheat, far from providing ammunition for the Lutherans, becomes a strategy of containment that is functional in safeguarding orthodoxy: the abuses are acknowledged, but, at the same time, they are ascribed to a rascal. Criticism cannot affect the ecclesiastical institution because the Pardoner, with his shameful conduct and his manifest tricks, puts himself outside that institution.

All the abuses listed by Owst reappear amplified in Heywood's Pardoner. He inflates the powers of his indulgences excessively, assuring remission *a poena et a culpa* – with no need for confession or contrition (lines 231, 321 and 323) to the living and the dead alike (line 197) – and for any sin, even patricide and matricide (lines 377–99). But the audience is well aware that he is a liar, firstly because what he is offering is not sanctioned within Church doctrine and cannot be granted; and, secondly, because his credentials, as we will see later, are manifestly false. In addition, the Pardoner does not hesitate to offend, threaten and, in the end, strike the Frere to secure an audience. The Pardoner's fight with his rival is made more scandalous by his assertion that he is the Pope's emissary and God's minister (lines 359–60). Appealing to the Pope's authority, the Pardoner excommunicates the Frere who, for his part, has already cursed him:

[*Pardoner*] Nay, thou art acurst, knave – and that shalt thou se!
 And all suche that to me make interrupcyon,
 The Pope sendes them excommunycacyon
 By hys bullys, here redy to be redde,
 By bysshoppes and hys cardynalles confyrmed. [. . .]
 Why despysedst thou the Popes mynyster?
 Maysters, here I curse hym openly,
 And therwith warne all this hole company
 By the Popes great auctoryte,
 That ye leve hym and herken unto me!
 For, tyll he be assoyled, his wordes take none effecte –
 For out of holy chyrche he is now clene rejecte.

(lines 265–69 and 305–11)

However, the audience immediately realizes that the Pardoner's declarative speech acts are defective, because, as a trickster, he places himself outside the ecclesiastical institution. Moreover, the Pardoner's speech is not only doctrinally flawed, but also unsuccessful. The Frere himself points out to the congregation (and to the audience) why it is defective: 'My maysters, he dothe but gest and rave – / It forseth not for the wordes of a knave!' (lines 312–13).

The criticism of the sales of indulgences was widespread among orthodox writers, and Heywood's opinion on the subject again reflects the programme of reform the More circle supported. Erasmus, reproving external shows of holiness that are not matched by sentiments of charity, piety and love, repeatedly criticizes the practice of indulgences. In his *Enchiridion*, first published in 1503, he declares:

Thou believest perchance all thy sins and offences to be washed away at once with a little paper or parchment sealed with wax, with a little money or images of wax offered, with a little pilgrimage going. Thou art utterly deceived and clean out of the way. The wound is received inwardly, the medicine therefore must needs be laid to within.¹⁸

In *Moriae Encomium* (1511), Folly, referring to the superstitious, asks:

Then what shall I say of the people who so happily fool themselves with forged pardons for sins, measuring out time to be spent in purgatory as if with an hour-glass, and figuring its centuries, years, months, days, and hours, as if from a mathematical table, beyond possibility of error?¹⁹

The target of satire, however, is not so much indulgences as the abuses connected with them. This is precisely the point made by Arnoldus in the colloquy ‘Of Rash Vows’. After poking fun at the practice of granting indulgences to scoundrels and selling bulls to the dead, Arnoldus, warned by his friend Cornelius that there are spies around, clarifies his position:

I don’t speak slightingly of Indulgencies themselves, but I laugh at the Folly of my fuddling Companion, who tho’ he was the greatest Trifler that ever was born, yet chose rather to venture the whole Stress of his Salvation upon a Skin of Parchment than upon the Amendment of his Life.²⁰

The object of Arnoldus's scorn is not pardons, but cheaters and the foolish people who are all too easily swindled by them. This is exactly the same attitude that emerges in Heywood's *The Pardoner and the Frere* and *The Foure PP*.

Even the relics that the Pardoner puts up for sale at the beginning of his performance are not a threat to orthodoxy, because they are too hyperbolically absurd to be mistaken as genuine or to be blasphemous. Some of them are taken from Chaucer, and the extravagant list includes: the blessed jawbone of All-Hallows and the big toe of the Holy Trinity.²¹ In addition, the benefits that can be obtained from the relics are far too ridiculous to be deemed impious. In this instance, exaggeration effectively neutralizes any possible criticism. It quickly becomes obvious that the target of satire is not the belief in relics, but the dishonesty of shameless individuals like the Pardoner and the credulity of simple people. Furthermore, the very fact that the Pardoner opens his address with the display of his relics is meant to discredit him: the carrying of false relics appears to have been the most effectively controlled of all the pardoner's abuses, and the sale of relics itself was forbidden by the Lateran Council of 1215. Genuine relics (i.e., relics bearing the seal of episcopal approbation upon them) might be carried, but only for veneration, and the Synod of Exeter (1287) stipulated that anyone causing false relics to be revered should be punished as a heretic. A rare and loathsome abuse like putting false relics up for sale (which is a double abuse) blatantly confirms that Heywood's Pardoner is a cheat, and alienates him from the body of the Church right at the beginning of his speech. Thus, most importantly, what the play shows and condemns is not the corrupt system, but the corruption of the system by foolish or dishonest individuals.²² The exposing of the Pardoner's tricks and abuses links directly with the author's defence of orthodoxy because it distances criticism from the Church in a period in which the practice of

indulgences was under bitter attack.

An obvious source for Heywood's pardoners is to be found in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer's Pardoner also finds a place in More's *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, where the Messenger, in voicing the Lutheran opinions that Chancellor More is called upon to refute, mentions one of the Chaucerian relics that Heywood re-uses in *The Pardoner and the Frere*: 'a bone of some holy Iewes shepe' (6: 98 and 217). Such references, the one appearing in a serious disputation and the other in a farcical contest, amount to a deliberate attempt to reappropriate Chaucer for Catholic ends. In fact, by the time Heywood's interlude and More's *Dialogue* were written, Chaucer's anticlerical (but orthodox) satire had been assimilated into Protestant polemics.

In presenting his pardoners, in both this interlude and *The Foure PP*, Heywood takes, more or less verbatim, 65 lines from the 'Pardoner's Prologue'. Parallel quotation from *The Pardoner and the Frere* and from the 'Pardoner's Prologue' will give an idea of the extent of the dramatist's debt:

But fyrst ye shall knowe well that I com fro Rome –	Firste I pronounce / whens that I come
Lo, here my bulles, all and some!	And than my billes shewe I all and some
Our lyege lorde seale here on my patent	Our liege lordes seall on my patent
I bere with me my body to warant,	That shewe I firste / my body to warent
That no man be so bolde, be he preest or clarke,	That no man be so bolde / ne preest ne clerke
Me to dysturbe of Chrystes holy warke, [...]	Me to distourbe / of christes hooly warke [. . .]
Fyrst here I shewe ye of a holy Jewes shepe	Than have I in laton a sholder bone
A bone – I pray you take good kepe	Whiche that was of an holy Iewes shepe
To my wordes and marke them well:	Good men say I / take of my wordes kepe
Yf any of your bestes belyes do swell,	If that this bone be wasshe in any well
Dyppe this bone in the water that he dothe take	If cowe or calfe / shepe or oxe swell

Into his body, and the swellynge shall slake.

And yf any worme have your beestes stonge,

Take of this water and wasshe his tonge,

And it wyll be hole anon; [...]

And, maysters all, it helpeth well

Thoughe a man be foule in jelous rage:

Let a man with this water make his potage,

And nevermore shall he his wyfe mystryst-

Thoughe he in sothe the faut by her wyst,

Or had she be take with freres two or thre²³.

That any worme hath eate / or hym stonge

Take water of this welle & wasshe his tunge

And it is hole anone [. . .]

And sirs / also it healeth ielousy

And though a man be fall in ielous rage

Let make with this water his potage

And never shall he more his wyfe mistriste

Though he in sothe the defaute by her wyste

All had she take prestes two or thre²⁴

In *The Pardoner and the Frere* Heywood also re-uses lines from the ‘General Prologue’, and themes and lines from ‘The Summoner’s Tale’ for the sermon of the Frere. The latter can also be traced back to Chaucer’s Pardoner, for, as the unvarying theme of his preaching is ‘Radix malorum est cupiditas’ (line 334), so the sermon of Heywood’s scoundrel unceasingly ‘goth on covetyce’ (see lines 422–23).

Furthermore, both characters participate in the very sin they condemn – as they are exceedingly avaricious. Interestingly, the discrediting of the Frere also links directly to Heywood’s defence of orthodoxy. This character is quite overtly associated with Lutheranism²⁵ – we may easily identify a recurring emphasis upon the gospel in his sermon and an insistence upon Protestant keywords like ‘electe’ (line 43), ‘grace’ (lines 68, 76 and 500) and ‘mercy’ (line 500). He is as corrupt as his Catholic companion. It is not irrelevant that, in *The Pardoner and the Frere*, the most evident borrowings from Chaucer are found in the Pardoner’s opening speech: the *Canterbury Tales* were widely known in the years in which the play was written,²⁶ and most probably Heywood’s audience immediately recognized Chaucer’s pilgrim in his Pardoner. Such an identification could only serve to discredit the character –

Chaucer's pardoner overtly admits that he is nothing but a cheat.²⁷

When the borrowing from the Chaucerian source is so pervasive and evident, any departure from the source can be considered a means of adding emphasis to something the author deems important. In *The Pardoner and the Frere* this has the effect of highlighting an appeal to the authorities. Compared with Chaucer, a greater concern with the Pardoner's credentials is found in Heywood, and it is made clear that these credentials are false. Chaucer's pilgrim only makes brief reference to his documents: he mentions his 'billes' and the 'liege lordes seall' on his patent in the passage quoted above (lines 336–37); immediately after, he generically refers to 'Bulles of popes and of cardynales, / Of patriarkes and bishopes' (lines 342–43); and, lastly, he cites 'the auctoritee / Which that by bulle ygraunted was to [him]' (lines 387–88). Conversely, in Heywood's interlude allusions to the Pardoner's licences abound. The repeated references to the documents in his possession become almost a leitmotiv,²⁸ and the listing and display of his various bulls takes 24 lines.

And bycause ye
Shall unto me
Gyve credence at the full,
Myn auctoryte
Now shall ye se:
Lo here the Popes bull!

(lines 183–88)

However, in foregrounding his 'credentials' in this way, he undermines the very legitimacy of his claims. This is because the sources of his authority are, to say the

least, questionable: he names as his warrantors a non-existent pope (July the sixth) and a schismatic pope who was notorious for his greediness (Bonyface the nynt). Moreover, the deliberate vagueness of naming ('Pope July, Pope Innocent, with dyvers popes mo', line 225) adds nothing to his credibility. Heywood's departures from his source are clearly meaningful. The play insists on the questor's credentials because it is there that the key to the unmasking of impostors resides: counterfeit pardoners would undoubtedly be fewer if ecclesiastical authorities, who have the power and the duty to verify the authenticity of their licenses and to punish them for any misdeeds, were more rigorous in performing their task. Thus, Heywood's added emphasis on credentials can be read as an appeal to religious authorities to be stricter in their examination of pardoners' letters and seals.

Although the milieu of the performance of *The Pardoner and the Frere* cannot be established with certainty, a 'private performance among like-minded family and friends', as Axton and Happé suggest (p. 45), is probable, while a performance before the King, given Heywood's presence at court, seems also likely. In both cases, the attendance of ecclesiastics would have been assured, given Heywood's connections with Sir Thomas More's circle, and Cardinal Thomas Wolsey's chancellorship in the years in which the play may have been written.²⁹ If we assume that there was a court performance *The Pardoner and the Frere* might also be seen to constitute an appeal to Henry VIII himself. Heywood's Pardoner boldly names the King as his warrantor and protector:

And, eke, yf thou dysturbe me any thyng

Thou arte also a traytour to the kynge;

For here hath he graunted me, under hys brode seale,

That no man, yf he love hys hele,
 Sholde me dysturbe or let in any wyse.
 And yf thou dost the kynges commaundement dispise,
 I shall make the be set fast by the fete!

(lines 270–76)

This is a real *coup de théâtre* aimed at provoking the outrage of the King, who is unexpectedly appointed supporter and defender of such a rascal. The fact that this pardoner claims to be provided with a royal writ of protection, which was not at all common at the time,³⁰ can be interpreted as a call for royal intervention, an appeal to Henry VIII to take action.

An episode occurring in 1540 demonstrates that playwrights might indeed urge monarchs on to take action against abuses, and that sovereigns were receptive to invitations of this kind. A letter to Thomas Cromwell relates the effect on the Scottish King James V of a performance of Sir David Lindsay's *Ane Satire of the Thrie Estaitis*, a play in which numerous corrupt ecclesiastics appear:

[. . .] after the saide enterluyde fynished the King of Scotts dide call upon the busshop of Glascoe, being Chauncellor, and diverse other bussops, exorting thaym to reforme their facions and maners of lyving.³¹

Henry VIII, who had been named *fidei defensor* by Leo X in February 1521, after he had written the *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum* to refute Luther's theses, can be assumed to have been even more open to an implicit invitation to amend religious abuses. Henry VIII wanted to appear as a champion of orthodoxy in those years and

could not remain unmoved before such a scandal. Here in *The Pardoner and the Frere* the dramatist is reminding the King of his role of *fidei defensor*, and is suggesting how he can be of service to the Catholic Church: Henry VIII should collaborate in the unmasking of corrupt individuals who not only abuse his name, but also undermine confidence in the ecclesiastical institution. Besides combating the Lutheran threat, the *fidei defensor* should work to maintain orthodoxy through the promotion of reform.

Inviting the monarch to help the Church at such a delicate time is, again, in line with the position of Christian humanists who believed that the destinies of State and Church were closely connected and that the moral health of both was essential. For men like More, Erasmus and Colet, a strong role for the monarchy in determining both temporal and spiritual matters was not seen as a danger for Church authority in the 1520s; on the contrary, it was desirable for the defence of orthodoxy. And intervening to correct abuses in the ecclesiastical institution seems to have been, indeed, one of Henry VIII's concerns at the time, since, as he admitted to the imperial ambassador Eustace Chapuys on 6 December 1529, he hoped 'little by little to introduce reforms and put an end to scandal'.³²

The intervention of a superior authority, both religious and civil, is absolutely necessary because, as the conclusion of the play demonstrates, the efforts of local authorities' efforts prove utterly ineffectual in defeating such rascals who so shamelessly haunt parish churches. The exordium of the Parson strikes a deliberately discordant note in the dramatic narrative:

Holde your handes! A vengeaunce on ye bothe two,
That ever ye came hyther to make this a do,
To polute my chyrche – a myschyfe on you lyght!

I swere to you, by God all myght,
 Ye shall bothe repente every vayne of your harte
 As sore as ye dyd ever thyng, or ye departe.

(lines 545–50)

In these few lines we have: an order ('Holde your handes'), two curses ('A vengeance on ye bothe two' and 'a myschyfe on you lyght') and a threat which is intensified by an appeal to divine authority ('I swere to you, by God all myght, / Ye shall bothe repente [. . .]'). The resolute commitment of the Parson is also evident in the way he addresses the constable, Neybour Prat, who is called by the curate to help him quell the brawl and hand the scoundrels over to the law. Emphatically, the Parson reasserts his determination to give the two rascals a lesson (by explicitly mentioning his authority). He gives the constable the following instructions:

Wherfore, take ye the one and I shall take the other.
 We shall bestow them there as is most convenyent
 For suche a couple. I trow they shall repente
 That ever they met in this chyrche here.
 Neyboure, ye be constable – stande ye nere;
 Take ye that laye knave, and let me alone
 With this gentylman. By God and by Saynt Johan
 I shall borowe upon prestholde somewhat
 For I may say to the, neybour Prat,
 It is a good dede to punysh such to the ensample
 Of suche other, how that they shall mell

In lyke facyon as these catyfes do.

(lines 580–91)

Prat too threatens the knaves by asserting his own authority:

Nay, I am ones charged with the:

Wherefore, by Saynt Johan, thou shalt not escape me

Tyll thou hast scouryd a pare of stokys.

(lines 601–3)

However, the effects of such an extraordinary display of illocutionary force are, to say the least, dubious. The Pardoner reacts to the threats by invoking mercy (lines 594–600 and 609–11), but, as the Parson notes, his plea cannot be taken seriously because the Pardoner is not frightened at all and thinks that ‘all is but mockes’ (line 604). The Frere, for his part, openly defies the curate and the constable (lines 616–20 and 624–25). Besides, the self-confidence of the two defenders of honest religion is utterly destroyed by the brutal aggression of the two rascals, who prefer to transfer the conflict from the level of authority to that of physical violence. By this stage the Parson and Prat are absolutely impotent and ask one another for help; instead of commands, they merely exchangedesperate requests:

Parson: Helpe, helpe, neybour Prat, neybour Prat!

In the worshyp of God, helpe me somewhat!

Prat: Nay, deale as thou canst with that elfe!

For why? I have inoughe to do my selfe.

Alas, for payn I am almoste dede!

The reede blood so ronnethe downe about my hede.

Nay, and thou canst, I pray the helpe me!

(lines 628–34)

And so he curate and the constable leave the place, cursing the winners of the bloody confrontation (‘And a myschefe go with you bothe twayne!’, line 641). This curse, which seems to parody the ones with which the Parson had made his debut, effectively acknowledges the defeat of the two champions of serious religion: institutional authority has proved powerless in stopping two shameless tricksters who, as they leave, promise that they will come back.

In the exchange that has just been discussed the gap between the illocutionary intentions of the Parson and Prat and the perlocutionary effects on their antagonists obviously creates mirth, but it also makes the audience reflect upon the inadequacy of local authorities to cope with the situation. In the light of such a defeat, the previously mentioned appeals to ecclesiastical authorities and to the King appear much more urgent and acquire a greater cogency. As they go, the Pardoner and the Frere impenitently shout: ‘Than adew, to the devyll, tyll we come agayn.’ This is not just ‘the actors’ conventional promise to return to “the place”’, as Axton and Happé suggest (p. 245), it constitutes a real threat and is intended as a reminder for the audience that this is not a single incident. On the contrary, scandalous episodes of this sort are bound to occur again and again, until something serious is done to amend abuses.

However, the plea for redress directed to Henry VIII could also be read as an admonition. Heywood’s Pardoner intrepidly asserts that the King himself is his

supporter and protector, and indeed documentary evidence shows that the monarch *was* involved in the practice of indulgences. It was not unusual for sovereigns to be assigned portions of the profits from the sales of pardons, and, as William Lunt reports, this was certainly true for the early Tudor monarchs. The last indulgence administered by papal agents in England was for the building of Saint Peter's in Rome. It was issued on 1 November 1517 by Leo X, the Pope who was to appoint Henry VIII *fidei defensor* a few years later, and the King received between a quarter to a third of the proceeds. The net income of the indulgence was £2289 9s 7d and it was available for five years: none of the previous indulgences had been offered for so long a period.³³ Receiving a share of the proceeds in a way made the King responsible for the correct administration of the indulgence itself, and for the honest behaviour of collectors. In *The Pardoner and the Frere* we do not find an explicit accusation against the King that he is encouraging corruption through the sanctioning of indulgences – Heywood, as an orthodox and strongly committed Catholic, was not against the practice of indulgences itself, only the abuses connected with it. What we have instead is an invitation to tighten up controls and to work to reform abuses. The King's reputation itself is at stake when scoundrels claim his support, thus making him an accomplice in their fraud. Even if such an invitation cannot be considered a denunciation, it is nevertheless a warning: Henry should take care to have pardons dispensed in such a charitable manner that people would have no occasion to regard them as granted out of covetousness.

To conclude, *The Pardoner and the Frere* does not only appear as 'an exercise in persuasion' (it presents a competition between two shameless individuals to convince a congregation to give money), but it is also 'a vehicle *for* persuasion', and its various, subtle, persuasive strategies arise from the dramatist's desire to see the

abuses in the ecclesiastical institution amended. Firstly, we find a strategy of containment that aims at strengthening orthodoxy: by presenting a character who is overtly a cheat the author distances criticism from the Church. Then, we find an appeal to religious authorities to be more rigorous in their examination of questors' credentials. The last act of persuasion is an appeal to Henry VIII in his role of *fidei defensor* for support in unmasking corrupt pardoners and promoting reform of ecclesiastical abuses. However, given the royal involvement in the practice of indulgences, this plea for redress is, at the same time, an admonition not to tolerate laxity of control simply because the Crown, like the Church, is constantly in need of money. As Baldassar Castiglione stated in *Il libro del Cortegiano*, the principal duty of the perfect courtier was to offer good counsel to his lord, 'without feare or perill to displease him'.³⁴ For his part, the good ruler had to demonstrate that, unlike the tyrant, he was ready to accept good counsel: this was deemed a mark of wisdom.

Accordingly, the author of *The Pardoner and the Frere* assumes an audience open to persuasion, and in such an environment he feels free to offer advice leavened with a touch of criticism and reproach.

NOTES: The Defence of Religious Orthodoxy in John Heywood's *The Pardoner and the Frere*

¹ The epigram (number 100 in the collection) is worth quoting in full for the information it conveys on its author's self-image:

Art thou Heywood with the mad merry wit?
 Ye forsooth maister, that same is euen hit.
 Art thou Heywood that applieth mirth more than thrift?
 Ye sir, I take mery mirth a golden gift.
 Art thou Heywood that hath made many mad plaies?
 Ye many plaies, fewe good workes in all my daies.
 Art thou Heywood that hath made men mery long?
 Ye: and will, If I be made mery among.
 Art thou Heywood that woulde be made mery now?
 Ye sir: helpe me to it now I beseche yow.

John Heywood, 'The fifth hundred of Epigrams', *John Heywood's 'Works' and Miscellaneous Short Poems*, ed. by A. Burton Milligan (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), p. 224.

² For an analysis of the complex (and ambivalent) relationship between dramatic entertainments and institutional authority in Tudor times, see Greg Walker, *Plays of Persuasion: Drama and Politics at the Court of Henry VIII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Nicoletta Caputo, 'Playing with Power': *gli interludi Tudor e i percorsi della Riforma* (Napoli: Liguori, 1998), chap. 1, and Caputo, "'Which play was of a king how he should rule his realm': Tudor Interludes Advising the Ruler", *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 11.1 (Spring 2005), 7–28.

³ Robert W. Bolwell, *The Life and Works of John Heywood* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1921), pp. 110, 112.

⁴ Thomas W. Craik, 'Experiment and Variety in John Heywood's Plays', *Renaissance Drama*, 7 (1964), 6–19 (p. 10).

⁵ Joel B. Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1978), p. 108.

⁶ On his third and longest visit (1509–1514) Erasmus resided in More's house, where he wrote *Moriae Encomium*, which he dedicated to More and whose title puns on his friend's name.

⁷ According to Erasmus and Bale, More even wrote many comedies in his youth, some of them satirizing friars and their faults (see Bolwell, *Life and Works of John Heywood*, p. 22, n.9).

⁸ On such attacks, see Pearl Hogrefe, *The Sir Thomas More Circle* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1959) and Alistair Fox, *Politics and Literature in the Reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), chap. 5.

⁹ Thomas More, *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, 15 vols (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963–97), VIII, 422.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Quotations and references for *The Pardoner and the Frere* are from John Heywood, *The Plays of John Heywood*, ed. by Richard Axton and Peter Happé (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991).

¹² At this point, we are still in a preparatory phase, and the Frere, so far, has touched on the subject of money only to praise the friars for their poverty (lines 22–24) and their disregard for material needs (lines 25–34).

¹³ Indulgences could only grant 'the full or partial remission of the temporal punishments of the sins of the faithful who [had] repented and confessed'. A. Friedberg (ed.), *Corpus Iuris Canonici* (Lipsiae, 1879–81), II, 1306; qtd. in R. W.

Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), pp. 138–39.

¹⁴ See G. R. Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England: An Introduction to Sermon Manuscripts of the Period c. 1350-1450* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1926), pp. 103–7.

¹⁵ Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England*, p. 105.

¹⁶ According to Owst, this was ‘only another indication of the general disdain’ in which pardoners were held: their efforts were ‘beneath contempt’, *Preaching in Medieval England*, p. 109.

¹⁷ Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England*, pp. 109–10.

¹⁸ Desiderius Erasmus, *A Book Called in Latin Enchiridion Militis Christiani and in English The Manual of the Christian Knight, replenished with the most wholesome precepts made by the famous clerk Erasmus of Rotterdam, to which is added a new and marvellous profitable Preface* (1503) (London: Methuen, 1905), p. 180.

¹⁹ Desiderius Erasmus, *Moriae encomium, id est stultitiae laus* (1511). *The Praise of Folly*, trans. Hoyt Hudson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951).

²⁰ *Desideri Erasmi Roterodami Colloquia* (1519). *The Colloquies of Erasmus*, 2 vols, trans. Nathan Bailey, ed. by Rev. E. Johnson (London: Reeves and Turner, 1878), I, 55.

²¹ A topical allusion that, as Axton and Happé suggest, might be encoded in one of the relics added by Heywood (i.e. the blessed jawbone of All-Hallows) could have been intended as a playful attack on All Hallows Church in Honey Lane, which, by 1528, had become a notorious pulpit for Lutheran ideas (Heywood, *The Plays of John Heywood*, ed. by Axton and Happé, p. 39): appropriately enough, the effect on

whoever touches the relic would be that ‘without dout, / All maner venym from hym shall issue forth’ (lines 157–58).

²² In this respect, I disagree with David Booker, who sustains that ‘Heywood’s pardoner is a criticism of Church practice and the papal position, not simple abuse by “false pardoners”’. David Booker, ‘Heywood’s Indulgent Pardoner’, *English Language Notes*, 29.2 (December 1991), 25.

²³ *The Pardoner and the Frere*, lines 97–102, 105–13 and 122–27.

²⁴ Geoffrey Chaucer, ‘Pardoner’s Prologue’, lines 335–40, 350–57 and 366–71. For these parallel quotations the 1526 edition of the *Canterbury Tales* (London: Rycharde Pynson) has been used. This edition is, presumably, the nearest in time to Heywood’s interlude. However, lines have been numbered according to the following edition: Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. by A. C. Cawley (London: Dent, 1992).

²⁵ On the subject, see *The Plays of John Heywood*, ed. by Axton and Happé, pp. 39–40.

²⁶ The *Canterbury Tales* were printed in 1476 and 1483 (by William Caxton), in 1492 (by Rycharde Pynson), in 1498 (by Wynkyn de Worde), in 1526 (by Rycharde Pynson) and in 1532 (by William Thynne).

²⁷ Chaucer’s Pardoner declares:

And telle an hundred false japes moore. [. . .]
 For myn entente is nat but for to wyne,
 And nothyng for correccioun of synne.
 I rekke nevere, whan that they been beryed,
 Though that hir soules goon a-blakeberyed! [. . .]
 For though myself be a ful vicious man, [. . .]

Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. Cawley, 'Pardoner's Prologue', lines 394, 403–6 and 459.

²⁸ See lines 89–91, 98–100, 268–69, 401 and 530.

²⁹ The same holds true if, as both Axton and Happé and Walker suggest, we accept a date of performance after 1529, when More himself succeeded Wolsey as Lord Chancellor (see Heywood, *Plays of John Heywood*, pp. 38–39, and Greg Walker, *The Politics of performance in Early Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 84.

³⁰ See Alfred L. Kellogg and Louis A. Haselmayer, 'Chaucer's Satire of the Pardoner', *PMLA* 66 (1951), 251–77 (p. 263). Curiously enough, Axton and Happé seem to connect the Pardoner's claim to royal protection not to the writ 'under hys brode seale' that he explicitly mentions, but to Henry VIII's presumably orthodox position on indulgences as *fidei defensor*, *Plays of John Heywood*, p. 40.

³¹ The letter is dated 26 January 1540, and was written by Sir William Eure, Lord Warden of the Scottish Border, to Thomas Cromwell. J. S. Brewer et al. (eds), *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII* (1540) (London: HMSO, 1862–1932), xv, p. 36.

³² G. A. Bergenroth et al. (eds), *Calendar of Letters, Dispatches and State Papers Relating to the Negotiations between England and Spain*, 13 vols (London: HMSO, 1862–1954), vi, p. 224.

³³ See William E. Lunt, *Financial Relations of the Papacy with England 1327-1534* (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1979), ii, pp. 609–10 and 620.

³⁴ See Baldassarre Castiglione, *Il libro del Cortegiano* (1528). *The Courtyer*, trans. Sir Thomas Hoby (London, 1561), p. 153.