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The Practice of PR and the Canterbury Pilgrims

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Jay Ruud and Stacey Jones,
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Abstract: In their article "The Practice of PR and the Canterbury Pilgrims" Jay Ruud and Stacey Jones argue that the concepts of relationship management discussed by public relations scholars can be applied to the study of literary characters, specifically here to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, *The Wife of Bath*, and *The Pardoner*. Essentially, what PR scholars call the expression of communal relationship values in the Wife's performance is rewarded, while behaviors like the Pardoner's that focus merely on a zero-sum win-lose relationship are punished. The Pardoner is competitive in all phases of his performance, and consistently demonstrates a win-lose mentality in his relationships both in his preaching and in his tale of sterile competition. The Wife's Prologue demonstrates her own competitive relationship with her husbands, but her tale emphasizes the value of communal relationship between the "hag" and her knight. While the Wife may in fact be deliberately manipu-lative and concerned with her own "winning," she is also concerned with benefiting her audience as well, and thereby demonstrates a "win-win" strategy.

Jay RUUD and Stacey JONES

The Practice of PR and the Canterbury Pilgrims

The discipline of "Public Relations" -- separate from the more general study of communications or the more established fields of marketing or journalism -- is relatively recently established as a field of university study in its own right. There is thus little precedent for the application of this discipline, concerned as it is with relationship management, to the study of other subject areas, but "relationship management" is in itself an interdisciplinary concept, incorporating communication, psychology, sociology, and business disciplines at the very least. Literature might seem at first to be an unusual area in which to apply the principles of public relations scholarship. But the interrelations of characters within a literary text are usually intended to reflect the "real" relationships of society. If pubic relations scholars examine how individuals in the "real" world relate to one another, what their goals are, and what their real motives are as they act in relation to one another, then the theoretical basis of this discipline is quite simply an excellent lens through which to look at "character" in a fictional text. This lens may also provide readers with another means by which to assess the authenticity of the characters a writer creates by applying the knowledge about human relationships that public relations research provides

Admittedly, of course, literary "characters" are not real people but textual creations. But there is an author behind the text who creates those characters, and if that author is perceptive in his/her observations of human relationships, then she/he will consciously make use of that knowledge in producing the text that creates those characters. And that knowledge is nothing more than the application of public relations principles to interpersonal relations. Thus while it may at first seem anachronistic to use public relations scholarship to discuss medieval literary creations, it is no more anachronistic than applying, for example, psychological notions to pre-modern literary texts. If psychology describes universal human traits, then it is equally valid in Shakespeare's time or in Kafka's. We contend, therefore, that the concepts of relationship management discussed by communications scholars, specifically those who teach public relations, can be fruitfully used to analyze some of Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims. Such concepts can be used, for instance, to explain why the verbal performances of the Wife of Bath and the Pardoner, so similar in the self-revelatory nature of their prologues and tales, have such different effects on their imagined pilgrim audience and, indeed, on modern readers as well. Such an approach, of course, unabashedly favors an old-fashioned "dramatic" interpretation of the pilgrims. This was the approach advocated initially early in the last century by George Lyman Kittredge, who famously stated that "the Pilgrims do not exist for the sake of the stories, but vice versa. Structurally regarded, the stories are merely long speeches expressing, directly or indirectly, the characters of the several persons" (Kittredge 154-55). The most comprehensive application of Kittredge's principle to the Canterbury pilgrims was that of R.M. Lumiansky, who wrote in his 1954 study *Of Sondry Folk: The Dramatic Principle in the Canterbury Tales* that "in attempting to interpret a particular Pilgrim's performance in the *Canterbury Tales*, a critic must first establish, to his own satisfaction at least, the traits that Chaucer intended us to associate with that Pilgrim, and the dramatic forces that govern not Chaucer as author but the Pilgrim as teller of the tale" (4).

This approach has since been called into question by a number of scholars, most notably by C. David Benson, who writes in his *Chaucer's Drama of Style* that "The intense, revealing association often assumed by followers of the dramatic theory is not very common and always difficult to prove" (11). But even a scholar like Benson, the most persuasive critic of the Kittredgean-Lumianskyan dramatic approach to the tales, would concur that the Wife of Bath and the Pardoner are beyond doubt constructed by Chaucer to invite a dramatic approach to their prologues and tales -- although he would emphasize that Chaucer's chief interest is more in the words the two speakers use than in their psychological makeup (Benson 44), and in effect it is their words, the text through which Chaucer imagines them creating themselves, that we are stressing in this article. Of course Chaucer would not himself have thought in terms of "public relations." He would have seen the question (of audience response to the Wife and the Pardoner) as a question of rhetoric, and the proper uses of rhetoric. The medieval attitude toward the practice of rhetoric had a

complex history dating back to Plato, who had lauded the use of logic while condemning rhetoric as a practice that might be used unscrupulously to lead an audience away from the truth -- an attitude rather similar to the notions that some contemporary critics might have about the modern practice of PR. But both Cicero (in *De oratore*) and Saint Augustine (in *De doctrina Christiana*) had defended rhetoric, although they emphasized its need to be allied with wisdom or truth (see Alford 110-11). The Pardoner makes it clear in his prologue that he uses rhetoric strictly in Plato's sense of the term. As for the Wife of Bath, few would regard her rhetorical strategy as one closely allied with the truth. But given the context of both the Pardoner's and the Wife's performances, it is safe to say that what they are seeking is not *truth* at all. Their concern is, instead, relationship. More than anything, their elaborate prologues are designed to establish relationships between themselves and their listeners. If we come to the Wife's and the Pardoner's Prologues and tales with an eye toward their methods of and motives for establishing these relationships, we enter the realm of what modern communications scholars call relationship management. We suggest that relationship management may be categorized as an "an enduring process" (Miller 135), a process that has been an aspect of organizations since people started organizing. That Chaucer was aware of this process, and able to observe and accurately portray it though he may not have called it by the same name, is evident in his depictions of the way the Wife of Bath and the Pardoner relate with the rest of the pilgrim group, and in the outcomes of those relationships.

Before we examine the success story of the Wife of Bath and the cautionary tale of the Pardoner, it seems necessary that we explicate more fully the connotations of relationship in the organization-public application of the term. Chaucer establishes for the *Canterbury Tales* a group of individuals, the pilgrims, who form an organization whose purpose is to provide inter-group entertainment by telling tales of "sentence and solaas" on the road to Canterbury. The Pilgrims also function as what public relations scholars would call "strategic publics" -- that is, groups or individuals "upon whom success or failure of the organization depends" (Cutlip 4). As the pilgrims are engaged in a contest for the most entertaining and most instructive tale on the journey to Canterbury, all the pilgrims are serving, in this model, as strategic publics for each other.

J.A. Ledingham and S.D. Bruning defined the organization-public relationship as "the state [that] exists between an organization and its key publics, in which the actions of either can impact the economic, social, cultural or political well being of the other" (62). We know that, as Chaucer represents them, each of the pilgrims' tales impacts the other pilgrims, both initially in the emotional reactions of the pilgrim audience (the tale's "public"), and subsequently, when pilgrims tell tales that respond to previous stories. For an illustration one need look no further than the Reeve's explosive reaction to the Miller's comic tale from the first fragment of the *Canterbury Tales*: "Stynt thy clappe! / Lat be thy lewed drunken harlotrye" (I 3144-45). The Reeve had been a carpenter in his youth, and, on hearing that the Miller intends to tell a tale about the cuckolding of a carpenter, he reacts vehemently as if personally affronted. His own response is a retaliatory tale of mean-spirited vengeance in which a fictional miller's wife and daughter are both ravished by a pair of students. Chaucer recognizes instinctively and puts into an imaginative context the organizational conditions studied by public relations scholars. Within these conditions he also examines the relationship management skills of various pilgrims. Relationship management is defined by Bruning and Ledingham as the process of combining communication messages and organizational behaviors to initiate, build, nurture and maintain mutually beneficial organization-public relationships (86). W.P. Ehling noted particularly that defining public relations as relationship management moves the practice away from "manipulation," the area with which many people most often negatively associate the concept (617-38), and R.L. Heath wrote that this view of the practice focuses on the "mutually beneficial relationships that an organization needs to enjoy a license to operate" (3).

The essence of the prevailing assessment of public relations is that strategic publics -- consumers, donors, taxpayers, regulatory bodies, employees, or in this case, pilgrims on the road to Canterbury -- develop relationships and keep relationships, thereby granting permission to operate to organizations (or in this case, the individual tellers of tales) that participate in relationships in which both parties benefit. Thus, in short, relationship management is about open communication that advances organization-public relationships. Both the Wife of Bath and the Pardoner ap-

pear to believe in open communication. They reveal a great deal more about themselves and their personal lives than any of the other pilgrims in their "confessional" prologues. Most readers, however, respond quite differently to the Wife's performance than to the Pardoner's. One immediate reason for this may be their relative honesty as demonstrated in what they do confess. Most immediately, it is clear that the two are not equally frank about their own sexuality. Alison, the Wife of Bath, is completely open about her sexual appetites: "Allas, allas! That evere love was synne! / I folwed ay myn inclinacioun / By vertu of my constellacioun: / That made me I koude noght withdrawe / My chambre of Venus from a good felawe" (III 614-18). The Pardoner, on the other hand, is never honest with the pilgrim public about his own sexuality. The pilgrim Chaucer suggests of the Pardoner in the *General Prologue* that "I trowe he were a geldynge or a mare" (I 691) -- that is, a eunuch or, possibly, a homosexual; yet the Pardoner seems to work hard disguising his nature, claiming during the Wife of Bath's own performance that "I was aboute to wedde a wyf," but that Alison's description of her treatment of her first three husbands has convinced him to give up the idea (III 166-69). Of course, it would be a very strange thing for the Pardoner to reveal either his castration or his sexual orientation to this group of strangers, but the contrast between his secrecy and the Wife's openness goes a long way in explaining the outcome of their relationships with their pilgrim public.

Derek Pearsall says that, while the Wife speaks "constantly of her thoughts and feelings," the Pardoner is "without soul, feeling, or inner being … a creature of naked will" (361). Thus, although scholars will point out the Wife's misuse of scripture and patristic authority and challenge her theological positions, and may even perhaps disapprove of her morals, most readers are like the students that Anne Kernan describes: "Having no particular disposition to celibacy, they [modern audiences of students] tend to respond positively to the Wife's position, and they greet her common-sense arguments … with delighted cheers. They laugh with her at the churchmen she debates, not at her, and I find it hard to believe that Chaucer's audience did otherwise" (15-16). The Pardoner, on the other hand, invites scorn and revulsion -- his greed, his hypocrisy, and his occupation of selling spiritual solace for mercantile gain, which requires what Pearsall calls "an atrophy of moral responsibility" (Pearsall 361), contrast sharply with the Wife's life-affirming focus on sexuality. We contend, like Kernan, that the pilgrim audience's reaction to the two performances in Chaucer's text parallels modern readers' reactions. The Pardoner's performance ends in personal embarrassment after a crushing insult from the Host, in which he tells the Pardoner "I wolde I hadde thy coillons in myn hond / In stide of relikes or of seintuarie. / Lat kutte hem of, I wol thee helpe hem carie; / They shul be shryned in an hogges toord!" (VI 952-55). The Wife, on the other hand, introduces the topic of marriage, to which the Clerk reacts as to a challenge to debate. In contrast to Harry Bailey's response to the Pardoner, threatening castration and the enshrinement of his testicles in a hog's turd, the Clerk's Tale does not attack the Wife personally, only her view of marriage, and his "envoy" pays her a kind of ironic and good-humored compliment (advising wives, for their own safety, to emulate the Wife of Bath rather than his own tale's patient Griselde), while at the same time it challenges the Wife's assumptions. And later the Merchant picks up on the Wife's themes, and even has one of the characters in his story cite the Wife as an authority. Considering her continued affect on the pilgrim public, it is safe to say that the Wife's skills at relationship management far exceed those of the Pardoner.

In this we have gone beyond the simple definition and have begun to consider the desired outcomes of relationship management: characteristics manifested in the successful relationship. Scholars have identified several aspects of relationships, including community involvement, "face" and favor, commitment, trust, satisfaction and "control mutuality" -- i.e., how the parties agree on who controls what in the relationship. Most important for our examination of the Wife of Bath and the Pardoner, however, are what public relations scholars would call the extremes on the exchange-communal continuum. These terms refer to the level at which the parties in the relationship are concerned, at one extreme, only with getting their own needs met, or, at the other, with the welfare of the other party. The exchange relationship has specific qualities that differentiate it from the communal one. M.S. Clark and J. Mills defined exchange relationships as those in which one party gives benefits to the other only because he or she expects to receive in return benefits of similar or greater value. For example, a shopper exchanges money in a store for the exact val-

ue of the groceries she will take home with her, not because she has any concern specifically for the continued well-being of the store. In the tales of the Wife of Bath and the Pardoner, although their performances are quite similar in many ways, their words seem to place them at opposite ends of this exchange-communal continuum. This is particularly clear when the two of them declare, in their prologues, their principle intents: "For myn entente nys but for to pleye," says the Wife (III 192), while the Pardoner asserts (in an echo of her line), "For myn entente is nat but for to wynne" (VI 403).

J.E. Grunig writes that an exchange relationship is one in which "one party gives benefits to the other only because the other has provided benefits in the past or is expected to do so in the future" (1). This type of relationship bears the features of obligation, as well as debts and favor, and is typical in basic marketing relationships in which the end goal is the value-for-value exchange. Grunig asserts that exchange relationships–while being common for most beginning organization-public relationships and not representing a foregone negative for its participants–should not be the end goal of public relations activities, because of the tit-for-tat nature of the experience. This is a feature of a short-term relationship with an immediate benefit or goal. But L. Hon and Grunig also assert that publics expect organizations to provide some benefits to their strategic publics without corresponding debt or obligation on the part of those publics. Thus communal relationships involve more than a *quid pro quo* exchange. Clark and Mills contrast this type of relationship with exchange relationships by asserting that one party in communal situations provides benefits to satisfy the needs of the other party or to show care and consideration for the other participant in the relationship. They assert that "In communal relationships, the receipt of a benefit does not change the recipient's obligation to respond to the other's needs. It does not create a specific debt or obligation to return a comparable benefit, as it does in an exchange relationship" (684). They further note that the distinction between the two is a "useful tool" in considering measurable results of relationships (Clark and Mills, "The Difference Between Communal and Exchange Relationships" 690).

Echoing this definition, Hon and Grunig assert that a communal relationship is one in which "both parties provide benefits to the other because they are concerned for the welfare of the other–even when they get nothing in return" (21). Essentially the goal of relationship management (the relational approach) is a communal relationship: that is, one that produces relationship outcomes of control mutuality, trust, satisfaction and commitment because of organizational behaviors that demonstrate to strategic publics that the organization is responsive to them and their needs over time, and that each of the parties is in a two-way, "symmetrical" or evenly considerate relationship with the other. Organizations that develop communal relationships benefit by encountering more support from strategic publics for organizational goals than other organizations are able to achieve. Fewer adversarial tactics (complaints, lawsuits, boycotts) are utilized against organizations that have achieved communal relationships because negotiation can occur organically as issues emerge, reducing the need for third-party adjudication, assessment or judgment.

As K. Miller explains, conflict resolution styles also play a role in the exchange-communal continuum. If the conflict style is competitive, the person or organization demonstrates, as stated above, a high concern for self and a low concern for others. If the style is collaborative, it might be said to manifest high concern for self as well as high concern for others. The former is a "zero-sum" orientation in which someone wins only if someone else loses (this sort of relationship might be illustrated in the *Canterbury Tales* by the Miller-Reeve exchange cited earlier). The latter is "win-win" (both parties come out ahead of where they started). How, then, might we view the performances of the two Canterbury pilgrims who from the beginning are the most concerned with establishing a relationship with the audience of pilgrims who form both their organization and their strategic public? Both the Wife and the Pardoner put a great deal of effort into "connecting" with the other pilgrims through elaborate prologues that precede their tales. On the basis of these prologues alone, it appears that both the Pardoner and the Wife are chiefly interested in the classic exchange relationship, and display a competitive conflict style, in their everyday lives, seeking to "win" only through another's "loss." That being the case, why do they ultimately emerge with such strikingly different relationships with the group of pilgrims, their strategic public? Finally, it will be

seen, it is the contrasting orientation to relationship management displayed in their tales that affects that public's responses to them.

The Wife of Bath's Prologue, framed as a kind of academic argument utilizing the authority of the scriptures and the experience of the Wife's own five marriages, presents marriage as a highly competitive, zero-sum contest in which the Wife has succeeded in establishing her "sovereignty" over her series of husbands: her first three she defeated by long harangues, bullying, nagging, and ultimately by establishing a pure exchange of items of equal or similar value with them: if they would give her sovereignty over their lands and goods, she would allow them use of her "belle chose" -- tit for tat. Her more difficult fourth husband presents a different case. He seems to have wanted nothing at all out of the relationship -- he took a mistress and seems to ignore Alison completely. She says she made him a cross of the same wood (tit for tat again?), but then denies that she ever actually took a lover, admitting only to a desire to make husband number four jealous -- an attempt that was apparently a failure, since she seems to have spent a good deal of her fourth marriage on pilgrimages to places like Jerusalem, without any interference from her husband. Ultimately it seems that both she and her husband gave up on the relationship -- neither got what they were looking for in the zero-sum contest, so they opted out of the marriage (a "lose-lose" rather than a "win-win"). And Alison, looking for a relationship that might give her more in the exchange, seems to have had jolly Jankyn the clerk waiting in the wings.

The fifth marriage, to the clerk Jankyn, soon became a battleground as each partner in the exchange viewed it as a zero-sum contest: if one of them won, the other had to lose. Jankyn, making his bid for sovereignty in the marriage, read to Alison nightly from his "Book of Wicked Wives," an authority through which he expected to put Alison in her place. But Alison ultimately seized control by ripping the leaves out of Jankyn's book and throwing them in the fire. When Jankyn knocked her down and then feared he had killed her, she was able to use his guilt to wrest sovereignty from him in exchange for her forgiveness: "But atte laste, with muchel care and wo, / We fille acorded by us selven two. / He yaf me al the bridel in myn hond, / To han the governance of hous and lond, / And of his tonge, and of his hond also" (III 811-15). This takes the form of another kind of tit-for-tat trade, but one that clearly leaves her as victor in the highly competitive game she has been playing. For good measure, she makes him burn his book.

The Pardoner demonstrates similar concerns in his Prologue: as James Rhodes observes, the Pardoner actually imitates the style of the Wife, by admitting openly to the worst of what the pilgrim audience suspects is true, and he exploits whatever advantage this honesty or jocose boasting yields. Like the Wife of Bath, the Pardoner courts the pilgrims by inviting them to identify with his life of adventure and to admire him for his individuality and superiority, his scorn for conventional morality, and his contempt for established authority (see Rhodes 43). Robert Boenig also calls the Pardoner's Prologue imitative of the Wife's -- in fact, for Boenig, it is a deliberate parody of the Wife's, and therefore not autobiographical at all; thus the Pardoner's performance is simply misunderstood by the Host. One could certainly agree that Chaucer in some ways parodies the Wife's prologue in the Pardoner's, but to claim that the Pardoner himself does so is to give him a will and raise the question of motivation, and it is difficult to see what the Pardoner's motivation would be for such an attack on the Wife. Like the Wife with her sexuality, he sees preaching as a pure exchange relationship with whatever congregation of parishioners he happens to be preaching to. In exchange for a quality sermon -- one that, he asserts, will very likely have the desired effect of turning them from the sin of avarice -- the parishioners will kiss his relics and pay him money for the indulgences he is selling. Profit is to him what sovereignty is for the Wife -- the chief desired object they want to receive in the exchange relationship. But money comes in finite amounts that cannot be shared among competing parties. This is in contrast to sovereignty in the Wife's marriage, which (as she tacitly recognizes at the end of her tale) can be shared without decreasing the portion for either participant (a "win-win"): "His herte bathed in a bath of blisse. / A thousand tyme a-rewe he gan hire kisse, / And she obeyed hym in every thing / That myghte doon hym plesance or liking" (III 1253-56).

Apparently, like Alison with her husbands, the Pardoner sees his relationship with his congregations as a zero-sum game, one which the parishioners must be made to lose if he is to be the winner: he knows that his relics are fake, and (since his motive is pure greed) it seems relatively

certain that the indulgences themselves are also bogus -- or, at any rate, that he has no real belief in their efficacy, if one takes him at his word when he says at the end of his performance that the blessing of Jesus Christ is a soul's best insurance. William Kamowski has suggested that, in effect, skepticism about relics in general was widespread in the fourteenth century, but that people generally played along with the idea as part of the pilgrimage experience. The Pardoner is simply being honest when he implies to the pilgrims "We've all seen fake relics before. So, if you perform some posturing with other counterfeits in the process of obtaining the genuine indulgence of pilgrimage, why not with mine? They are no different except that I'm willing to admit about them what we all now about many relics" (Kamowski 5). Ultimately, it is his honesty that is his downfall, since he brings up "an uncomfortable point about skepticism and belief that was best left unsaid" (Kamowski 5). But even if this is the case, only the Pardoner stands to gain anything in the exchange: the "pardon" coming from the Pardoner, in exchange for the pilgrims' cash contribution, is as ineffective as the relics themselves. In any case, he has no concern for the spiritual welfare of the congregations he meets, declaring that their souls may go blackberrying for all he cares. The Pardoner's relationship goal is the worst kind of exchange relationship, that in which one party gets nothing at all from the transaction.

But the relationships between the Wife and Pardoner and their pilgrim public do not end with their prologues. In contrast to the prologues, the two speakers display completely different concerns for relationship management in their respective tales. *The Wife of Bath's Tale* depicts a young knight who is convicted of rape and condemned to death by King Arthur, but who is spared by the Queen provided he can discover the answer to the question "What do women want most." He searches for the answer over the course of a year, until an old hag tells him she will help him if he grants her wish. She gives him the answer the Queen wants to hear -- women want sovereignty in marriage -- and in exchange demands that the knight marry her. Although he is disgusted by her, the knight must keep his word and go through with the marriage. On their wedding night, however, the "loathly lady" -- after lecturing the knight about the wisdom of age and the nature of true nobility -- gives him an impossible choice: the knight may have his wife either ugly and faithful or beautiful and (perhaps) unfaithful. When he leaves the matter to her, he demonstrates that he has recognized her sovereignty and she agrees to be both beautiful and faithful. Thus the Wife's tale has an end message of a communal relationship, both literally, with the marriage of the knight and the hag, and according to the parameters of public relations scholars. The knight enters the agreement upon an exchange basis in which both parties agree on what they are exchanging: he marries the hag in exchange for the information she has that will keep him alive, *quid pro quo*: "'Plight me thy trouthe heere in myn hand,' quod she, / 'The nexte thyng that I requere thee, / Thou shalt it do, if it lye in thy myght, / And I wol telle it yow er it be nyght.' 'Have heer my trouthe,' quod the knyght, 'I grante'" (III 1009-13).

In the end, when the hag gives him the choice of whether she shall be beautiful or the "loathly lady," he tells her that she should decide -- acknowledging the sovereignty of which she spoke -- which could be construed as a communal gesture, an effort to see to her welfare before his own. This is returned by the lady in a gesture that is considerate of her groom: she becomes beautiful and faithful. And further, she yields back the absolute sovereignty she has been granted, "And she obeyed hym in every thing / That myghte doon hym pleasance or liking" (III 1255-56). The two parties demonstrate concern for one another, and both parties benefit from having the relationship with the other -- the classic "win-win." The Pardoner's tale, however, is strikingly competitive, like his Prologue. Each player in the tale feels that only if another loses, does he win**,** and since there is a finite sum of treasure, each player can get more only if another gets less. The Pardoner's tale is essentially an exemplum intended to illustrate the theme of his sermon, *radix malorum est cupiditas* ("the root of evil is cupidity," or greed). The three revelers of the story have lost a comrade to Death, and their first reaction is to avenge that loss by killing Death itself -- a zero-sum competition if there ever was one. But they start off on this quest with an act of what appears to be control mutuality: they swear an oath of brotherhood, binding them to one another, and in this way they agree on the level of control each is to have in their future relationships with each other: "Togidres han thise thre hir trouthes plight / To lyve and dyen ech of hem for oothor, / As though he were his owene ybore brother" (VI 702-04). Their first act, however, is to abuse an old man

that they meet in their search for Death. With an implacably competitive view, they assume that if the old man is not with them, he must be against them, in league with Death itself, so they lay hands on him, demanding he reveal the whereabouts of Death. The old man responds with an answer to their demands: "if that yow be so leef / To fynde Deeth, turne up this croked wey, / For in that grove I lafte hym, by my fey, / Under a tree, and there he wole abyde" (VI 760-63). The three rioters follow his directions down the crooked path, where they find a stash of gold under an oak tree, and from that point they search no more for death.

The brotherhood based on mutual control, however, immediately breaks apart when the incentive of the gold appears. The youngest reveler, sent to town to bring back bread and wine while the others guard the gold, poisons the wine so that he can have the gold for himself. The other two revelers, meanwhile, plot the murder of the young man when he returns. The brotherhood turns into a zero-sum relationship -- a game which, ultimately, nobody wins, as the young man is murdered and the other two revelers drink the wine in celebration but succumb to the poison ("lose-lose"): "Thus ended been thise homicydes two, / And eek the false empoysonere also" (VI 893-94). His audience is strongly affected by the tale, and the Pardoner concludes his performance with a condemnation of greed and numerous other "tavern sins," after which he invites the Host to kiss his relics and receive the Pardoner's blessing, in exchange for a small fee. Like the revelers of his tale, the Pardoner, having entered into a cooperative relationship with the other pilgrims, switches into "zero-sum" mode when he smells the possibility of monetary gain. But the Host vehemently rejects the Pardoner's offer: after all, the Pardoner has already told the pilgrims that all of his relics are fake, and the Host, whose own motivations in the story-telling contest go beyond control mutuality to his own personal gain when the pilgrims all meet back at the Tabard Inn for a celebratory dinner, is not about to lose this exchange with the Pardoner. The Host's insult -- that he'd like to enshrine the Pardoner's testicles in a hog's turd and make a relic out of them -- effectively closes the debate, and beats the Pardoner at his own competitive game. Although the Knight steps in and persuades the two Pilgrims to kiss and make up, the reconciliation is merely a symbolic act to restore the appearance of community. It does not truly reconcile the Pardoner to the group -- he has effectively been ostracized, and he never speaks again throughout the remainder of the pilgrimage.

The pilgrim responses to the Wife and the Pardoner seem to demonstrate what Public Relations scholars are asserting: that the expression of communal relationship values is rewarded with continued mutually beneficial relationships -- and that behaviors that focus merely on the exchange are punished with negative relationship behaviors. Viewed through this lens, the tales of the Wife and of the Pardoner demonstrate what we suggest might be a fundamental expectation of a strategic public: that the behavior of an organization (or in this case an individual) supports the prioritization of a communal (rather than exchange) relationship. The Pardoner has shown himself to be in all ways a competitive player: his prologue demonstrates his win-lose mentality with people who come to him vulnerable, seeking heaven's forgiveness and God's solace. Even with those who are spiritually naked before him -- the parishioners who come to him relying on his relics and indulgences for solace and redemption -- he engages in a competition, and then finds a way to win at it. At the same time, the Wife, whose Prologue indicates her own competitive stance with husbands, tells a tale that palpably demonstrates the value of the communal relationship, with a partnership of "hag" and knight that clearly shows a balance in the control-mutuality column, in which both parties care for the welfare of the other, possibly even at great cost to themselves. If Alison were by nature so completely competitive, so intensely focused on "winning" over her husbands, could she tell a tale so demonstrative of a mutually beneficial relationship?

It is possible that the Wife is manipulating the audience (what Plato worried rhetoricians would do, and what Ehling tells public relations practitioners to steer away from) with her communal tale for the express purpose of "winning" -- either winning the "Harry Bailey Prize" for storytelling or, more likely, winning husband number six from among the preponderantly male audience of pilgrim listeners. But at the same time, relationship management seeks the mutually beneficial relationship. The Wife will win if her strategic public finds her tale the most enjoyable. Clearly they find it more enjoyable than they found the Pardoner's, at least in the end. Hers is a "win-win" strategy, and she ultimately creates a better relationship with her strategic public than does the Pardoner

with his zero-sum competitive approach. The Pardoner's ultimate silence, even after that symbolic kiss aimed at mending his broken relationship with the Host, the chief representative of his pilgrim strategic public, demonstrates his isolation from the rest of the pilgrims. His zero-sum strategy has ended, finally, with his own defeat.

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