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“Don’t Excommunicate the Messenger”:  
Humor, Authorial Responsibility, and Religious Commentary in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Tales of Canterbury* and Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quijote de La Mancha*

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## *Introduction*

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In Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Tales of Canterbury* and Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quijote de La Mancha*, both authors consider the religious zeitgeists of their respective historical moments and deliver social commentaries regarding the religious state of affairs. Both texts are known as humorous, classic works that have transcended barriers of time: they are currently some of the most widely-read medieval texts, and each one is considered a staple of its culture's literary canon. This thesis will explore the role of humor within each of these works, and will study the impact of each author's employment of humor on the resulting religious social commentary that he delivers. In order to investigate the results of humor, we must first comprehend each author's purpose in writing a comical piece. Are the authors using humor to create a sense of irony and thus criticize the current social order? Are they utilizing humor as a cover for their criticisms because they know that straying from social norms might have repercussions for them? By incorporating the historical contexts of each of these texts, as well as various theories of humor, this thesis discusses Chaucer's and Cervantes' tactics in using humor as a tool for delivering religious social commentary.

Both Chaucer and Cervantes play with the concept of authorial responsibility, which is the idea that the author will be held accountable for whatever content makes its way into his works. The authors each create fictional secondary authors or narrators to perform what I will call "meta-literary" humor. Meta-literary humor is the practice of breaking the fourth wall and inserting the author as an actual character in the story. Both writers do this at various points in their texts, and they do so to toy with authorial responsibility: if the author is actually a character in the story, and these secondary authors or narrators are given ownership of the content of the story, then the author himself effectively retains less accountability over that content.

However, Chaucer and Cervantes use this reduced accountability for different purposes, and their resulting social commentaries reflect this distinction. In the General Prologue of *The Tales of Canterbury*, Chaucer himself is the primary narrator. So, when he criticizes the church, he cannot be particularly overt in his criticism because at this point, he has considerable authorial responsibility. In the General Prologue, Chaucer uses puns and double entendres to create a sense of ambiguity around his criticisms, which removes authorial responsibility from himself, and thus allows him to make jokes that are considered scandalous while still maintaining plausible deniability. But, after the General Prologue, Chaucer uses secondary narrators (other pilgrims) as a way to be more openly critical, creating more social tension surrounding the church.

I argue that the purpose of the comical spat between the friar and the summoner, along with their respective tales, is twofold. First, by employing secondary narrators, and specifically secondary narrators who are members of the clergy, Chaucer is able to make more explicit critiques of the church while claiming the role of the simple “messenger” because he is supposedly not the one telling these stories; they are evidently being told by official church figures. This allows Chaucer to amplify the sense of tension around the religious institution that he created in the General Prologue because he does not have as much authorial responsibility over the second narrators’ tales, so he does not need to be as evasive with his word choice. Second, Chaucer intentionally pits these two church figures against each other, and creates a harsh dialogue between them, which magnifies the tension surrounding the church even further. By packaging the two stories together as a unit, Chaucer sets the two narrators in opposition with each other, thus intensifying the situation. Overall, Chaucer uses meta-literary humor to critique the church and create social tension around its corruption.

On the other hand, Cervantes uses a fictional second author, Cide Hamete Benengeli, as a symbol to emphasize the harm of pitting Christians against Muslims, thus reducing the social tension between the two groups. Cervantes originally denigrates Benengeli and claims that he is a poor historian, but later goes back on that accusation, and even goes so far as to poke fun at himself by suggesting that perhaps *he* (Cervantes) is the poor historian. This changing attitude towards Benengeli demonstrates the necessity for reevaluating prejudiced preconceptions of Muslims, which effectively reduces the tension between the two religious groups. Cervantes plays with authorial responsibility as a way to place himself and the fictional Arab author on the same playing field. Cervantes also employs secondary narrators in addition to Benengeli, such as the Captive Captain. By utilizing secondary authors and narrators, Cervantes can more freely address the building tension between Christians and Muslims of the historical moment, and eventually, he denounces that tension. Whereas Chaucer uses secondary narrators to increase tension surrounding the church, Cervantes uses secondary authors and narrators to reduce tension between two religious groups.

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### ***Humor Theory and Social Implications of Humor***

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When investigating authors' motivations for using humor, it is helpful to understand the accepted theories behind why people use humor in general. In Chapter 1 of John Morreall's book, *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor* (2009), Morreall outlines three central theories of humor. The first theory, called "Superiority Theory," suggests that laughter is an anti-social concept because it necessitates the mockery or belittlement of others. Superiority theory views laughter as hostile, because laughing brings pleasure for the individual, but implies malice towards those being laughed at. Some proponents of the theory argue that individualism and natural competition are driving factors in laughter: pointing out the flaws of others and

intentionally humiliating people maintains the status of the person laughing, and thus comedy is an inherent creator of hierarchy.

Typically, satirical humor tends to fall under this category, because it is defined by having a target. According to Ian Higgins, who wrote an entry on satire for the *Continuum Encyclopedia of British Literature*, “The satiric composition... attempts to shame its subject. A work of wit, satire employs such resources as irony and invective, diminution and derision, innuendo and allusion, parody and pastiche in order to expose malpractice and corruption, folly and vice” (Higgins). This means that in order for a work to be considered satire, there needs to be a *critical purpose* to the piece. Higgins also writes that “Some of the funniest works [] are satires, but humor in true satire is a means to the satirist’s end, not the end itself” (Higgins). Higgins views humor as a *tool* of satire, but the two are not one and the same because satire does not necessitate humor: rather, it requires a subject worthy of criticism.

In his book *Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature* (1956), John Peter explains the differences between satire and another form of critical literary works: complaint. According to Peter, “complaint” is much less personal than “satire” because it typically expresses the *beliefs* or tenets of an author as opposed to the *personality* of that author. When comparing Chaucer (whom Peter believes is a satirist) to Langland (a contemporary of Chaucer whom Peter believes is an author of complaint), Peter writes, “while Chaucer’s verse reflects his personality, leaving his beliefs comparatively shadowy, Langland’s verse reflects his beliefs, leaving his personality to be guessed at” (9). Peter also explains that while satire tends to be scornful, “often reflecting only a token desire for reform” (10), complaint is typically more corrective in nature. This distinction also speaks to the reader’s role in the texts: whereas readers of satire enjoy when the author pokes fun, readers of complaint may feel personally targeted. Peter writes, “In reading

satires our reaction is one of pure ‘enjoyment’: we appreciate the satirist’s virtuosity and the trimming of the butts he chooses. In reading complains we are ourselves trimmed, for the simple reason that all men are” (10). By contrasting complaint and satire, Peter expresses that satire creates an “intimacy” between the author and the reader because the reader is so interested in the author’s personal attitudes towards the people or things he writes about (8). Peter’s distinction between complaint and satire emphasizes that Chaucer’s ambiguity surrounding his own beliefs is a key component of his satire. This plays into the concept of authorial responsibility because it relates to Chaucer’s inclusion of his own personality into his work, and to the meta-literary practice of writing himself in as an actual character and pilgrim. Cervantes employs similar tactics by “breaking the fourth wall” at various points in both volumes I and II of *Don Quixote*, so it is important to note the presence of each of these authors within their own texts as a component that contributes to their satirical appeal to the audience as opposed to a condescending complaint. While both satire and complaint would fall under the category of Superiority Theory, as they both require a social target, satire lends itself to humor more easily than complaint does because complaint tends to target readers as much as societal problems, whereas satire may focus more on more general issues.

Cervantes expresses that humor must be appropriate and subtle, which frames his satire as pointedly witty, but only detectable with close attention. Anthony Close writes in his book *Cervantes and the Comic Mind of His Age*, “*burlas* (practical jokes, clever deceptions, ludicrous mishaps) ... require wit for their execution... in principle, Cervantes intends that they should be restrained by discretion and taste” (Close, 17). Close argues that the basic values of Cervantine comedy and satire are “*propiedad* and *descreción*”<sup>1</sup> (17), expressing that Cervantes’ jokes or

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<sup>1</sup> “appropriateness and discretion” (my own translation)

criticisms are not necessarily overt: part of the humor is the keen eye that is necessary to analyze it. So, in comparison to Chaucer, Cervantes' satire tends to be even less outright, leaving readers guessing about his actual beliefs. However, Cervantes does create meta-literary moments by inserting himself as a character in the story, allowing the reader to develop more of an understanding of his personality. By Peter's definition, this action establishes him as more of a satirist than an author of complaint. This thesis will examine the relationship between Cervantes' subtlety and his authorial responsibility in order to explore his depiction of tensions between Christian and Muslim characters.

The second theory outlined in Morreall's chapter is "Incongruity Theory," which is currently the most widely-accepted theory of laughter in both philosophy and empirical psychology (Morreall, 12). The theory suggests that we laugh because two or more inconsistent things are placed together, and thus violate our expectations or perceived norms. Morreall writes that "Amusement is being struck by the mismatch between a concept and a perception of the same thing, and enjoying the mental jolt that gives us," (12), expressing that humor is fundamentally similar to confusion or puzzlement. Various proponents of Incongruity Theory express that a joke's punch line is funny because it's not what the audience expected, so the contradiction and the abandonment of schema cause amusement.

The third and final theory is "Relief Theory," which expresses that humor is a way to relieve tension in the body. This theory originated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the commonly held belief was that the nervous system was made up of liquids passing through the body, and when those liquids would build up pressure, laughter would be the natural "release valve" reaction. Since then, Relief Theory has taken on the more modern perspective that laughter is "simply a way of discharging nervous energy [that was] found to be unnecessary" (17). In this sense, the

Relief Theory can be seen as somewhat similar to the Incongruity Theory, because it implies that there is a tense situation that requires a tense emotional reaction, but then that tension is found to be unnecessary due to a sudden twist (or incongruity) that relieves the stress.

For the purposes of this thesis, I will examine the intersections between Relief Theory and Incongruity Theory in order to understand how and why authors choose to amplify or relieve social tension. Morreall expresses that some philosophers have interpreted the Relief Theory as a relief of tension that is not associated with the body. He writes, “Over the next two centuries, as the nervous system came to be better understood, thinkers such as Herbert Spencer and Sigmund Freud revised the biology behind the Relief Theory but kept the idea that laughter relieves pent-up nervous energy” (Morreall, Winter 2016 edition), with the most well-recognized theory being Freud’s.

In his book *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*<sup>2</sup> (1905), Freud explores the function of laughter as a response to an inappropriate situation, which is somewhat similar to the Incongruity Theory. Freud argued that “laughter releases energy that was summoned for a psychological task, but then became unnecessary when that task was abandoned... the humor stimulus must be a ‘descending incongruity,’ shifting us from thinking about something important to thinking about something unimportant. If the incongruity were the other way, we wouldn’t laugh” (Morreall, 17-18, 20). This depicts laughter as a situational relief that depends on external stimuli, as opposed to the classic Relief Theory which defines laughter as a bodily relief. This interpretation is useful because it frames the Relief Theory as separate from bodily tension, and the recognition of external stimuli can be used as a jumping-off point for interpersonal social

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<sup>2</sup> Due to restrictions to library access caused by covid-19, I was unable to gain direct access to this book. Morreall discusses the main points of Freud’s argument, so I will be analyzing Morreall’s reading of Freud’s text. Freud’s text can still be found in the Works Cited.

stimuli. Effectively, Freud combines aspects of the Relief Theory, the Incongruity Theory, and the Superiority Theory because he argues that humor 1) is a relief of unnecessary pent-up energy, 2) necessitates an incongruous situation to establish that pent-up energy, and 3) requires an external stimulus to produce that incongruous situation. Because this thesis will investigate the interpersonal (mocking across social groups) and intrapersonal (authors making fun of themselves) aspects of laughter, Morreall's and Freud's theorizations of humor are essential to understanding the ways in which authors may create that humor.

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### *The Canterbury Tales*

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#### ***Historical Context***

*The Canterbury Tales* were written in late 14<sup>th</sup>-century England, between 1387 and 1400. At this point in time, new religious ideologies were on the rise, many of which criticized the prescriptive nature of the church in its interpretation of biblical passages, and the corruption of its figures. One important event that contributed to the dissemination of these ideologies was the translation of the Vulgate version of the Bible (written in Latin) into English, which was completed in 1382 by John Wycliffe. Wycliffe was a leader of the "Lollard" movement, which expressed that "every layman could engage with the one resource upon which his or her faith ought to be grounded" (McCormack, 36), and thus promoted the idea that ordinary people should be able to access the word of the Bible and interpret it themselves, as opposed to simply accepting the prescribed meaning that the Church determined.

Central components of Lollardy included the support of vernacular scripture and the repudiation of transubstantiation. Because so much of the church's power derived from the fact that church members were some of the only people who could understand the Latin Bible and thus only the church could speak to the Bible's meaning, Wycliffe's action of translating the

Bible into vernacular scripture attempted to delegitimize the church by asserting that the Bible was the “only valid source of doctrine and the only pertinent measure of legitimacy” (Hudson, 280). Wycliffe also argued that the act of transubstantiation – the doctrine of the Eucharist which states that “the bread and wine of Communion are changed by God on their elevation by the priest into the actual body and blood of Christ” (Wagner & Walters Schmid) – was not actually occurring, but rather that the bread and wine are only *representations* of the body of Christ. According to Frances McCormack, “questioning of papal authority, the challenge to ecclesiastical hierarchy and the condemnation of religious orders as superfluous to the operation of the Church were fuel enough, but the denial of the doctrine of transubstantiation was a step too far” (35), meaning that the church condemned Wycliffe’s claims, and eventually, all of his propositions were judged to be either erroneous or heretical by the Blackfriars Council in 1382 (Arnold-Baker).

According to *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, the Wycliffite English Bible was “widely distributed throughout England and equally widely condemned by the ecclesiastical establishment” (Caie, 25), meaning that the church deemed the interpretation of biblical texts by common folk extremely inappropriate, and the institution feared the possibilities of resistance as a result of such enfranchisement. Anne Hudson concurs with Caie in her book *The Premature Reformation*, stating that the Wycliffite translation of the Bible was a popular text, but higher-ups in the church were adamantly against its distribution. She writes,

“Of the rendering of the bible known as the Wycliffite translation over two hundred and fifty manuscripts survive. This is a larger number of copies than is known for any other medieval English text; the nearest rival is the 117 copies of the *Prick of Conscience*. . . of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* [ ] 64 copies are known. But in the making of such a comparison it should be remembered that within twenty years at most of its making, more probably within ten years, possession of copies of the Wycliffite bible was forbidden by [Archbishop Thomas] Arundel’s *Constitutions*.” (Hudson, 231).

Despite the fact that possession of Wycliffite bibles was eventually outlawed, it is still the medieval English text with the most surviving copies, suggesting that at the time, it was widely distributed and read. For the purpose of this thesis, this information is relevant for various reasons. First, the fact that this bible was vastly read contextualizes Chaucer's critique of the church, and shows that at the time that Chaucer was writing, a movement of having pure and direct access to the word of the bible was on the rise. Second, the censorship on the part of Archbishop Arundel and the ecclesiastical establishment provides background surrounding what topics were and were not considered acceptable at the time. The Wycliffite bible was clearly an irrefutably religious document that challenged the traditions of the church, giving the church more reason to ban it than they might have for other leisure-reading texts like *The Canterbury Tales*. But, the religious suppression does provide more context as to why Chaucer may have been more elusive regarding his word choice when critiquing the institution.

Finally, it is notable that Archbishop Thomas Arundel was a central figure in the anti-Lollardy movement. He was the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1396, and then again from 1399 until his death (Chambers Biographical Dictionary). As we may recall, *The Canterbury Tales* were written during this period, finishing in 1400. The pilgrims in the tales are said to be traveling to Canterbury to honor "the hooly blisful martir," (Chaucer, General Prologue, 17) glossed by Robert Pratt, the editor, as "Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, was murdered in 1170 and canonized three years later. The scene of his martyrdom was the object of many pilgrimages for centuries" (1n17). Becket was a purist when it came to religious interpretation, and his virtue is remarkable when juxtaposed with the later corruption that informs Chaucer's church criticisms. According to the Chambers Biographical Dictionary, Becket was "a rigid ascetic, showed his liberality only in charities, and became a zealous servant

of the Church. He soon championed its rights against the king,” and so “the people [ ] regarded him as a shield from the oppressions of the nobility” (Chambers Biographical Dictionary). It is clear that Thomas à Becket’s anti-corruption values align with Chaucer’s, whereas Thomas Arundel clearly did not want the general public to have direct access to the word of the bible for fear that it would draw attention to the church’s exploitation under the guise of indulgences. Even though Thomas Arundel was the Archbishop of Canterbury during the time that *The Canterbury Tales* were written, Thomas à Becket was the one that Chaucer and all of the pilgrims were paying homage to. Asserting that the pilgrimage was a direct rejection of Arundel’s ideologies would be a stretch because, as Pratt notes, honoring Becket’s martyrdom was popular for centuries, not just during this time. However, Chaucer’s decision to highlight Becket’s values appears to be an intentional distancing from Arundel’s ideals.

Considering that Chaucer was an educated scholar who was familiar with many people who ran in Wycliffe’s circles, that one of Wycliffe’s closest collaborators, John of Gaunt, was actually Chaucer’s brother-in-law (Caie, 25), and that Chaucer held “acquaintance with several ‘Lollard Knights,’ such as Sir John Clifford” (Ackerman, 22), Chaucer’s familiarity with Wycliffe’s work is apparent. In Robert Ackerman’s essay *Chaucer, the Church, and Religion*, Ackerman further explores Chaucer’s religious views and suggests that Chaucer may have been intentionally vague or private about his own ideologies. Ackerman writes,

“the view of Chaucer as a man well within the bounds of orthodoxy gained wide acceptance, as stated by Kittredge and others. Struck by the poet’s air of free inquiry and his occasional irreverence, a few critics, like Tatlock, tended to claim Chaucer as a religious skeptic or as perhaps a ‘Laodicean,’ that is, one given to lightly-held opinions. Such possibilities have been explored and mainly dismissed by Mary Edith Thomas, Loomis, and Wagenknecht... however, no satisfactory evidence as to personal views may be found in the body of life-records compiled by Crow and Olson... Whatever is set down in the writings is competent testimony to Chaucer’s awareness of, sensitivity to, and sometimes delight in religious views, controversies, and superstitions of his day, but it must remain uncertain evidence as to his innermost beliefs and articles of faith.” (Ackerman, 22-23).

While we lack certainty regarding Chaucer's actual views, it is generally agreed-upon that he was not a skeptic, and that he was "within the bounds of orthodoxy." Ackerman also notes that "whatever is set down in the writings" ought to be considered separately from Chaucer's own views, but it certainly sheds light on his knowledge on the polemics of the time, and pushes us to question his intentions when criticizing the corruption of the church in *The Canterbury Tales*. Some scholars suggest that Chaucer remains generally neutral in the text, but that he "exploit[s] the discourse and ideology of the [Lollard] movement for aesthetic, didactic or literary reasons" (McCormack, 37). However, other researchers, such as Lillian Bisson, argue that "the assigning of a Wycliffite image and voice to his idealized Parson (whose meditation on penance arguably inspires Chaucer to retract his sinful works) does seem to suggest a Chaucer not entirely opposed to the [Lollard] movement" (McCormack, 38). Regardless of Chaucer's actual religious views, his incorporation of religious criticisms pushes the reader to question the religious "disorder of [Chaucer's] age" (McCormack, 40), and to reflect on the social commentaries that Chaucer delivers.

### ***The Friar's Section of the General Prologue***

For most of the stories in *The Canterbury Tales*, the established narrator is one of the many pilgrims, meaning that Chaucer can claim the status as a mere messenger as opposed to the primary creator of the tale's content. But, the General Prologue (GP) is one of the few sections of *The Canterbury Tales* for which Chaucer himself must assume full authorial responsibility, because he is the primary narrator. Chaucer uses first person narration throughout the General Prologue, and even offers speculations or guesses about the characteristics of certain pilgrims,

suggesting that his personal ideologies are present within this section<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, towards the end of the GP, Chaucer expresses that the tales to follow are not of his own invention, but rather, come from the minds of their respective pilgrims, and Chaucer is only the scribe. He writes,

“And after wol I telle of our viage / And al the remenant of oure pilgrimage. / But first I pray yow, of youre curteisye, / That ye n’arete it nat my vileynye, / Thogh that I pleyedly speke in this mateere, / To telle yow hir wordes and hir cheere, / Ne thogh I speke hir wordes proprely. / For this ye knowen al so wel as I: / Whoso shal telle a tale after a man, / He moot reherce as ny as evere he kan / ... Or ellis he moot telle his tale untrewe, / ... Also I prey yow to foryeve it me, / ... My wit is short, ye may wel understonde.”<sup>4</sup> (General Prologue, 723-746)

Here, Chaucer addresses the structure through which he will relay the pilgrims’ tales, and expresses that he is simply repeating the stories after other people. By explicitly referring to “speke[ing] hir (their) words proprely,” Chaucer makes it clear that he is not responsible for content of the tales to come, and suggests that it would be “untrewe” of him to change anything that the pilgrims say. Finally, Chaucer makes fun of himself, asking the reader to forgive him and saying that his “wit is short.” This humorous moment serves as a way to remove still more authorial responsibility from himself because he comically implies that he is not even smart enough to organize the General Prologue correctly, so how could he be smart enough to make the pointed criticisms that are to come in the following tales? Altogether, this section of the GP

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<sup>3</sup> See General Prologue, lines 82 (“Of twenty yeer of age he was, I gesse”), 117 (“A forster was he, soothly, as I gesse”), and 691 (“I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare”, translated into modern English by Harvard University’s Geoffrey Chaucer website as “I believe he was a eunuch or a homosexual.”)

<sup>4</sup> Modern trans. “And after that I will tell of our journey / And all the rest of our pilgrimage. / But first I pray yow, of your courtesy, / That you do not attribute it to my rudeness, / Though I speak plainly in this matter, / To tell you their words and their behavior, / Nor though I speak their words accurately. / For this you know as well as I: / Whoever must repeat a story after someone, / He must repeat as closely as ever he knows how / ... Or else he must tell his tale inaccurately, / ... Also I pray you to forgive it to me, / ... My wit is short, you can well understand.” (Harvard’s Geoffrey Chaucer Website, hereafter HGCW. All modern translations of *The Canterbury Tales* are from HGCW unless otherwise noted.)

directly expresses that Chaucer is simply a messenger; he does not claim ownership of the other pilgrims' tales. Considering that this assertion does not come until the end of the GP, it is implied that Chaucer does take responsibility for the content of the GP, whereas Chaucer would like for the reader to believe that the pilgrims' tales are not his own thoughts, but the thoughts of their respective pilgrims.

In his description of the friar within the GP, Chaucer utilizes satire to critique the corruption of the church and to express that officials of the church do not uphold the values or duties that are required of them. While the passage clearly questions the moral principles of the church, Chaucer is purposeful with his use of humor as a way to remove authorial responsibility for the harsh critiques in the text, and it is evident that he is purposefully evasive with his word choice. By using puns and double entendres to create a sense of irony and sarcasm around the church, Chaucer maintains the ability to claim that he is simply poking fun, rather than seriously ridiculing the sacred institution. In the friar's passage from the General Prologue, Chaucer uses humor to create tension around the corruption of the church, but is purposefully ambiguous with that humor so that he can provide a sardonic critique without needing to take total authorial responsibility for his criticisms.

In the beginning of the passage, Chaucer implies that the friar has seduced various women, which violates the requirement of celibacy for religious figures. He writes, "He hadde maad ful many a mariage / Of yonge wommen at his owene cost." (General Prologue, 212-213). Here, Chaucer employs a double entendre: the phrase "at his owene cost" could either mean that the friar helped with the dowry for the young women, or it could mean that he made the marriages at a cost to himself, suggesting that marrying the women off is upsetting for him because he is attracted to them. In fact, Robert Pratt glosses these lines as, "he found husbands

and dowries for women whom he had seduced,” (8n212-13) expressing that the phrase definitely implies that the friar had relationships with these women, which is a grave sin, especially considering the friar’s position in the church. In this case, the double entendre is extremely useful for Chaucer: even though his second “implied” meaning questions the moral devoutness of figures in the church, his first meaning of providing a dowry would conveniently cover that criticism and reduces Chaucer’s accountability over the critique.

At various points in the passage, Chaucer also highlights the friar’s greed and materialism, and expresses that he accepts indulgences in order to cushion his own pocket, even if the sinner has not served their penance. Chaucer writes, “For many a man so hard is of his herte, / He may nat wepe, althogh hym soore smerte. / Therefore in stede of wepyng and preyeres / Men moote yeve silver to the povre freres.”<sup>5</sup> (GP, 229-232). This is clearly a jab at the corruption of the church: the ironic juxtaposition of what should be necessary to atone for one’s sins (i.e. “weeping and prayers”) and what actually happens (paying silver to the “poor” friars) emphasizes the corrupt nature of the church. One might think after reading this that Chaucer may have overstepped his boundary because he openly accused the friar of being unethical. However, these lines are in conversation with lines earlier on in the passage: “For unto a povre ordre for to yive / Is signe that a man is wel yshryve; / For if he yaf, he dorste make avaunt, / He wiste that a man was repentaunt”<sup>6</sup> (GP, 225-228). This section expresses that if a man gives money to the poor friars, it is a sign that he is “well-shriven” (absolved) because giving money is a charitable act and therefore an indicator of repentance. The reader can clearly tell that this is sarcasm:

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<sup>5</sup> Trans. “For many a man is so hard in his heart, / He can not weep, although he painfully suffers. / Therefore instead of weeping and prayers / One may give silver to the poor friars.” (HGCW)

<sup>6</sup> Trans. “For to give to a poor order (of friars) / Is a sign that a man is well confessed; / For if he gave, he (the friar) dared to assert, / He knew that a man was repentant” (HGCW)

simply giving somebody money is not a sign of repentance or atonement. But, by using lines 225-228 to preface the concept of giving the poor friars silver, Chaucer uses the irony as a safety net: even though he delivered a harsh criticism, he could still argue that he genuinely believed that indulgences were justified moral actions, thus maintaining his plausible deniability.

Later on in the passage, Chaucer makes some bawdy implications about the friar, but he never outright accuses the friar of sleeping with women. He writes of the friar, “His tycet was ay farsed ful of knyves / And pynnes, for to yeven faire wyves”<sup>7</sup> (GP, 233-234), suggesting that he uses the goods that he bought with indulgence money to woo women. Then, Chaucer writes, “He knew the tavernes wel in every town / And every hostiler and tappestere” (GP, 240-241).

Although there is no explicit evidence that the friar was involved in any indecent behavior, the word “knew” could certainly mean that he “knew” the tappestere (glossed by Pratt as “barmaid,” 8n241), in the biblical sense. The University of Michigan’s Middle English Dictionary (hereafter UMMED) also expresses that the word “tappestere” could be used as a “term of denigration for a woman,” perhaps suggesting that she might be loose, which makes the lewd allusion even more plausible. However, Chaucer could still easily argue that the friar simply knew the innkeepers in a friendly sense, or even in the sense that he was helping provide guidance to people in need, such as people who might be found at the tavern. Once again, the double meaning comes to Chaucer’s aid, because he is able to evade culpability over his critique of corruption.

Chaucer then juxtaposes the friar’s presence at the taverns with his avoidance of lepers and beggars to emphasize that the church is not helping the people who actually need its support. In the lines immediately following those about the barmaids, Chaucer writes, “Bet than a lazar of a beggestere; / For unto swich a worthy man as he / Accorded nat, as by his facultee” (GP, 242-

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<sup>7</sup> Trans. “His hood was always stuffed full of knives / And pins, to give to fair wives.” (HGCW)

244), expressing that the friar spent more time at the bar than helping people in need because he considered himself too honorable a man to “deelen with [] switch poraille” (GP, 247). Of course, the reader can recognize that there is a sense of irony here: religious figures are meant to help the “poraille” (poor people) and in fact, the biblical story about Jesus performing a miracle and cleansing a leper (*New International Version*, Matt. 8.1-4) demonstrates that it is a religious duty to help people such as these. But, the sense of irony created when Chaucer talks about the friar being too honorable can once again be used as a scapegoat because he could contend that the church is such an honorable institution that the friar is right not to make “aqueyntaunce” with such people.

Soon after this, Chaucer suggests that the friar always follows the money, and that that is his actual motivation for all of his actions. Chaucer writes, “And over al, ther as profit sholde arise, / Curteis he was and lowely of servyse. / Ther nas no man nowher so vertuouus.” (GP, 249-251). The juxtaposition in these lines is comical: we’ve just read that the friar is only courteous and humble because there is potential profit on the table, then suddenly, Chaucer proclaims that he is virtuous. According to the UMMED, the word “profit” could also be interpreted as “Spiritual benefit; a spiritual advantage or benefit; also, spiritual well-being,” and Chaucer uses this other possible understanding to his advantage because he can say that he wasn’t calling the friar greedy or corrupt: maybe he is just so religious and pious that he looks for spiritual well-being everywhere he goes, and that’s why he’s so “virtuous”. Additionally, the phrase, “Ther nas no man nowher so vertuouus” is purposefully vague, creating an “intensive triple negative” (Pratt, 9n251) that leaves the reader confused about its actual meaning. According to Pratt, the word “nas” means “was not,” so in theory, “nas no man nowher” could suggest that there was actually a man more virtuous than the friar, even though that is not how we would first interpret it. The

ambiguous play on words decreases Chaucer's authorial responsibility, allowing him to get away with the jab.

Next, Chaucer makes another play on words, or rather, a play on "*the* Word... and the Word was God." (*New International Version*, John 1.1). In lines 253-255, Chaucer writes of the friar, "For thogh a wydwe hadde noght a sho, / So plesaunt was his '*In principio*,' / Yet wolde he have a ferthyng, er he wente." Here, Chaucer references a commonly-known biblical verse from the Gospel of John, and expresses that the friar is so good at reciting this verse that even widows who could not afford shoes would pay to hear it. The allusion to this verse in particular is snide for various reasons. First, it suggests that the friar is trying to play God simply by reciting the words of the Bible: if "the Word was God," then speaking the word is an act of God. By referring to this verse specifically, Chaucer implies that the friar is pretending to have the same power as God by "absolving" people of their sins for money. Second, the inclusion of this verse insinuates that church figures have simply been using buzz-words among the religious community to make money. After all, John 1:1 is one of the most widely-known Bible passages, so reciting it to people in need of guidance would likely not have been very useful, because they would already have known it, and because it does not actually offer any insight at all about moral actions. Chaucer uses this biblical allusion to imply that religious figures are essentially name-dropping, rather than doing their actual job, in an attempt to take advantage of even the poorest of people who cannot afford shoes.

One final play on words rounds out the friar's section of the General Prologue, and Chaucer is sure to make it the most resonant one. He writes of the friar, "His purchas was wel better than his rente. / And rage he koude, as it were right a whelp." (GP, 256-257). According to Pratt, "as it were right a whelp" is glossed as "exactly as if he were a puppy," suggesting that the

friar would be acting in a playful or lighthearted way. However, the UMMED suggests otherwise: the database expresses that in slang terms, “whelp” can also be read as “son of a bitch.” This implied meaning is rather harsh, but, the double entendre allows him to make the pointed critique that church members are using their absurd amounts of money to behave wantonly, while still having the playful connotation as a back-up. As Jill Mann writes in her book *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, “the evidence for our impressions of Huberd’s [(the friar’s)] licentiousness is slender; it is no more than a series of linguistic suggestions, which the traditional view of the friar attunes us to pick up, but which do not allow a definite conclusion” (Mann, 41), expressing that crude interpretations of the text are easily debatable and refutable because they are only “suggestions,” which allows Chaucer to remain inculpable. Additionally, Mann’s phrase “which the traditional view of the friar attunes us to pick up” is reminiscent of Freud’s Relief Theory of humor: these accusations of the friar’s reckless behavior are particularly funny because they are incongruous with our preconceptions regarding purity and piousness. Because Chaucer is the narrator of the General Prologue, meaning that he must claim full authorial responsibility for this section, Chaucer relies on the reader to recognize this humorous incongruity as opposed to explicitly stating it himself. Chaucer uses humor as an “out” in order to maintain his plausible deniability of his religious criticisms.

### ***The Friar’s and Summoner’s Tales***

In *The Friar’s Tale* and *The Summoner’s Tale*, the critiques of the church are much more obvious and intense than in the General Prologue, which is permissible because Chaucer uses these secondary narrators as a way to remove accountability from himself. Additionally, Chaucer emphasizes the tension and division within the church by intentionally pitting the two religious characters against each other. For example, the friar first delivers a critical tale about a

summoner in which the summoner makes a deal with a demon. Whereas any pilgrim could have easily recounted a nasty tale about a summoner, Chaucer's choice of the friar as the narrator is significant because it highlights the clash of religious figures and the division in the church institution. In these cases, the tales themselves are not necessarily the most important aspects, but rather, their narratorial authorship: the fact that each of the insulting tales is told by a fellow member of the church amplifies the significance of the problems outlined in the tales and shows the corruption, weakness, and fragility of the church as its members become more and more divided.

In the prologue to the Friar's tale, Chaucer elaborates a conversation between the friar and the summoner, demonstrating the direct confrontation between the two religious characters. When the friar expresses that he will tell a critical tale about a summoner, the host says that he should be polite and refrain from doing so, but the summoner responds, "lat hym seye to me / What so hym list; whan it comth to my lot, / By God! I shal hym quiten every grot. / I shal hym tellen which a gret honour / It is to be a flaterynge lymytour; / And of many another manere cryme,"<sup>8</sup> (Friar's Prologue, 1289-1295), expressing that the friar can say what he likes, but the summoner will retaliate during his own tale. The reader can sense the summoner's sarcasm when he says that being a "flaterynge lymytour," or essentially a glorified beggar, is a "greet honour." Chaucer uses the humorous incongruity between these two phrases to magnify the tension and contempt between the friar and the summoner. In the following line, the summoner compares the friars' action of begging to a "cryme," implying that the friars are effectively stealing money and not providing religious support for people. According to the

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<sup>8</sup> Trans. "let him say to me / Whatever he pleases; when it comes to my turn, / By God, I shall pay him back every groat (fourpence). / I shall tell him what a great honor / It is to be a flattering licensed beggar, / And of many another sort of crime" (HGCW)

Middle English Dictionary, “cryme” could literally refer to an illegal act, but it could also refer to sinfulness or wickedness (Middle English Dictionary). Calling the friar a criminal is already more overtly accusatory than the jokes that Chaucer made in the GP. This newfound bluntness is a result of the secondary narrator, because now Chaucer is supposedly not the one telling the story; the summoner (an established figure of the church) is the one being so forthright.

In response to the friar’s condemning tale, the Prologue to the Summoner’s Tale is a humorous but harsh insult towards friars which emphasizes the immense tension between the friar and the summoner. By placing these two tales in immediate proximity to each other as a unit, Chaucer intentionally divides two members of the church who, in theory, should be unified on the religious front. The summoner makes his opinions on friars abundantly clear in the prologue by telling an anecdote about a friar who went to hell but did not see any other friars there. Upon asking an angel why there were no other friars, the angel tells Satan to lift up his tail, and then “Right so as bees out swarmen of an hyve / Out of the develes ers they gonne dryve / Twenty thousand freres on a route”<sup>9</sup> (Summoner’s Prologue, 1693-1695), insinuating that the worst place in hell is reserved for friars: Satan’s asshole. This is a humorously ironic moment: the crude and bawdy imagery is meant to make readers laugh, but it may not have been expected from a figure such as a summoner, who is supposed to be an enforcer of devotion to the church. The incongruity between the content of these comments and the person who said them emphasizes the severity of the insult, and further increases the social tension between the friar and the summoner. It is important to note that here, there is no other possible interpretation of the criticism: the summoner certainly did not hold back in his derision of friars. Such an insult would

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<sup>9</sup> Trans. “Just as bees swarm out from a hive, / Out of the devil's ass there began to rush / Twenty thousand friars in a crowd” (HGCW)

not have been found in the General Prologue, but it is acceptable here because the summoner is the narrator, not Chaucer, and there is much less of an issue with such a critique of the church when it comes directly from a religious figure. Chaucer uses his lack of authorial responsibility to deliver harsher commentaries than he would have been able to in the General Prologue.

Once the tale begins, the summoner describes a particular friar who “helps” a sick man named Thomas. Throughout the tale, the summoner highlights the idiocy, hypocrisy, and materialism of the friar, expressing that friars have no true concern for the people that they claim to help. The summoner says about the friar, “what men yaf hem, leyde it on his bak. / And whan that he was out atte dore, anon / He planed away the names everichon / That he biforn had writen in his tables; / He served hem with nyfles and with fables”<sup>10</sup> (Summoner’s Tale, 1756-1760). The summoner certainly did not hold back here: he blatantly states that friars are deceitful and simply take people’s money and then “plane away” the names of those people immediately after. Chaucer’s intentional choice of the summoner as the pilgrim to narrate this scornful criticism of friars amplifies the existing tension within the church: not only does the general public believe that there is corruption, but the church members have no problem detailing that corruption. The summoner also expresses that the friar is corrupt in the sense that he does not maintain the purity of celibacy, because he flirts with and fondles Thomas’ wife. The summoner says, “The frere ariseth up ful curteisly, / And hire embraceth in his armes narwe, / And kiste hire sweete, and chirketh as a sparwe / With his lippes...” (Summoner’s Tale, 1802-1804). This description is certainly more intimate than a typical greeting: the friar hugs the wife “narwe” (closely), kisses her sweetly, and then is so excited that he chirps like a sparrow. The

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<sup>10</sup> Trans. “And what men gave them, laid it on his back. / And when he was out at door, immediately / He planed away the names every one / That he before had writen in his tables; / He served them with tricks and with falsehoods” (HGCW)

summoner suggests that friars are more than just corrupt monetarily: they behave inappropriately with women, too. This is not the first time that such an assertion has been made; as we recall, the section of the General Prologue about the friar also suggests that the friar behaves wantonly. However, in the General Prologue, this assertion was easily-deniable: Chaucer could have claimed that the friar did not “know” barmaids in the biblical sense, but rather in the context of supporting them religiously. But here, because the summoner is narrating as opposed to Chaucer, there is no need for such ambiguity, and the accusation is much more explicit, magnifying the social tension.

In addition to attacking the friar’s chastity, the tale also depicts the friar as a terrible liar who does not care at all about the people he claims to be helping. Thomas’ wife explains that she and her husband lost a child, and they are concerned about his life after death. The friar responds, “His deeth saugh I by revelacioun, ... / at hom in oure dortour. / I dar wel seyn that, er that half an hour / After his deeth, I saugh hym born to blisse / In myn avision, so God me wisse!”<sup>11</sup> (Summoner’s Tale, 1854-1858). Clearly, the reader can tell that the friar has not actually seen the baby’s soul rise up to heaven. A friar lying about a child’s soul is extremely anti-clerical and a brutal attack on the friar. But, it is important to remember that the summoner is the one narrating this tale; the summoner is essentially saying, “Friars will literally lie about babies’ deaths” in front of an entire audience of other pilgrims! The friar and the summoner are in such a spat that the summoner does not even care if what he says will make the church look bad: he petty-mindedly goes after friars and says terrible things about them for the simple reason of, “he started it.” Here, Chaucer does not have to take authorial responsibility of the tension created by

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<sup>11</sup> Trans. ““His death saw I by revelation," / ... "at home in our dormitory. / I dare well say that, before half an hour / After his death, I saw him carried up to bliss / In my vision, as God may guide me!” (HGCW)

these accusations. Instead, he depicts the friar and the summoner as two hotheaded and silly men, highlighting the ironic humor of two clerical characters not holding anything back in their absurd and immature squabble.

Later in the tale, the summoner uses bawdy humor to emphasize the friar's materialism, and ends up making an anti-clerical fart joke<sup>12</sup>. The friar begs Thomas to give him some money, and Thomas agrees on the condition that the friar divide his gift equally among all the other friars. Thomas tells the friar to "put thyn hand down by my bak... / and grope wel bihynde. / Bynethe my buttoke there shaltow fynde / A thing that I have hyd in pryvetee" (Summoner's Tale, 2139-2143). According to the Middle English Dictionary, the word "pryvetee" could mean privacy, but it also has secondary connotations involving the genitalia, or in this case the anus (Middle English Dictionary). As in the prologue to this tale, the summoner ends up talking about friars and assholes, and it would seem that there is no coincidence that he makes this connection more than once. Then, when Thomas "felte this frere / Aboute his tuwl grope there and heere, / Amydde his hand he leet the frere a fart" (Summoner's Tale, 2147-2149). Clearly, this is a funny instance to the reader: the friar believed he would be finding money, but instead, he gets farted on! This is a classic example of Freud's Relief Theory: we laugh because we were expecting something important (money that could be used to support the good works of the friars), but instead, we get something pretty unimportant – and crude (a fart). The most comical part of this incident is that later, when the friar is ranting about what happened, he says, "I shal diffame hym over al wher I speke, / The false blasphemour, that charged me / To parte that wol nat departed be / To every man yliche, with meshaunce!" (Summoner's Tale, 2212-2215). This means that the friar's primary reason to "defame" Thomas is not that he farted on him, but rather that Thomas

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<sup>12</sup> Credit to Prof. Maud McInerney for this term.

promised the friar that his gift would be divisible among all the friars, when in fact, it could not be so. This hilarious grievance shows the materialism and greed of the friar, and the summoner uses the fart-joke as an opportunity to demonstrate the friars' corruption. The summoner's references to asses as an insult to friars both in his prologue and in his tale are much bolder than Chaucer's criticisms in the GP. The explicit and overt nature of the summoner's narration amplifies the tension and division within the church that Chaucer had more subtly established in the General Prologue.

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## *Don Quijote de La Mancha*

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### *Historical Context*

The two volumes of *Don Quixote* were written in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, with the first part being published in 1605, and the second in 1615. As a result of various sociopolitical factors, Spain (at that point referred to as the kingdoms of Castile and Aragón) was a predominantly Catholic nation. In the late 1400s, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabel established the Holy Office of the Inquisition, which enforced Catholic orthodoxy through numerous strategies including jailing, torture, and execution (Krueger). Many different sects were affected by the Inquisition, but Jews and Muslims were the primary targets, as they were forced to either convert to Catholicism or leave the country. In 1609, between the publications of parts one and two, King Philip III of Spain declared that the moriscos, or the moors, were to be expelled from Spain (García-Arenal & Wieggers, 21). A morisco is a person of Muslim descent, regardless of whether the family had converted to Christianity or not. This meant that even if a family had previously followed the orders of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, they were still ordered to leave. The timing of this decree is important to note in the context of *Don Quixote*: it was an era of much religious turmoil, and Cervantes notes the increasing tension between Christians and Muslims over the course of the first volume. The Inquisition was not disbanded until the 1800s, meaning that *Don Quixote* was written during this period of heavy religious suppression.

The censorship of literature was well-established by the time that Cervantes began writing *Don Quixote*. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the concern was primarily “with theological works, or works religious in quality” (de Bujanda, 63). Although *Don Quixote* is not an explicitly religious text, it does deal with themes of religion, meaning that this censorship was certainly a consideration for Cervantes. While we may not know how the work may have been different under other circumstances, we do know that Cervantes’ conservatism is reflective of texts

published during this time. Various laws since the establishment of the Inquisition in the 1400s had restricted printing and publication, and in September of 1558, King Philip II issued a royal decree that solidified these constraints. J.M. de Bujanda writes in his article *Literary Censorship in Sixteenth-Century Spain*,

“First, from the law of 1502, the existing prior censorship was called to mind, together with the Inquisition’s power, as censor, to suppress books already in circulation. But the royal law [of 1558], instead of giving the inquisitors or the Inquisition a right to inspect before printing, reaffirms that this must be done directly by the civil authorities. As for book importing, it forbade the entry of works already condemned by the Spanish Inquisition, and also of anything in Spanish published outside Castile, even if it came from Aragon, Valencia, Catalonia or Navarre. Spanish books already imported were to be shown to Crown officials who were to send the list of them to the Royal Council. Infringers of this law incurred the death penalty and confiscation of all their property. To print any work, Spanish or Latin, the publisher (subject to the same penalties) must be forearmed with a license from the Royal Council” (de Bujanda, 55).

This context is crucial in understanding the relationships between literature, art, the Inquisition, and censorship during the time that Cervantes was writing. Considering that the death penalty was a possibility for religiously offensive texts, Cervantes and other authors of the time needed to be extremely careful, even if their works were more leisure-oriented than ecclesiastical. In my analysis, I argue that Cervantes is particularly subtle in his criticisms of the hate between Christians and Muslims, and he uses secondary fictional authors or narrators as buffers for some of his more forward points. All of this makes sense when we consider that anything more overt could have been dangerous for him at the time.

Cervantes was born in 1547 in Alcalá de Henares, a city about 20 miles from Madrid. In 1569, an arrest warrant from the Royal Court ordered the arrest of Miguel de Cervantes, because he had apparently wounded a man in a duel. Although the historical certainty of this event is contested among Cervantine bibliographers, it is generally agreed upon that this arrest warrant was likely the push factor that caused Cervantes to flee from Madrid to Seville, and eventually to

Naples, Italy. There, he would become a soldier in the Spanish infantry regiment, until he was captured by Barbary pirates and held captive in Algiers.

Cervantes was held in captivity as a slave for 5 years. While there are not many historical records that provide detailed accounts of his time there, this period was certainly influential for his writing after his return to Spain: Cervantes wrote various works that discuss imprisonment, such as *El trato de Argel* (The Trade of Algiers), *Los baños de Argel* (The Dungeons of Algiers), and even *La historia del cautivo* (The Captive's Tale), which is a section from Part I of *Don Quixote*. As María Antonia Garcés argues in her book *Cervantes in Algiers: A Captive's Tale*, “trauma in Cervantes functions as a fountain of creation: the reenactment of the traumatic experience in the writer’s works generally produces an outburst of fantasy, an escape into another reality that circumvents the traumatic event itself even while functioning as an artistic testimony to trauma” (Garcés, 5). Garcés’ belief that Cervantes’ traumatic experience is a creative motive that allowed him to write so deeply about madness and fantasy (two main themes of *Don Quixote*) is a logical one. In the prologue to Part I, Cervantes writes, “Y así, ¿qué podía engendrar el estéril y mal cultivado ingenio mío... antojazido y lleno de pensamientios varios y nunca imaginados de otro alguno, bien como quien se engendró en una cárcel, donde toda incomodidad tiene su asiento y donde todo triste ruido hace su habitación?”<sup>13</sup> (Cervantes, I, Prologue; 9). Although it cannot be determined in which prison Cervantes actually conceived of *Don Quixote* (he was also incarcerated in Castro del Río in 1592 and Seville in 1597), it is clear that captivity played an influential role in his work.

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<sup>13</sup> Trans. “And so what could my barren and poorly cultivated wits beget... capricious, and filled with inconstant thoughts never imagined by anyone else, which is just what one would expect of a person begotten in a prison, where every discomfort has its place and every mournful sound makes its home?” (Grossman, 3).

It is also important to note that Cervantes' relationship with Muslims and Islam is not perfectly clear, and the lack of accounts regarding Cervantes' captivity hinders our ability to understand his experience or treatment in full. It is certain that Cervantes attempted to escape his imprisonment four separate times, suggesting that his situation may have been grim. That being said, it is also certain that after Cervantes "led and masterminded [a failed] escape plan... the captives rightly expected the worst, but in the event no one lost a nose or ear or was flogged. Mercifully for Cervantes his life was spared... because Ramadan Pasha was a more compassionate ruler than his predecessors..." (McCrary, 76). The Encyclopaedia Britannica corroborates that various leaders were merciful towards Cervantes, saying, "His masters, the renegade Dali Mami and later Hasan Paşa, treated him with considerable leniency in the circumstances" (Cruz & Riley). So, while it is likely that Cervantes faced severe adversity during his time as a prisoner, it is also possible that his experience included instances of benevolence that impacted his depiction of Muslims and Arabs within *Don Quixote* and his other works.

### ***Cide Hamete Benengeli – The Second Author***

In *Don Quixote*, Cervantes plays with the concept of authorial responsibility by inserting himself as a character into the story and claiming that he is not actually the author of the work. Cervantes creates a humorous meta-literary moment when he states that an Arab historian, Cide Hamete Benengeli, is the historical author of the novel. In this instance, the reader is faced with a question: how does the meaning and interpretation of the text change with the revelation that the story was written from a completely different perspective? Cervantes uses the meta-literary break to appeal directly to his audience, and to convey the message that the perceived conflict between Cervantes (a Christian) and Benengeli (a Muslim) is actually unwarranted, thus reducing the social tension between the two religious groups.

Before Cervantes even introduces the fictional second author, Cide Hamete Benengeli, he creates a humorous moment to preempt the coming tension of two authors from different religions. Supposedly, Cervantes was having a conversation with a morisco and asked the morisco to translate the content of an old Arabic text. While reading, the morisco laughs and says, “Está, como he dicho, aquí en el margen escrito esto: «Esta Dulcinea del Toboso, tantas veces en esta historica referido, dicen que tuvo la mejor mano para salar puercos que otra mujer de toda la Mancha».”<sup>14</sup> (Cervantes, I, 19; 118). Here it is revealed that Dulcinea del Toboso, who is Don Quixote’s love interest in the tale, and has been depicted throughout the story as a damsel in distress, is actually nothing but a pork-salter, which was known as a lowly commoner’s position. Freud’s Relief Theory helps Cervantes spoof the motif of chivalric knight tales: we find this situation so hilarious because we expect heroic knights to be in love with princesses or women so pure that they connect the knights to God, but instead, Don Quixote is in love with the best pork-salter in all of La Mancha. The comedic relief also predicates a relief in tension between the morisco and Cervantes. Eating pork is a crime in Islamic religion, but rather than taking offence to reading about a pork-salter, the morisco laughs and recognizes the comedy behind the situation. Cervantes uses the humorous moment both to parody tropes of chivalric knight tales, and to create a relief of tension between two different cultures.

When the second author is originally introduced, Cervantes continues to use humor to defuse the tension created by the concept of two authors from different religions. The discovery of the second author is presented as a funny coincidence: Cervantes just happened to come across a boy selling old transcripts, and he just happened to find a morisco to translate them, and

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<sup>14</sup> Trans. “As I have said, here in the margin is written: ‘This Dulcinea of Toboso, referred to so often in this history, they say had the best hand for salting pork of any woman in all of La Mancha.’” (Grossman, 67).

the morisco just happened to notice the note in the margins about Dulcinea del Toboso. Then, when Cervantes (the character) asks the morisco to translate from the beginning, the morisco reads, “*Historia de don Quijote de la Mancha, escrita por Cide Hamete Benengeli, historiador arábigo.*”<sup>15</sup> (I, 19; 118). The author’s name itself is actually a second joke: “Benengeli” is very similar to the Spanish word “berenjena,” or, “eggplant.” It’s funny enough to have the author’s name sound like a vegetable, but this particular vegetable is even funnier because eggplants are a “favorite food of Spanish Moors and Jews” (Grossman, 67n6). In fact, in chapter II of the second volume, the “first author” is referred to as Cide Hamete Berenjena, confirming that the similarity between the name of the vegetable and the name of the author was intentional. In the previous passage, Cervantes referred to pork, a food that is sacrilegious for Muslims, and now, he refers to one that typically has a positive connotation for them. This may not seem significant, but the choice to make jokes about two foods that hold very specific connotations for the Muslim community seems to be a way to establish a sort of equilibrium: once Cervantes makes an offensive joke, he goes back on it and makes amends. This structure is repeated more than once in the text, and it can be interpreted as a subtle way of suggesting a sense of equality between Muslims and Christians.

Once Cervantes has revealed the identity of the second author, he originally disparages him, and expresses that the second author is untrustworthy. He writes, “Si a ésta se le puede poner alguna objeción cerca de su verdad, no podrá ser otra sino haber sido su autor arábigo, siendo muy propio de los de aquella nación ser mentirosos; aunque, por ser tan nuestros

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<sup>15</sup> Trans. “History of Don Quixote of La Mancha. Written by Cide Hamete Benengeli, an Arab Historian.” (Grossman, 67)

enemigos, antes se puede entender haber quedado falto en ella que demasiado.”<sup>16</sup> (I, 9; 120). At first glance, this seems like a scathing appraisal of Arabs; after all, Cervantes does say that they tend to be liars (“mentirosos”), and he calls them enemies. However, there is a sense of irony and sarcasm here: firstly, Cervantes uses the word “verdad” (truth), making a joke out of the fact that the story itself is a spoof of chivalric knight tales, not a historical account. Second, the phrase “aquella nación” (“that nation”) is purposefully ambiguous, and does not actually refer to any specific people. In the edition of the book published by the Cervantes Institute, Francisco Rico adds a footnote to this phrase, reading, “‘los musulmanes’ ; C. mantiene la ambigüedad sobre la veracidad de lo que se relata”<sup>17</sup> (Rico, 120n43). Here, Rico implies that Cervantes’ wording is purposefully vague. The lack of specificity leaves the reader unable to decide Cervantes’ actual viewpoint on the matter, and suggests that he intentionally muddles the line of religious separation between Muslims and Christians.

Later on, Cervantes goes back on his earlier accusatory tone, and actually ends up praising Benengeli’s historical work. For example, in the paragraph immediately following the introduction of the second author, Cervantes describes Benengeli’s work as “pintada muy al natural,” “[correcto] sin duda,” and “maravillosamente pintado ... que mostraba bien al descubierta con cuánta advertencia y propiedad se le había puesto el nombre...”<sup>18</sup> (I, 9; 119-120). By describing Benengeli’s work as accurate and marvelously depicted, Cervantes

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<sup>16</sup> Trans. “If any objection can be raised regarding the truth of this one, it can only be that its author was Arabic, since the people of that nation are very prone to telling falsehoods, but because they are such great enemies of ours, it can be assumed that he has given us too little rather than too much.” (Grossman, 68)

<sup>17</sup> Trans. “‘The Muslims’ ; C. maintains the ambiguity about the veracity of that which he relates” (my own translation).

<sup>18</sup> Trans. “a very realistic depiction,” (Grossman, 68) “[correct] without a doubt,” (my own translation) and “wonderfully depicted... that it was clear with what foresight and accuracy he had been given the name...” (Grossman, 68)

contradicts his earlier suggestion that all Arabs are deceitful liars, and actually praises the historian's capabilities. Cervantes bounces back and forth between making jokes at Muslims' expense then countering those jokes, and disparaging Arabs then praising their work. This consistent act of mocking Muslims and then negating his own criticisms demonstrates that Cervantes purposefully reduces the social tension between Christians and Muslims, suggesting that perhaps the hate between the two religions is unwarranted.

Because of the historical context surrounding *Don Quixote*, it is likely that Cervantes needed to disparage Muslim characters like Benengeli as a cover for his actual goal of reducing religious tensions. However, Cervantes plays with authorial responsibility and ambiguity in order to hedge that explicit disparagement. For example, Cervantes addresses the implications of the second author for the content and truthfulness of the rest of the text, and overtly says that Benengeli is untrustworthy. He writes, "En ésta sé que hallará todo lo que se acertare a desear en la más apacible; y si algo bueno en ella faltare, para mí tengo que fue por culpa del galgo de su autor, antes que falta del sujeto."<sup>19</sup> (I, 9; 121). Here, Cervantes expresses that anything that is wrong is the fault of the author, implying that he is just the messenger, and Benengeli should be to blame. However, the word choice is once again intentionally ambiguous; Cervantes could have easily written that "the fault lies with Cide Hamete Benengeli" instead of "the fault lies with the dog who was its author" to confirm that he was referring to Benengeli. But instead, he refers to the author, and readers know that even though he invented a second fictional author, Cervantes is the true author of the tale. This vague phrasing is a way for Cervantes to subtly make fun of himself: while at first glance it may appear that he is ridiculing Benengeli, the lack

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<sup>19</sup> Trans. "In this account I know there will be found everything that could be rightly desired in the most pleasant history, and if something of value is missing from it, in my opinion the fault lies with the dog who was its author rather than with any defect in its subject." (Grossman, 69)

of a direct reference demonstrates that he could just as plausibly be referring to himself. Additionally, Francisco Rico points out that “*galgo y perro* eran insultos que se aplicaban recíprocamente cristianos y musulmanes”<sup>20</sup> (Rico, 121n48)<sup>21</sup>. Whereas Cervantes could have used an insult that is specific to Muslims, he intentionally uses an insult that could denote either a Christian (himself) or a Muslim (Benengeli), meaning that the blame is nameless. Once again, Cervantes uses humor to blur the divisions between himself and the fictional second author, thus reducing the social distance between Christians and Muslims.

Cervantes goes on to explicitly praise Cide Hamete Benengeli multiple times later in the text, confirming that the negative presumptions about his character and his ethnicity are incorrect. For example, in chapter XVI, Cervantes writes, “Fuera de que Cide Mahamete Benengeli fue historiador muy curioso y muy puntual en todas las cosas, y échase bien de ver, pues las que quedan referidas, con ser tan mínimas y tan rateras, no las quiso pasar en silencio; de donde podrán tomar ejemplo los historiadores graves”<sup>22</sup> (I, 16; 186-187). The phrases “careful

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<sup>20</sup> Trans. “*greyhound* and *dog* were insults that were applied reciprocally [to each other] by Christians and Muslims.” (my own translation)

<sup>21</sup> Rico’s annotations require a complementary book that explains the footnotes in further detail. When Rico expresses that “greyhound” and “dog” were used reciprocally among Christians and Muslims, he cites 5 other versions of *Don Quijote* with annotations. Due to limited library access during covid-19, I was only able to access one of those versions, annotated by Diego Clemencín. In this version, Clemencín writes that “Concluyó Cervantes llamándole perro, dicerio vulgar con que solían motejarse mutuamente moros y cristianos: lo cual no es del caso ni concuerda con los elogios que de Cide Hamete se hacen en otros lugares, llamándole *sabio, alentado, prudentísimo, celebrísimo y flor de los historiadores.*” (Clemencín, 143n2). Trans. “Cervantes concluded calling him a dog, a vulgar taunt that Muslims and Christians mutually tended to nickname each other with: that which does not agree with the praises made of Cide Hamete in other places, calling him *wise, animated, very prudent, celebrated, and flower of the historians*” (my own translation).

<sup>22</sup> Trans. “Cide Hamete Benengeli was a very careful historian, and very accurate in all things, as can be clearly seen in the details he relates to us, for although they are trivial and inconsequential, he does not attempt to pass over them in silence; his example could be followed by solemn historians” (Grossman, 112)

historian” and “accurate” contrast with the original introduction to Benengeli; they emphasize his dedication to the truth, whereas he was initially portrayed as inherently untruthful. Additionally, the readers’ first exposure to Benengeli suggest that he has likely “given us too little”, or intentionally left details out. The contrast between this accusation and the actual reliability of Cide Hamete Benengeli completely negates Cervantes’ original statements about the Arab, emphasizing that the tensions between Christians and Muslims were overstated and unfounded, and that Benengeli is actually a trustworthy source. Finally, Cervantes actually uses this opportunity to mock himself a bit, which is yet another example of his play on authorial responsibility. He refers to Benengeli here as “Cide *Mahamete* Benengeli,” (my own italicization) which is different from the original “Cide Hamete Benengeli.” Even though this subtle difference may not appear to be much, it comes at a time when Cervantes is appreciating Benengeli’s dedication to accurately depicting the little details. By changing the name of the author, Cervantes humorously implies that perhaps he is the one who is inaccurate in his recounting of the tale. Francisco Rico even notes this change in one of his footnotes, implying that it was likely intentional on Cervantes’ part. By ironically replacing his previous criticisms of the Muslim historian with commendations, and by making fun of his own historical (in)accuracy, Cervantes demonstrates that the vilification of Muslims is undeserved, and reduces the social tension between Christians and Muslims.

Later on, Cervantes uses Cide Hamete’s character to deliver a direct message about making fun of other people, expressing that it is distasteful and reflects poorly on the mocker. Despite Cervantes’ original unfavorable depiction of Benengeli, he eventually establishes Benengeli as a reliable historian, which reflects poorly on Cervantes for jumping to conclusions and making crude jokes about the Arab historian being a deceitful dog. In the second volume of

the text, Cervantes inserts “Cide Hamete’s” opinion about this sort of mockery, writing, “Y dice más Cide Hamete: que tiene para sí ser tan locos los burladores como los burlados y que no estaban los duques dos dedos de parecer tontos, pues tanto ahínco ponían en burlarse de dos tontos”<sup>23</sup> (II, 70; 1303). Here, Cervantes is referring to a situation where a duke and a duchess found Don Quixote’s and Sancho Panza’s delusions so laughable that they decided to make fun of Quixote and Panza by treating them like actual knight-errants. The parallel structure used in “tan locos **los burladores** como **los burlados**” (“the jokesters are as crazy as the joke-ees”<sup>24</sup>) and in “parecer **tontos**... de dos **tontos**” (“seeming like fools... of two fools”) highlights the fact that the duke and duchess are just as ridiculous as Quixote and Panza because they decided to stoop so low as to heckle them. What’s more, citing this as Cide Hamete Benengeli’s opinion, as opposed to Cervantes’ own thoughts, draws the reader’s attention to Cervantes’ original misjudgment of Benengeli, and draws religion back into the picture. Cervantes conveys the message that making fun of anybody in such an explicit way is distasteful, and by referencing this as Benengeli’s opinion, Cervantes makes it clear that this message is particularly relevant for religious ridicule. This instance emphasizes that not only does harassing people because of their religion, madness, or any other basis increase the social distance between the two groups, it also holds negative consequences for the harasser.

### ***The Captive Captain and The Renegade***

Cervantes repeats this motif of jumping to negative conclusions about a Muslim character and then going back on them with another character in the text: the renegade. A renegade is a

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<sup>23</sup> Trans. “Cide Hamete goes on to say that in his opinion the deceivers are as mad as the deceived, and that the duke and duchess came very close too seeming like fools since they went to such lengths to deceive two fools” (Grossman, 914)

<sup>24</sup> These are my own translations. The succinctness and parallel structure is more easily conveyable in Spanish than in English.

person who was previously Christian, but converted to Islam. When a Captain describes his experience escaping from captivity, he recounts that he employed a Muslim renegade to translate documents that were important for his escape. Cervantes plays with narratorial authorship at this point: The Captive Captain's story is remarkably similar to Cervantes' own experience with captivity at the hands of Barbary pirates. Just like Cervantes, the Captive Captain went to Naples, Italy and enlisted in the Venetian fleet in Messina. As Garcés points out in her book, "Such alliance between life and work, between traumatic knowledge and literary creation, pressures me to examine the limit between autobiography and fiction in Cervantes, especially in his most famous autobiographical piece, *La historia del cautivo* [*The Captive's Tale*], interpolated in *Don Quijote*, Part I" (Garcés, 183). These similarities are certainly more than a coincidence: During the Captive Captain's tale, the Captain says, "Sólo libró bien con [mi amo] un soldado español llamado tal de Saavedra"<sup>25</sup> (Cervantes, I, 40; 507). Cervantes' full name is actually Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, making this a meta-literary moment because Cervantes writes himself into the story, and draws an explicit connection between the Captive Captain's narrative and his own experience with captivity. By using this secondary narrator to tell *The Captive's Tale*, Cervantes plays with his authorial responsibility: should he be held more accountable for the content of the tale because the narrator is so similar to himself, or should be held less accountable because he is not the direct narrator of the story? In either case, the Captain (and perhaps Cervantes) expresses an original suspicion towards the Muslim renegade, which eventually switches into complete and utter trust. While Cervantes may not hold as much authorial responsibility of this message as a result of the second narrator, the Captive Captain's similarities to Cervantes offer the possibility

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<sup>25</sup> Trans. "The only one who held his own with [my master] was a Spanish soldier named something de Saavedra" (Grossman, 344)

that Cervantes supports a reevaluation of perceived social tensions between Christians and Muslims.

Originally, the Captain depicts the renegade as untrustworthy and manipulative because of his willingness to desert Christianity. The Captive Captain says, “En fin, yo me determine de fiarme de un renegade, natural de Murcia, que se había dado por grande amigo mío... Algunos hay que procuran estas fees con Buena intención; otros se sirven dellas acaso de industria: que viniendo a robar a tierra de cristianos”<sup>26</sup> (I, 40; 510). The phrases “finally I decided to trust” and “claimed to be a great friend of mine” emphasize the Captain’s hesitations in trusting the renegade, and suggest that the renegade is disreputable and is only trying to brownnose the Captain so that he will sign documents attesting that the renegade should be allowed to return to Christian lands and culture<sup>27</sup>. Additionally, the phrase “plunder Christian lands” heavily suggests that the renegade would become aggressive or violent towards Christians, which is unfounded based on the Captain’s interactions with the renegade. The tension here arises from the fact that the Captain would need to have faith both in the renegade’s translation and in his loyalty to the Christian captives, but religious clashes inhibit the Captain from doing so.

Subsequently, the Captain’s eventual decision to allow the renegade to translate the letter from Arabic into Castilian represents a transcendence of both linguistic and religious boundaries. The Captive Captain explains that the renegade said “que él aventuraría su vida por nuestra libertad... de guardarnos lealtad y secreto en todo cuanto quisiésemos descubrirle... venimos en

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<sup>26</sup> Trans. “Finally I decided to trust a renegade, a native of Murcia, who claimed to be a great friend of mine... Some obtain these declarations with good intentions; others use them as a possible defense when they come to plunder Christian lands” (Grossman, 346).

<sup>27</sup> “fees” (Span.) or “declarations” (Eng.) refer to documents that were typically signed by Christians to advocate for renegade Muslims to be reinstated into Christianity.

declararle la verdad del caso, y, así, le dimos cuenta de todo, sin encubrirle nada”<sup>28</sup> (I, 40; 512).

Within less than a two-page span of the novel, the Captive Captain has gone from distrusting the renegade to placing complete and utter faith in him. Significant cultural implications result from the simple action of allowing the renegade to translate the written text because it symbolizes a display of deeper trust. Cervantes confirms that this change of heart was justified when he underlines the significant role that the renegade played in helping the Captain escape, writing, “No se pasaron quince días, cuando ya nuestro renegado tenía comprada una muy Buena barca, capaz de más de treinta personas; y para asegurar su hecho y dalle color, quiso hacer, como hizo, un viaje a un lugar que se llamaba Sargel”<sup>29</sup> (I, 40; 517). The Captain’s initial distrust of the renegade is juxtaposed with the renegade’s kindness and helpfulness, demonstrating that it is unjust to presume that non-Christians would be purposefully fraudulent.

Even though this story comes from a secondary narrator, a parallel structure is noticeable with the depictions of the renegade and Cide Hamete Benengeli; in both cases the Muslim characters are criticized and slandered, only for those original accusations to be later completely disproved. Both Cervantes and the secondary narrator employ the structure of shifting our thinking from something high-stress (“this Muslim person is deceitful and a bad person”) to something low-stress (“oh, it turns out he was an extremely reliable person and exceeded all expectations”), which follows Freud’s Relief Theory, and presents this incongruity as a humorous critique of the social tension between Christians and Muslims. The religious

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<sup>28</sup> Trans. “he would risk his life for our freedom... that he would be loyal to us and keep secret anything we wished to tell him... we agreed to tell him the truth, and so we revealed everything to him, hiding nothing” (Grossman, 347-348).

<sup>29</sup> Trans. “Before two weeks had passed, our renegade bought a very good boat with room for more than thirty people, and to guarantee the success of his plan and lend it credibility, he wanted to sail to a town called Sargel...” (Grossman, 352).

suppression of the time may have pushed Cervantes to invent a secondary narrator to tell a tale that appears remarkably similar to his own experience: the secondary narrator acts as a buffer that reduces Cervantes' authorial responsibility. But, regardless of the narrator, the message remains the same: the Muslim characters end up being honest and reliable despite the original accusations against them, showing that the tension between the two religious groups was unwarranted.

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### ***Conclusion***

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In each of these works, the respective authors play with authorial responsibility to deliver religious social commentaries. Through the meta-literary creation of fictional secondary authors and narrators, both Chaucer and Cervantes are able to place buffers between the content of their texts and their accountability for that content. However, the authors use this same structure to achieve different objectives: Chaucer does so to create tension and division within the church, whereas Cervantes attempts to reduce the social tension between Christians and Muslims. The historical contexts of each of these works played a role in determining the need for reduced authorial responsibility. Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales* during a time of religious revolution that was meant to empower the people by giving them direct access to the bible. So, while his sections of the General Prologue are somewhat tame (or can at least be argued to be tame), the tales narrated by other pilgrims are crude, lewd, bawdy, and overall hilarious. On the other hand, Cervantes wrote during a time of heavy censorship<sup>30</sup>, driving his satirical humor to be much more subtle in nature than Chaucer's. This pushes us to ask the question: How does a text's historical moment influence authorial responsibility, acceptable objects of mockery, and

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<sup>30</sup> Sections of *Don Quixote* actually ended up being replaced in the second edition (Grossman, 206n1) due to censorship by the Portuguese Inquisition in 1624 (Rico, 319n12).

delivery of social commentary? As an avenue of future research, I might suggest a study that investigates ways in which these two texts have been in conversation with each other. For example, this could examine what knowledge Cervantes had of Chaucer's meta-literary convention of establishing fictional secondary narrators, and explore the historical factors that might have pushed Cervantes to adopt the same structure with a different purpose. By investigating these texts in conversation with each other, as opposed to comparing a single convention, we might come to understand meta-literature not only as a way to remove authorial responsibility, but as a way to connect texts across distinct historical moments.

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