

The Medieval Period, Day Ten

Our Middle English Pilgrimage

Website Use Reminder

Basic Requirements:

1 posting that contributes to personal/class learning

1 relevant comment on another student's post

Due before Thanksgiving (Th Nov 23)

What *Gawain* taught us...

Not just a good story but an exploration of...

- How to look at word choice across a text

“from his gorge to his **girdle** so great and so square” (7.9)

“save your **blood** in my body I boast of no virtue” (16.15) “in his face the **blood** did flame...when he showed it to his shame” (100.24-6)

- How to look at the impact of alliteration on meaning

“right **gl**ad is the **gr**ass that **g**rows in the open” (23.3) “all **gr**ey is the **gr**ass that **g**reen was before” (23.12)

- How to look at the influence of voice and sensory appeal

“marvels have by men been **seen**” (2.4) “if you will listen... I have **heard**” (2.11)

that loveliest lady there
on them **gl**anced with **ey**es of grey
that he found ever one more fair
in sooth no man might say. (4.22-3)

...short body and thick **w**aist
with bulging **b**uttocks spread;
more delicious to the **t**aste
was the one she by her led. (39.39-42)

- How to consider the importance of narrative unit divisions

...this **c**ourt

To consult the **k**nights draw near,
And this plan they all support;
The **k**ing with crown to clear,
And give **G**awain the sport. (16.19-23)

A Middle English Pilgrimage!



- Let's finish reading the first 22 lines of the *Canterbury Tales* out loud together.

Local Events:

The Rap *Canterbury Tales*

5pm Oct 10
Thompson Room
Barker Center
Harvard College

8:30pm October 12
Jewett Auditorium
Wellesley College



The *Canterbury Tales*



Manuscript form:

- more than 80 mss of fragments
- the Ellesmere MS (left) is one of the earliest surviving copies

Verse form

of the *General Prologue*:

- iambic pentameter, couplets

Pilgrim Portraits



Chaucer



Prioress



Pardoner



Franklin



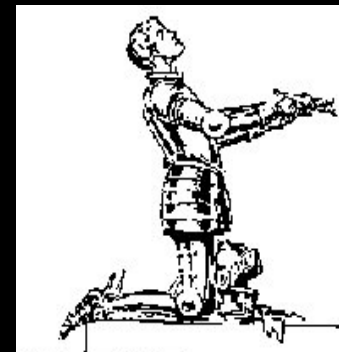
Wife of Bath

Chaucer's Knight, early 20th c.

“...the Romance of the knights of the Middle Ages has its attraction for all boys and has its appeal to their moral sense. Their Code of Chivalry included Honour, Self-discipline, Courtesy, Courage, Selfless sense of Duty and Service, and the guidance of Religion. These and other good attributes would be readily accepted if embodied in a Law for Scouts.”

— Lord Baden-Powell, *Lessons from the Varsity of Life* (1933)
Chapter 10, part 1.

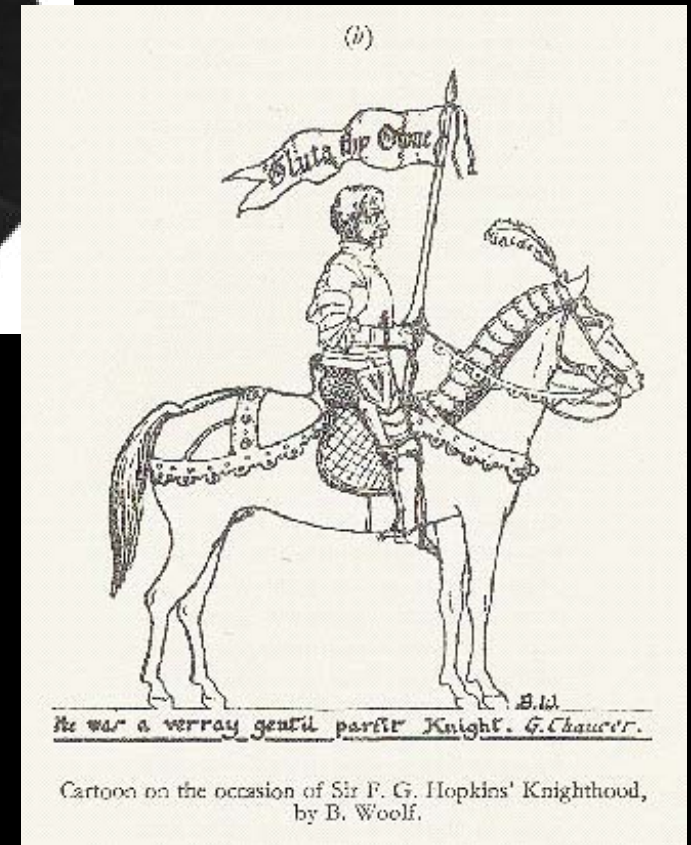
Baden-Powell at the second Boy Scout Camp meeting, 1909



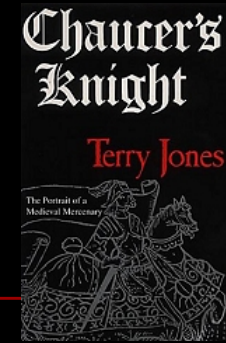
"He was a verray parfit
gentil knight" --
Chaucer

Chaucer's Knight, mid-20th c.

- Frederick Gowland Hopkins (1861-1947) discovered and proved the existence of 'accessory food factors' (now known as vitamins), and advocated biochemistry as an academic discipline
- When Hopkins was knighted in 1925, *Brighter Biochemistry* magazine recognized the occasion by depicting him as Chaucer's "verray gentil parfit Knight"; his banner, "Gluta thy owne", gestured to his work on the functions of glutathione.



Chaucer's Knight, late 20th/early 21st c.



Terry Jones argues “it would not be surprising . . . if Chaucer had chosen the portrait of such a knight as the centre-pin for his satire on the society of his day” (33-37).

- Notes that Chaucer's Knight “is not endowed with any physical beauty or grace; there is no mention of any family background, no coat-of-arms, no shield, no belt, no manorial estates” (2-4).
- Argues for negative connotations of “ryden out”(45) and “prys”(67)
- Argues for a negative medieval view of Christian in-fighting, and the named battles, especially the siege of Alexandria.



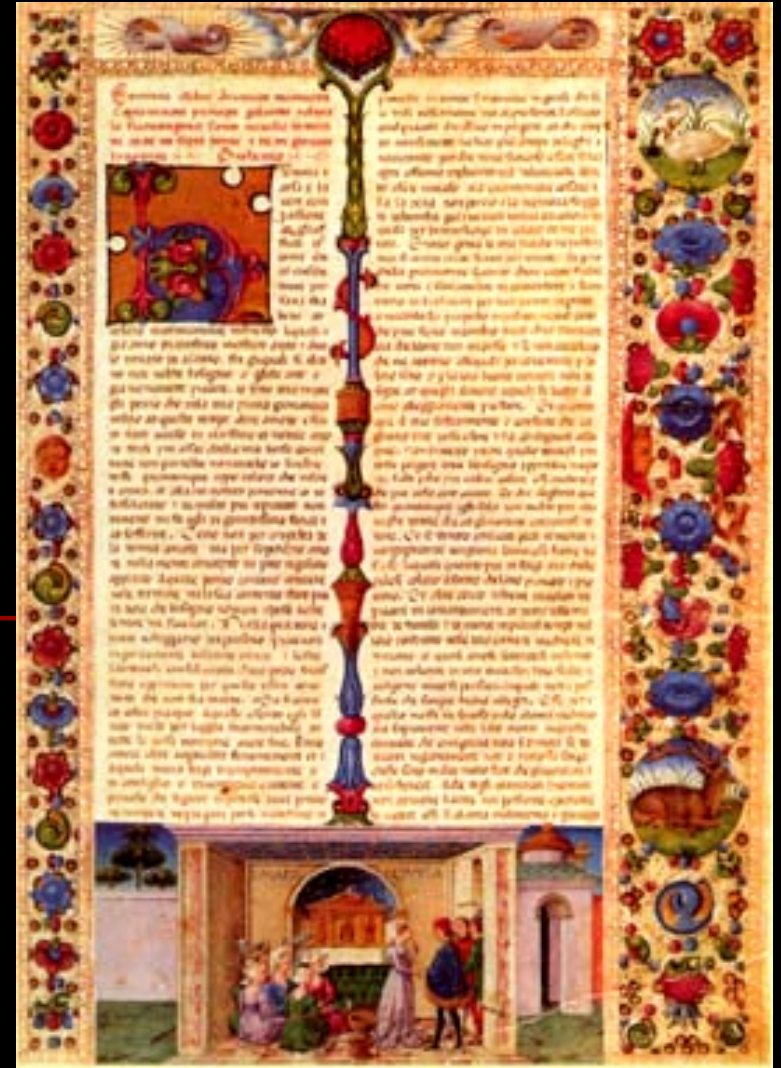
“Every age sort of has its own history. History is really the stories that we retell to ourselves to make them relevant to every age. So we put our own values and our own spin on it.”

—“An Interview with Terry Jones,” *IGN* (2004) 2.

—*Chaucer's Knight: A Portrait of a Medieval Mercenary*. London: Weidenfeld, 1980.

Il Decameron

A contemporary contrast
to the *Canterbury Tales*?



Giovanni Boccaccio, 1313-1375

- Chaucer rewrites a number of the stories found Boccaccio's Latin and Italian poems.
- One of these poems, the *Decameron* [a name coined from Greek meaning 'ten days'], is most like the *Canterbury Tales* in being a tale collection.
- But there are significant differences...

Il Decameron

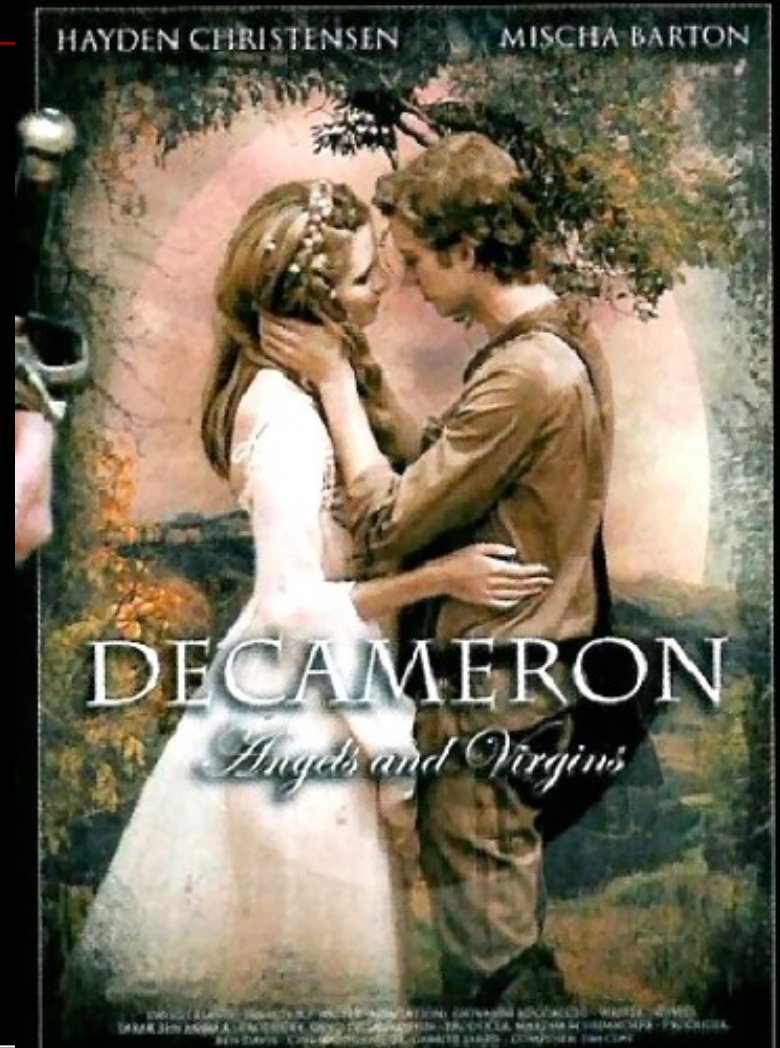
- Boccaccio's 10 tale-telling characters are all young, aristocratic, beautiful, and in love.
- The setting is not a pilgrimage but a plague refuge.
- There is a stricter ordering of the tales.
- The reason for the tale-telling is pleasure and ease.
- The relation of the author to the characters in introducing their story is different.

Il Decameron: Guilty Pleasures (2007)



Mischa Barton and Hayden Christensen
star in a new film based on the *Decameron*.
Coming Soon...

American Title: *Angels and Virgins*



Reason for Tale-Telling

“If you were to follow my advice, this hotter part of the day would be spent, not in playing games (which inevitably bring anxiety to one of the players, without offering very much pleasure either to his opponent or to the spectators), but in telling stories—an activity that may afford some amusement both to the narrator and to the company at large. By the time each one of you has narrated a little tale of his own or her own, the sun will be setting, the heat will have abated, and we shall be able to go and amuse ourselves wherever you choose. Let us then if the idea appeals to you, carry this proposal of mine into effect. But I am willing to follow your own wishes in this matter, and if you disagree with my suggestion, let us all go and occupy our time in whatever way we please until the hours of vespers” [trans. G. H. Williams, 23]

Author introduces Characters

“One Tuesday morning (or so I was told by a person whose word can be trusted) seven young ladies... I could tell you their actual names, but refrain from doing so for a good reason, namely that I would not want any of them to feel embarrassed, at any time in the future, on account of the ensuing stories, all of which they either listened to or narrated themselves...”
[trans. G. H. McWilliam, 13]

The Ending...

according to the characters

“lest aught conducive to tedium should arise from a custom too long established, and lest, by protracting our stay, we should cause evil tongues to start wagging, I now think it proper since we have all in turn had our share of the honour still invested in me, that with your consent we should return whence we came. If, moreover, you consider the matter carefully, our company being known to various others hereabouts, our numbers could increase in a such a way as to destroy all our pleasure. And so, if my advice should command your approval...”

[trans. G. H. McWilliam, 796]

The Ending...

according to the author

“Noble young ladies, for whose solace I undertook this protracted labor, I believe...those objectives which I set forth at the beginning of the present work have now been fully achieved... the time has come for me to rest my pen and weary hand. Before conceding this repose, however, since I am fully aware that these tales of mine are no less immune from criticism than any of the other things in this world...I propose briefly to reply to certain trifling objections which...may have possibly arisen in the minds of my readers, including one or two of yourselves...”

[trans. G. H. McWilliam, 796]

Next:

The Ending of the *Canterbury Tales*...

- Read and Read Aloud!
- Practice the kind of textual analysis explored in your group discussion of *Sir Gawain*
- Think about the different perspectives presented in the two essays assigned: one by the historian, Du Boulay, one by a literary critic, Donaldson. [These essays are found in the back of your edition.]