

The Medieval Period, Day Twelve



“Trust me, I’m lying”

Term Clarifications

- Orthography

- Enallage

- “pity that busy monster...manunkind”

- Paleography/Codicology

- Linguistics, Morphology

What is *Chaucer*?



You read two essays about ‘Chaucer’ (Pilgrim, Poet)
by

- E. Talbot Donaldson and
- Barbara Nolan.

How are their perspectives different?

How might each change the way you read ‘Chaucer’?

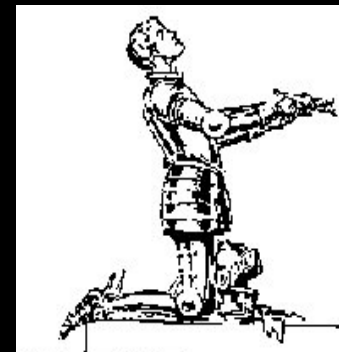
How does your conception of ‘Chaucer’ affect the way
you interpret his characters?

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.

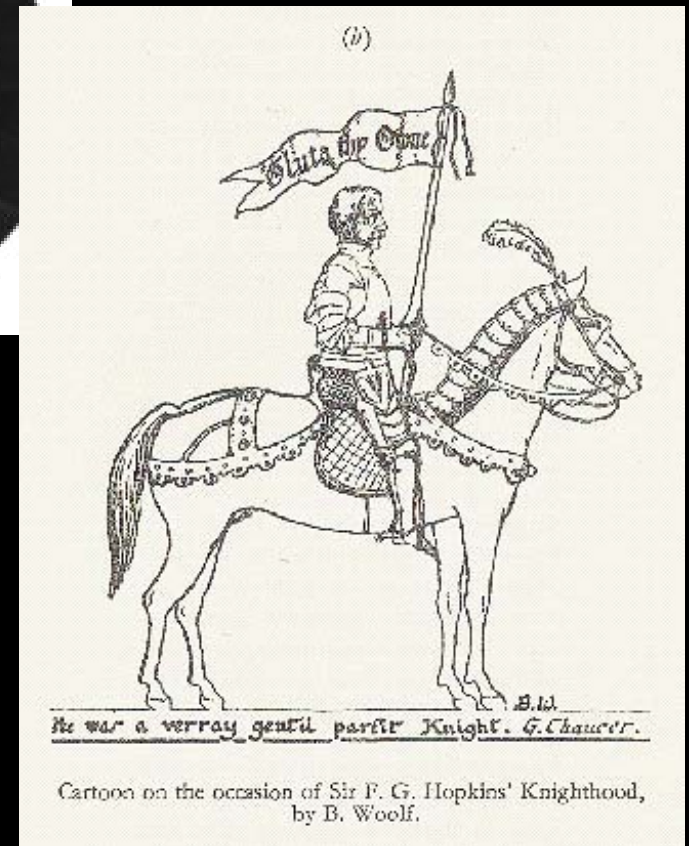
Baden-Powell at the second Boy Scout Camp meeting, 1909



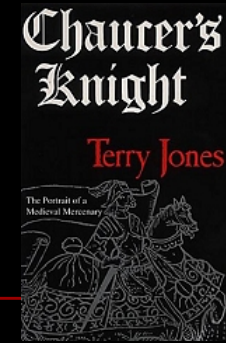
"He was a verray parfit
gentil knight" --
Chaucer

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.

Vicious Morality?

“For though myself be a ful vicious man, / A
moral tale yet I yow telle kan” (PardPro
459-60)

“Thus spitte I out my venym under hewe / Of
hoolynesse, to semen hooly and trewe”
(PardPro 421-2)



389 By this gaude have I wonne, yeer by yeer,
"By this trick have I won, year after year,
390 An hundred mark sith I was pardoner.
An hundred marks since I was pardoner.
391 I stonde lyk a clerk in my pulpet,
I stand like a clerk in my pulpit,
392 And whan the lewed people is down yset,
And when the ignorant people are set down,
393 I preche so as ye han herd bifoore
I preach as you have heard before
394 And telle an hundred false japes moore.
And tell a hundred more false tales.
395 Thanne peyne I me to strecche forth the nekke,
Then I take pains to stretch forth the neck,
396 And est and west upon the peple I bekke,
And east and west upon the people I nod,
397 As dooth a dowve sittynge on a berne.
As does a dove sitting on a barn.
398 Myne handes and my tonge goon so yerne
My hands and my tongue go so quickly
399 That it is joye to se my bisynesse.
That it is joy to see my business.
400 Of avarice and of swich cursednesse
Of avarice and of such cursednesse
401 Is al my prechyng, for to make hem free
Is all my preaching, to make them generous
402 To yeven hir pens, and namely unto me.
To give their pennies, and namely unto me.
403 For myn entente is nat but for to wynne,
For my intention is only to make a profit,
404 And nothyng for correccioun of synne.
And not at all for correction of sin.

Sexuality/Textuality

“Com hider love to me”
“bar to hym a stif burdon”
“geldyng or a mare”
(GP 672, 673, 692)

Caroline Dinshaw (the nature of language)

The Pardoner “appears to be a eunuch, either congenital or castrated... The Pardoner surrounds himself with objects—relics, sealed documents, even language, regarded as a kind of object—that he substitutes for his own lacking parts...they are fakes, and he tells us so [but] he holds on to the belief that they can make him whole, part of the body of pilgrims, and of the larger body of Christians...he exposes everyone’s radical longing for completeness” (568).

Monica McAlpine (mechanisms of social acceptance)

The narrator suggests “that the Pardoner is either a nonman, that is, a eunuch, or a woman-man, a homosexual... by exploiting the potential for self-deceit in those he imagines condemn him, the Pardoner...leads them away for the legitimate sacrament...At the same time, the Pardoner constantly enacts in reverse the scene of absolution he longs for...often arousing in his audience true contrition...all the while hoping that the forgiveness he dispenses will magically flow back to cleanse himself” (14-16). “The vernicle asserts the dignity of the Pardoner, whatever his sexual status, as part of Christ” (19).

Next Class: The Pardoner's Tale

- Look closely at lines 692-738 and compare the different attitudes towards death exhibited by the rioters and the Old Man.
- Is the tale a 'moral' tale? Does the Pardoner's preceding self-presentation enter into the tale at all?
- How does the conclusion of the tale and pilgrims' response affect the way you understand the tale?