# The Medieval Period, Day Fifteen

*Performative Language*

October 24, 2006
For class use only

# What is the history of late medieval friars?

6th c. the *Rule of St. Benedict*, instructions on how to live a holy contemplative life, become the basis of the Benedictine Order. The Benedictines become known as monks; the order as a monastic order.

11th c. The Cistercian Order (named for the location of the monastery where the practice originated) is formed by monks who seek to return to literal adherence to the rule of Benedict, especially returning to manual labor.

13th c. At this time, a radically new kind of religious orders begins to appear: these become known as the mendicant, or begging, religious orders and including the Dominican (named for St. Dominic) and Franciscan (named for St. Francis) Orders. From the 13th to 15th centuries, members of these orders were not allowed to acquire and possess any kind of property and were not expected to keep together apart from the world within a monastery but rather go out into the world and minister to others.
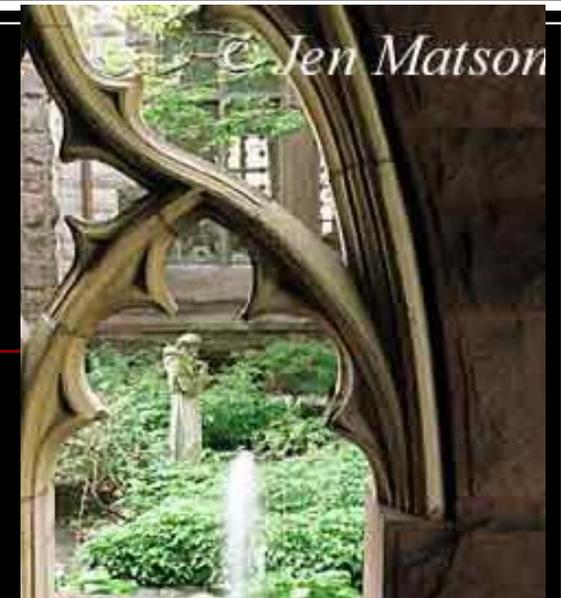
The garden of St. Francis in Trinity Church, at the heart of downtown Boston

# Friar vs. Summoner



A friar (from *frere,* French for 'brother') was part of a fraternal order, specifically a 'mendicant' (begging) order.

A summoner (one who delivered summons to the ecclesiastical court) was part of the secular clergy, the designation for church officers who lived in the regular world and dealt with lay people (people who have not taken religious offices).

The two compete with each other for their livelihoods, derived from the offerings and gifts and penances of lay people.

Two different hierarchies:
The Pope
↓
Minister of a fraternal order
↓
Friars

The Pope
↓
Cardinals
↓
Bishops
↓
Archdeacons
↓
Deacons
↓
Priests
↓
Summoners, canons, prebends, etc.
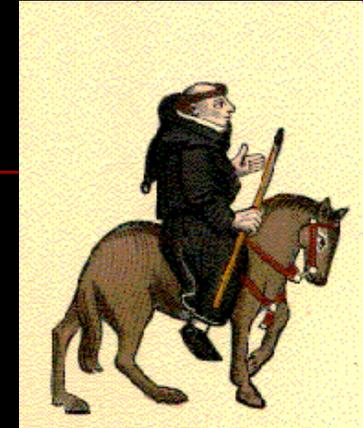
# The Friar's Tale

- The form of the friar's tale is probably best described as an *exemplum,* a simple narrative told for the purposes of serving as an example, either of what should or should not be done (the bounds of the genre contain quite a range of stories, like the pardoner's tale or the tale of Melibee).

- The story of the 'heart-felt curse' is relatively common (one other English example is reprinted at the back of your edition, p. 397). Chaucer adds a few features not found in other versions of this exemplum, however: the detailed characterization, the complex use of dialogue, the concern with academic vs. experiential knowledge, and the extra demonological lore.

When did you first realize the summoner's yeoman companion was demonic? What early clues are provided?

What do you make of the summoner's kidding of the devil?

How is academic knowledge compared to experiential knowledge in this tale?

What kind of power does language have?

# "By Seinte Anne!" (FrT 1613)

# Performative Language

"Utterances can be found…such that

A. they do not 'describe' or 'report' or constate anything at all, are not 'true or false'; and

B. the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as, or as 'just', saying something…" (257)

"Can saying make it so?" (259)

# Next Class:  Mid-Term Exam

- Be here on time to take the exam!

- The syllabus does not schedule any reading or written assignments to do for Thursday so you can use this time to prepare for your mid-term.