

The Medieval Period, Day Twenty-Six

The Manuscript and the Modern

got medieval?



This man is Geoffrey Chaucer. He drank milk. Sometimes.

He helped to build the Tower of London.

It still stands.

He was granted a tonel (252 gallons) of wine each year for life by two kings.

It still shows.

He first made writing in English cool.

It still is.

Chaucer. Still strong after 600 years. Find out why.

ENGLISH 381: CHAUCER, Spring '07
MWF at 11:30 am *or* MW at 5:30 pm

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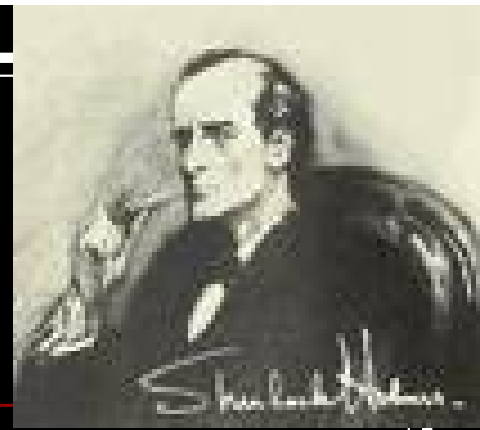
Your second essay is NOT due today.

- Your second essay is due Tu Dec. 12 (our last day of class)
- Do please meet with me / email me ASAP if you have questions about the second essay, feedback from the first essay or other written or in-class exercises.
- If you have not yet picked up your first essay DO SO right after class. Pick up your film exercises, too!
- You will be able to pick up the second essay from me in my office in the hour *before* our final exam (10:30-11:30 am Mon Dec. 18). If you want your essay returned and are not sure you can make this pick-up time, give me a stamped self-addressed envelope with the essay so I can mail it to you.

In the beginning...

- What is the importance of the fictitious prologue and its manuscript claims? Does this resemble anything in the texts we have read? Eco has said, in explanation, “books always speak of other books, and every story tells a story that has already been told” (511-2).
- What is the significance of the narrator? His age(s)? His style? “Adso’s narrative style is based on that rhetorical device called preterition or paralepsis, or ‘passing over’ ” (519).
- What about the structure of the novel divided into the days of one week by the medieval hours of prayer? Does this resemble anything in the texts we have read?
- What happens? Were the first 100 pages a kind of penitence?

In the Name of the Rose



- Published in 1980, the novel was such a hit that a film version was made in 1986, starring Sean Connery and Christian Slater.
- What happens?
 - “Naturally, a Manuscript” invents a history for the story. The “Prologue” introduces the narrator Adso, a young Benedictine monk, the scribe and disciple of a Franciscan, William of Baskerville. Both the name and the description of William suggest the best known fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes:
 - “His very person and appearance were such as to strike the attention of the most casual observer...In height he was rather over six feet, and so excessively lean that he seemed to be considerably taller. His eyes were sharp and piercing, save during those intervals of torpor to which I have alluded; and his thin, hawk-like nose gave his whole expression an air of alertness and decision. His chin, too, had the prominence and squareness which mark the man of determination”
 - Dr. Watson’s first description of Sherlock in Arthur Conan Doyle’s *A Study in Scarlet*, compare with William’s description on page 15.

The First Day



- The differing logics of William and Adso appear in the matter of the horse
- The abbot Abo tells William of the mysterious death of Adelmo, asking him to investigate and explaining the hidden nature of the library
- Adso is awed by the church, where he and William meet Salvatore and Ubertino. Then Severinus gives them a tour of the garden and the Aedificium. The librarian Malachi introduces them to many monks. The old blind monk Jorge of Burgos rebukes those who laugh. The Greek scholar Venantius reminds Jorge of a debate on the subject with Adelmo, Benno, and Berengar, in the presence of Malachi—Berengar breaks off the reminder.
- William discusses the making of glasses and other sciences with the glazier Nicholas, and later advances a theory of Adelmo's suicide to Adso. They have dinner at the Abbot's table and observe a fork and have further discussions with Jorge.
- What does Jorge say when introduced to Adso (83)?



The Second Day

Venantius is found dead upside down in the vat of pig's blood. William investigates, Adso discovers the track in the snow leading from the Aedificium. William asks Severinus about poisons, then questions Benno, who suggests the library is the key, and Berengar, who confesses to a secret encounter with Adelmo before his death.

- William and Adso see the cook and Salvatore fight, and listen to Aymaro speak bitterly about the power relations in the abbey and between the abbey and the people. William and Adso then return to the scriptorium, William again discusses laughter with Jorge, then asks that Venantius's work desk be untouched while he slips out to meet with Benno.
- Benno complains about the restricted access to the library, and suggests that Adelmo traded sexual favors with Berengar for access to library secrets, then confessed to Jorge, then entered the church, followed by Venantius. William speculates that Venantius discovered a secret from Adelmo which somehow led to his death.
- The meeting with the abbot reveals the purpose of William's mission—to set up a meeting between papal representatives and Michael of Cesena, who represents the Franciscans and the Emperor.
- William is again frustrated in his desire to search Venantius's desk and he determines to enter the library at night. The oldest monk, Alinardo, reveals that the library is a labyrinth and one can enter from the ossarium (bone house); he also speaks of the seven trumpets of the last judgment.
- William and Adso enter at night. They discover a book is missing from Venantius's desk leaving behind only a mysterious page, written on with heat-revealed ink—but William's glasses are stolen by a mysterious figure they are unable to catch or pursue. They wander through the labyrinth library and discover some of its tricks. They emerge to hear that Berengar has disappeared.

The Third Day



- Adso talks with Salvatore, feels confused, discusses the subject of heresy with William, and finds out William has cracked the coded message on the manuscript page, despite the delay in forging new glasses.
- The abbot tells them that Bernard Gui is the man coming with soldiers to defend the pope's interests in the meeting with Michael of Cesena. William and Adso create a map of the library. Adso asks for food from Salvatore and then asks Ubertino about the mysterious heretic Fra Dolcino. He sneaks into the scriptorium to read more about the heresy, then recalls seeing a heretic named Michael burned to death. He rushes down to the refectory in the grip of strong emotions and finds a village woman there. He has sex with her and describes the experience in biblical language, some of the images being the same used to describe his memory of Michael's burning. He awakens to find the woman has gone and left behind a heart wrapped up in linen—he faints.
- William revives Adso, who confesses. William logically points out that the heart belonged to an animal and that the woman probably had an arrangement to receive kitchen scraps from the cellarer Remigio in exchange for sexual favors. Alinardo babbles more about apocalyptic revelations and the destruction by water. William and Adso search the baths and discover Berengar's body.

Major themes of the *Name of the Rose*

- Vernacular vs. Latin
- Knowledge as a commodity vs. Knowledge as sacred
- The nature of knowledge (epistemology) and of signs (semiotics), in particular the nature of history and of science
- The role of book production and illustration (the scriptorium)
- Classical Texts / Patristic and Ecclesiastic Texts
- The relationship of the Church and the Empire
- Heresy and Torture
- Beauty and Virtue

Eco on the medieval period

- “I wanted to become completely medieval and live in the Middle Ages as if that were my own period (and vice versa). But at the same time, with all my might, I wanted to create a type of reader who...would think he wanted nothing but what the text was offering him. A text is meant to be an experience of transformation for its reader” (524)

Next Class: Eco-ing the Past

- In the section at the back entitled “The Historical Novel,” Eco distinguishes three kinds of novels that engage with history:

The romance

The adventure novel

The ‘true’ historical novel

How do you think Eco’s work engages with history?

- We will discuss the end of the novel and its significance as a picture of the ‘medieval’ period in our penultimate class on Thursday.
- In our last class, next week, we will gather the second essays, complete course evaluations, and prepare for our final.

