The Medieval Period, Day Twenty-Seven

Eco-ing the Past

UMass Boston
English 401.1
Dr. Kamath

Cast of Characters

- Adso of Melk and William of Baskerville
- Bodies:

Adelmo

Venantius

Berengar

(Salvatore, unnamed girl, Remigio)

Severinus

Malachi

Abo

Jorge

- Others: Michael of Cesena, Ubertino, Bernard Gui, Benno, Alinardo, Nicholas
- Behind the scenes: Pope John XXII, Emperor Louis, Fra Dolcino, the heretic Michael
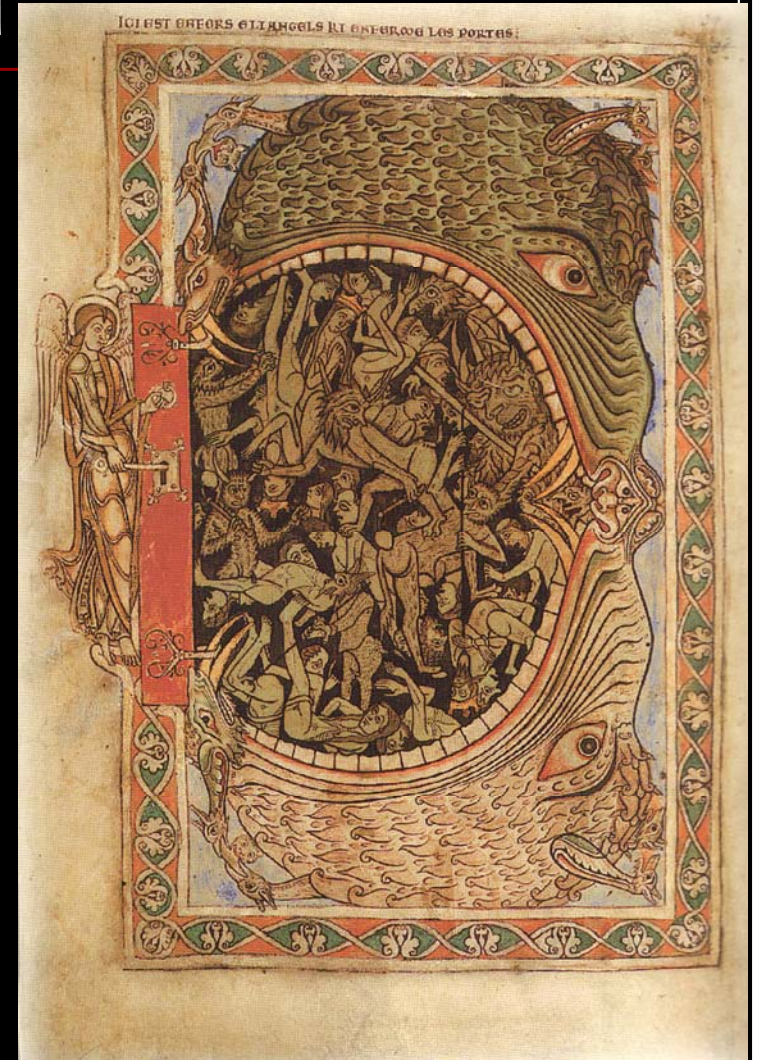- Texts as characters?

Coena Cyrpriani The Supper of Cyprianus

Aristotle's missing treatise on laughter

Jorge and Borges

- Jorge Luis Borges (1899 - 1986), influential Argentinian writer and long-time director of the Argentinian national library, although he had become blind

- "Everyone asks me why my Jorge, with his name, suggests Borges, and why Borges is so wicked. But I cannot say. I wanted a blind man who guarded a library (it seemed a good narrative idea to me), and library plus blind man can only equal Borges… [and] it was through Spanish commenatries and illumination that the Apocalypse influenced the entire Middle Ages…when I put Jorge in the library I did not yet know he was the murderer… characters are obliged to act according to the laws of the world in which they live" (515)

Mystery and History

- What did you think of the end of the text?

Eco claimed of his novel "this is a mystery in which very little is discovered and the detective is defeated" (525)

- " 'What a fool'

'Who?'

'I…I was convinced the series of crimes followed the sequence of the seven trumpets of the Apocalypse…I conceived of false pattern to interpret the moves of the guilty man, and the guilty man fell in with it" (469-70)

- "The author should die once he has finished writing. So as not to trouble the path of the text" (508).

The state of medieval studies?

- "A library made up of fragments, quotations, unfinished sentences, amputated stumps of books" (500)

- *"Stat rosa pristina nomine, nomina nuda tenemus"* (502)
"the ancient rose remains through its name; the naked name we have"

Borrowing from a 12th c. Benedictine poem *De contemptu mundi [In contempt of the world]*: "*Stat roma pristina nomine, nomina nuda tenemus*"

Eco "the rose is a symbolic figure so rich in meanings that by now it hardly has any meaning left" (506)

History and Mystery

- Three ways of narrating the past (533-4)

Romance

"it must only not take place here and now, and the here and now must not be mentioned…Romance is the story of an *elsewhere*"

Adventure Novel

"a 'real' past…with characters already found in the encyclopedia…in this ('real') picture the imaginary characters are introduced, though they display feelings that could also be attributed to characters of other periods"

Historical Novel

"events and characters are made up, yet they tell us things about … the period that history books have never told us so clearly"

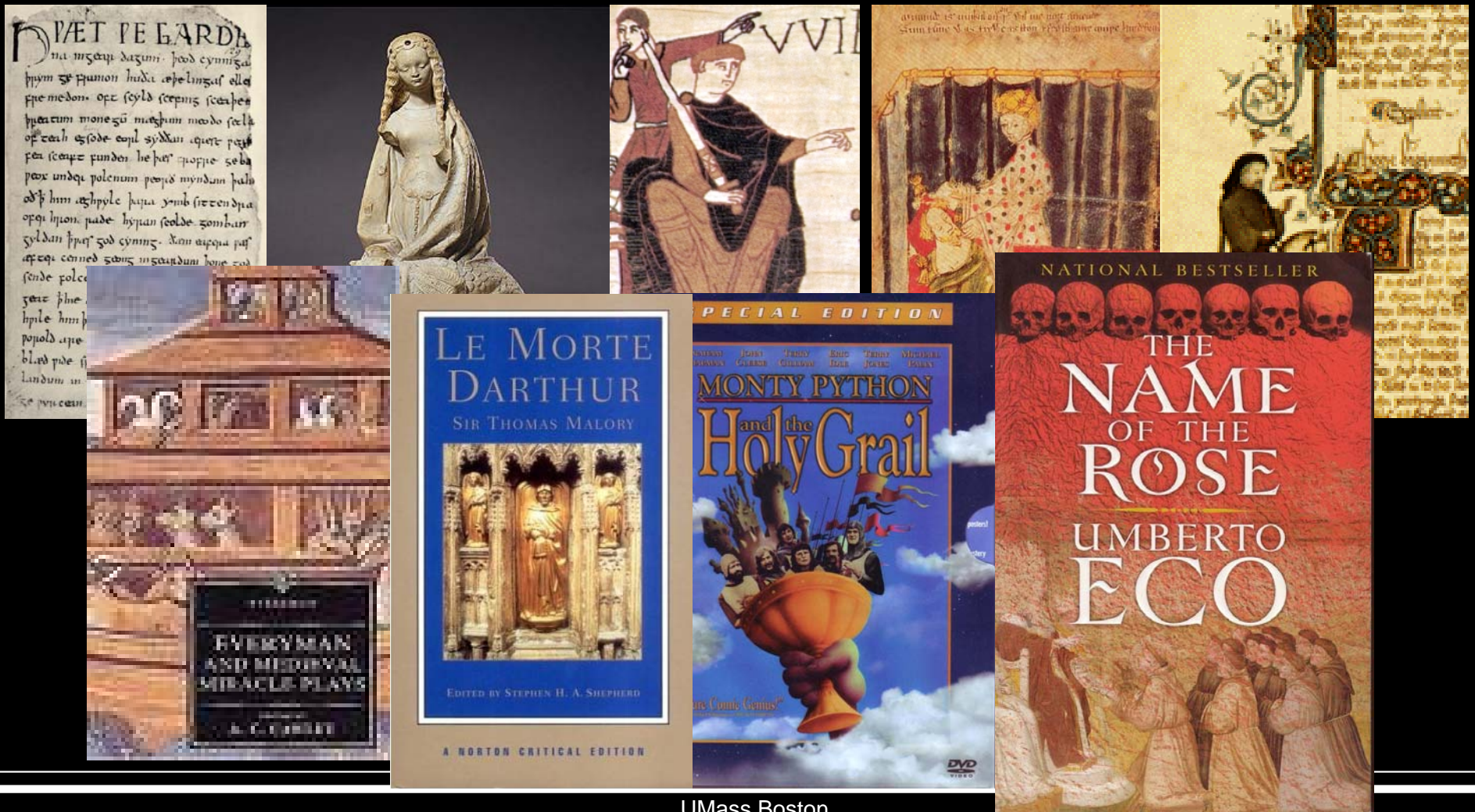# Major themes of the *Name of the Rose*

- Vernacular vs. Latin

- Knowledge as a commodity vs. knowledge as sacred

- The nature of knowledge (epistomology) 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

Significant Passages

- Which passages from Eco's work strike you as significant?
- Select a short passage (one line to one short paragraph) that seems significant.
- Present your passage to the class, explaining why this passage is especially significant (thematically, historically, theologically, or in terms of characterization, textual structure or style, gender, audience, authority, etc.—just pick one or two)
- Hint: This exercise will be very useful in exam preparation!
- Three passages discussed:

"We found the abbot in the church…engulfing the altar itself" (142)

"On August 16, 1968…together we sailed together up the Danube" (1)

"In vain…in that face shone all the bliss of creation" (278)

Next Class: Course Review!
Collect papers, Review for exam, Complete Course Evaluations