

Teaching Innocent's Legacy

Middle English Texts for Commoners

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As a teacher and scholar of Middle English literature, I am dogged by medieval damsels. By this I mean that when I meet new people — at social functions, say, or waiting at the bus stop — and they ask me what I do for a living, the damsels are usually not far in the offing: more than a few times, people unfamiliar with the Middle Ages have asked me if I teach about “the ladies with the pointy hats.” The knights at the Renaissance Faire tend to come up; once in a while someone will remember the infamous Miller of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. Students who enroll in my Middle English literature courses often have this same set of associations for the Middle Ages. It bears saying that there is nothing wrong with these associations in and of themselves — there are damsels in Middle English literature; while it always rankles me when people associate knights with the Renaissance Faire, an homage to the early modern era, there is no shortage of knights in medieval texts; and Chaucer’s drunken Miller is one of the most memorable characters in English literature. In fact, the Miller, knights, and damsels are some of the most abiding figures in medieval literature, in large part because they are present in some of the most tenaciously canonical texts of the period: Chaucer’s *Miller’s Prologue and Tale*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and selections from Malory’s *Morte Darthur* have been included in every edition of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* since its inception in 1962; they are also in the current editions of *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature* and *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*. So it is not so much that

people identify these figures with medieval literature that I see as problematic, but rather that these most enduring characters of the Middle Ages — two noble figures and another of lower status who is, of course, portrayed as ill-mannered — betray the undeniably elitist disposition of the canon of medieval English literature.

To be sure, social elitism has long defined not just the medieval portion of the literary canon but all of it, in both the English and American branches. In her seminal work *Silences*, Tillie Olsen (1965: 6, 264) calls the relationship between social status and literature “the great unexplained” and recognizes strictures of low social status as the most significant causes of “silences” in literary history — that is, of the absences of texts overlooked, not preserved, or unable to be written at all. Since the 1965 publication of *Silences*, increasing attention has been paid to texts featuring nonelite characters and themes in what has come to be known as “working-class literature,” first in special sections in literary anthologies (usually alongside other special sections, such as “women’s writing” or “Native American writing”) and then in independent collections, such as *Working Classics: Poems on Industrial Life* (Oresick and Coles 1991), *American Working-Class Literature: An Anthology* (Coles and Zandy 2007), and most recently, *Working Words: Punching the Clock and Kicking Out the Jams* (Liebler 2010). This work of expanding our understanding of literature beyond texts produced for and by those with more privileged social positions has focused exclusively on definitions of social status influenced by modern industrial labor, apparent in the uses of the term *working class* and permutations of it in the anthology titles above. Viewing texts through this lens, scholars have given special attention to recovering or preserving the voices of working-class writers, those silenced voices about which Olsen wrote.

It is thus not surprising that no anthology of working-class literature reaches so far back as to include medieval texts. The Middle Ages had a social category roughly equivalent to the modern working class — what Paul Strohm (2007: 202) has identified as the commons, a term he specifies “refers not to the parliamentary commons or the governing classes but to the ‘common people’ of the realm, the majority of its nonaristocratic residents” — but this is a large and diffuse identity category defined by more than just work. Too, not many of the commons could write, so their voices, by and large, remain silent. But literacy was a different affair in the Middle Ages than it is today, when we consider it an either/or kind of status — either one is literate or illiterate. It is most useful to think of literacy in the Middle Ages in terms of degrees: few commons could write, but at least some of them could read,

and likely all of them were read to (by a priest, friend, or family member). Significantly, the Middle Ages saw the production of the first texts in English written specifically for the “common people” or, as I will call them here, commoners, and even a few texts written by them. Though these texts may not qualify as “working-class literature,” they surely had commoners as their first audience, and they can disrupt the elitist slant of the canon of English literature by providing students an opportunity to explore more socially diverse themes and characters and by demonstrating that the nobility were not the only medieval consumers of texts. In this article, I briefly explain the origins and significance of these texts, describe some of the rewards and also some of the challenges of teaching them, and suggest ways to build a class session or unit focused on these texts into a literature course.

Innocent and His Legacy

Innocent III, pope from 1198 until his death in 1216, was ultimately responsible for the production of texts for commoners, though in an accidental kind of way. At the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, Innocent issued a decree that changed the way Christians made confession. This decree — known by its first few words in the original Latin, *Omnis utriusque sexus*, and also as the twenty-first canon (a term that, in this application, means official decree) — required all Christians who had reached “the age of reason” to make a private confession of their sins to a priest once a year.¹ To be sure, Innocent did not invent this mode of confession; scholars had been debating the finer points of confession for most of the twelfth century, and a form of confession called tariff penance, very like what Innocent mandated in his decree, was being practiced as early as the sixth century in Ireland. However, *compulsory* annual confession for *all* Christians was new, as were its implications: it required a basic knowledge of how to examine one’s conscience and make a confession, and it assumed a general comprehension of the faith. Christians may well have possessed such knowledge, but never before had they been called upon to demonstrate their faith in the way this form of confession required, and many needed help. Thus, Innocent’s decree made the individual Christian’s knowledge of faith a truly institutional concern. And while Innocent made no explicit order for the development of texts to support this new form of confession, such texts were produced out of need for the kinds of instruction and knowledge called for by the mode of confession he instituted.

In England, these texts were composed first in Latin, for priests to use to educate their congregations, but eventually also in English for the laity to digest without the assistance of their curates. A significant moment

in the history of these English works came in 1357, when John Thorseby, Archbishop of York, ordered the translation from Latin to English of a text known as Pecham's syllabus. Written in 1281 by John Pecham, Archbishop of Canterbury, Pecham's syllabus was essentially a lesson plan for priests to use to instruct lay people on the tenets of Christian belief. While the English version of the syllabus, known as Jon Gaytryge's sermon, was intended for use *as* a sermon (its vernacular assisting priests whose Latin was not up to snuff), it eventually circulated among the laity as well. What is more, though some Middle English religious texts existed before Gaytryge's sermon, many more appeared around the same time and increasingly after it. The result was an extensive corpus of Middle English religious works: the first written to help priests instruct their parishioners, and later ones addressing—and at times written by—more informed and spiritually engaged lay Christians. In several of my courses on early English literature, but especially in a course I teach titled “Medieval Popular Piety,” which focuses on Innocent's legacy, my students and I read widely from this expansive body of work: sermons, miracle stories, saints' lives, educational and devotional treatises, lyrics, and heterodox texts—a pretty representative sampling of Middle English writing, but one that takes us far afield of the canon in English literature. Only a handful of texts we read—Julian of Norwich's *Shewings*, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, *Piers Plowman*, and a couple cycle plays—are now canonical, and some of these would not have counted as canonical twenty or thirty years ago.

I consider all these works to be Innocent's legacy in England. I am not the first to identify a connection between such English texts and Innocent; though Leonard E. Boyle's primary interest is in the development of literature for priests initiated by Innocent's decree (indeed, he coined the generic name, *pastoralia*, for these texts), he also notes increased production of texts for the laity (Goering 2010: 7–19). In his article “The Fourth Lateran Council and Manuals of Popular Theology,” Boyle (1985: 38) provides a most useful diagram illustrating the breadth of texts inspired by Lateran IV. It is true that fairly broad criteria hold the texts representing Innocent's legacy together; they are all religious texts written around or after the mid-fourteenth century, in English, for the laity. They vary greatly in form, content, and purpose, and they can easily be divided into categories more specific than “Innocent's legacy.” However, as Innocent's legacy, they signify an important development in English literary history: they are some of the earliest texts written in English for commoners—that is, the writers who produced these texts were some of the first to make an effort in English to speak to nonnoble audiences in particular. That is a distinction worth preserving.

It is because these texts address, deliberately and with sincere interest, audiences of commoners that I think it is important to teach Innocent's legacy. Especially because the majority of canonical medieval literature — like most canonical literature overall — has a more privileged audience in mind, the particular audience these texts hail is remarkable. For example, *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, a fourteenth-century text by an unknown author, addresses those who are unable to take religious vows because of “pouerte, or for drede of thaire kyn, or for band of Maryage” [poverty, or for fear of their relatives, or because of the bond of marriage], helping them establish private devotional practices (Perry 1913 [1867]: 51). Similarly, the fifteenth-century treatise *The Doctrine of the Hert*, whose author is also unknown, characterizes the heart as an allegorical house and uses household chores and other tasks that would have been familiar especially to commoners as metaphors for spiritual practices. *The Doctrine of the Hert* addresses itself to “such that ben unknunning in religioun” [those who are unlearned in religion] and begins by explaining how the audience can make its heart ready for God:

The hert muste be made redy in thre maner of wises: that is, as an hous is made redy to receive a worthi gest, as mete to be made redy for to be etyn, and as a spouse maketh here redy to plese here housbonde. (Whitehead, Renevey, and Mouron 2010: 3, 6)

[The heart must be made ready in three ways; that is, as a house is prepared to receive a worthy guest, as food is prepared to be eaten, and as a wife makes herself ready to please her husband.]

The author painstakingly develops all three analogies. The anonymous late-fourteenth- or early-fifteenth-century text *The Holy Boke Gratia Dei*, which provides instruction and advice regarding contemplation suited to lay limitations and experience, was clearly designed to speak to impoverished, rural-dwelling Christians, as George R. Keiser (1989: 155) has noted. It encourages audiences to rise in the morning “at þe belle ryngynge, if þou may it here. And if na kirk be þare þou duellis, þe cokk be thi belle; if þer be nowthir cokk ne belle: Goddes lufe þane wakken the” [at the ringing of the bell, if you can hear it. And if there is no church where you live, let the rooster be your bell; and if you have no rooster and there is no bell, then God's love will wake you] (Arntz 1981: 61).² Far from addressing privileged audiences, these texts and many others like them draw elegantly on imagery, themes, and experiences that nonelite audiences would understand and appreciate; they speak a “common” language.

Innocent's Legacy in the Classroom: Rewards and Challenges

For me, one of the greatest rewards of teaching the texts of Innocent's legacy in England is that a good number of students easily and quickly identify with them. I was pleased to have a student recently volunteer in class discussion that the plowman in the short, anonymous poem "God Spede the Plow," in which the character of a plowman complains that he is taxed beyond his means by every level of society, is the earliest realistic depiction of a "working-class" character she has read. One passage especially stood out for my student as depressingly similar to the plight of the modern American worker:

The kyngis purviours also they come,
To have whete and otys at the kyngis need;
And over that befe and mutton,
And butter and pulleyn, so God me spede! (Dean 1996: 254)

[The king's purveyors also come
To have wheat and oats whenever the king needs them;
And on top of that beef and mutton,
And butter and poultry, so help me God!]

This student, enrolled in my course in the early months of 2011, quite astutely connected this passage to then-recent debates in U.S. politics about the inequitable demands put on working-class taxpayers. Other students have connected with one chapter in particular from Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. That chapter details what Jesus did between the ages of twelve and thirty, a period of his life not covered by the gospels. During this time, according to the *Mirror*, Jesus lived at home with his parents and "shewed no dedes of comendacion outwarde, wherefore men scorned him & held him as an ydiote & an ydul man & a fole [outwardly displayed no commendable deeds, for which reason people scorned him and took him for an idiot, idler, and fool]" (Sargent 1992: 62–63). My students see, fairly, in Love's depiction of Jesus a stereotypical picture of a twenty-something slacker. When we read miracle stories, which I usually excerpt from two collections of sermons, *Mirk's Festial* and *Speculum Sacerdotale*, my students almost always find the collection of thieves, unmarried pregnant women, and derelict clerks who garner the help of saints to be likable, sympathetic characters — protagonists they can root for.³ I present miracle stories to them as a genre similar to the modern sit-com: after a brief introduction, a problem

is identified and resolved in short order. This generic parallel helps students begin to understand how these narratives entertained, provided a sense of closure, and reaffirmed a certain worldview for medieval audiences, as sitcoms do for us today. These examples illustrate what I mean when I say these texts speak a “common” language. The commoners’ experience depicted in these texts has turned out to be very much the *common* experience. It has proven easy for my students to see a connection to themselves and their own culture in texts representing Innocent’s legacy, and that has meant they are more interested and invested in Middle English texts overall.

That these texts catch students’ attention leads to an additional benefit: we can talk in sustained ways about the problems of canonicity and what audiences the canon truly represents. My students have not usually thought much about canonicity; not all of them know what the canon is, and few have considered how the “literary greats” got identified as such or who selected them as the texts and authors essential to English literature. In my course focusing on Innocent’s legacy, I always devote one class session at the end of the term to a discussion of the canon, a conversation that gives students an opportunity to explore how the forces shaping the canon have changed and remained the same. Students work in small groups with a worksheet to guide them (see appendix A), and for the last part of the session we have a whole-class discussion.⁴ I provide photocopies of the tables of contents for the first and most recent editions of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (it is indeed arguable whether the *Norton* itself is a fair representation of the canon, but it serves as such for this lesson) for students to compare as they ponder canon construction.⁵ This class session is almost always one of much head-scratching and big-picture realizations for students—my most recent class wondered why it took so long for the editors to include female authors, complained that the works of certain writers get privileged at the expense of including a broader representation of writers and texts, and noticed that the editors seemed to have carefully picked their way around a number of works that demonstrate the extreme prejudice against Jews that was an ugly fact of life in medieval England. These are important and admirable insights with implications that go far beyond just my course and help my students be more critically aware readers overall. Our discussion always ends with students choosing a noncanonical text we have read and making an argument for why they believe it should be in the canon. It is humbling to see students make a case that a text I hemmed and hawed about putting in the syllabus at all is fundamental to early English literature, and it makes me think even more

critically about both the canon and the process I go through to choose which texts to assign in a course.

Finally, teaching the texts of Innocent's legacy provides the benefit of quickly breaking down the widespread assumption that the medieval church was a unified entity—that all Christians shared common and uniform pious practices. This was, of course, never the case, but it was increasingly less true after the great flowering of texts inspired by Innocent's decree; indeed, these texts provided tools for audiences to develop more personalized spiritual practices. This is perhaps most clear to my students when we read the fourteenth-century "Epistle on the Mixed Life" written by Walter Hilton. An Augustinian cleric, Hilton addresses his letter to an unknown man of modest wealth to dissuade him from withdrawing from the world and pursuing a contemplative life. Hilton calls this man's idea "reklees" [reckless]; an "unlettered" Christian, he says, would do better instead to "doo many goode deedes outwarde to his evene-Cristene [to] kendele the fier of love with hem [do a number of good deeds in the world for his fellow Christians and to kindle the fire of love within them]" (1994: 116, 121). My students are always at first confused by Hilton's reaction to the spiritual aspirations of the man to whom he writes—should he not be pleased about the man's zeal? Why is Hilton discouraging his efforts to pursue a more intense piety? These questions are a good way to start parsing Hilton's letter. I ask students: What makes this unknown man's spiritual aspirations zealous? What is his piety more intense than? Students can easily see that both Hilton and the man recognize a significant difference between the contemplative life the man wants to live and the life of the average lay Christian—this difference is what makes the change attractive to the man and why Hilton objects. But Hilton responds to the man's aspirations by saying that there are also different kinds of lay piety, and that the man can have an exceptional pious practice without withdrawing from the world by performing charitable acts and inspiring his fellow Christians. So even in the few lines from Hilton's letter I have included here, students can discern three different kinds of lay pious practice, and suddenly medieval Christians do not look so uniform.

All this diversity of practice is evident in just one text that bears little, if any, relation to the heresy Lollardy, which was the main alternative to orthodox Christianity in medieval England, though Lollards, too, had much variety of spiritual practice, also evident in the many Lollard texts that survive and are available in modern editions. I am sure Innocent would cringe to see me identify such heterodox works as part of his legacy, but I consider it

an indisputable fact: Lollardy encouraged literacy and insisted on a vernacular translation of the Bible so that all Christians could have access to it; how could a movement so rooted in the English language not bear a connection to those first religious texts in English inspired by Innocent's decree? Later in this article I outline ideas for a course unit on the diversity of pious practices; from what I have said here, though, I hope it is clear that by studying the variety of religious texts Innocent's legacy offers, students can begin to see some of the richness and diversity of religious expression, orthodox and otherwise, that is difficult to observe in the narrow view of the Middle Ages the canon offers.

The few challenges to teaching Innocent's legacy are worth facing for all the benefits these texts provide, and they are relatively easily remedied with a little work and knowledge on the instructor's part. One significant issue is that not all the texts are scintillating. Gaytryge's sermon is without question a watershed in early English literature because it was written specifically to educate common audiences, but it is pedantic and dry, a bare-bones religious lesson. I have tried teaching it and always want it to work, but it is like teaching the motor vehicle code as a literary text: theoretically possible, but a tough lesson to sell.⁶ So there are texts that seem important to Innocent's legacy that just do not teach well; although I excerpt from them all the time, picking and choosing the parts that seem useful, I find it difficult to teach not just Gaytryge's sermon but any whole sermon, though likely some instructors will have better luck with them. Luckily, there are many texts in Innocent's legacy that do impressive things with language and imagery, have interesting plot development, and are fantastic to teach. The problem is finding them; a few of them are canonical and thus easy to find, but the grand majority are not, and it helps to know a few likely places to look.

One place to start is in the Works Cited list at the end of this article, where I have placed an asterisk before each listing containing a text or texts I consider part of Innocent's legacy. In addition, I have been careful to cite the best editions of texts I have mentioned here — these editions typically include introductory material, marginal glosses, footnotes, and a glossary — and to note any problematic editions. Many of the texts I discuss here are included in anthologies, so looking up one text I mention may well lead to the discovery of several more I have not. But my references are by no means exhaustive, and there are certainly other places to look. A very easy one is the online menu of the Consortium for the Teaching of the Middle Ages (TEAMS) Middle English Text Series (www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/tmsmenu

.htm#menu). The extensive list of texts TEAMS makes available online is a boon to any teacher looking to expand teaching beyond the bounds of the canon. TEAMS also offers a series of affordable textbooks featuring a wide variety of Middle English texts; these editions are excellent to consult for ideas as well as to order for student use in courses. Another extremely useful resource is the Early English Text Society (EETS) series, of which many libraries have extensive holdings. EETS was established in the late nineteenth century with the aims of making more Middle English texts available to students and providing sources for early examples of word usage for the *Oxford English Dictionary*. One does need to browse through the books physically, though — a good many of EETS's books are anthologies with a number of short texts not listed in a library catalog search. EETS does maintain a website (users.ox.ac.uk/~eets/index.html), but it identifies only volume titles, not contents. However, I can practically guarantee that instructors who spend any small amount of time with these books will find at least one text they want to teach.

A secondary challenge, once a good text to teach has been found, is determining if it is part of Innocent's legacy. Though it is a broad category, as I suggested earlier, it does have some defining features. First and foremost, the texts of Innocent's legacy address nonnoble audiences, a trait not necessarily explicit. Sometimes introductions or footnotes to a text will reveal some fact of authorship or circulation that makes clear a text was written for commoners — as is the case, for example, with Gaytryge's sermon, known from its presence in an archbishop's records to be written to educate the illiterate laity at the parish level. Most often, however, one is forced to assess the first audience of a text without such certainty; a couple tips can help. Many texts meant for common audiences are simply meant for the broadest of audiences — that is, they did not speak directly to commoners *or* nobles. Good examples are religious lyrics, a genre of which friars (mendicant preachers known for entertaining open-air preaching) made much use (see Brown 1924, 1939). It is arguably more likely that a commoner would hear a friar's preaching, but most lyrics do not hail a specifically common or noble audience. Such texts intended for a general audience I consider to be written for commoners. Another way I identify texts for commoners is to look for themes, imagery, and characters suggesting such an audience. When I read this way, it always initially seems a little like stereotyping. Done with respect, though, it is actually a much more sophisticated and nuanced effort to recognize a difference in textual priorities or presentation that bespeaks nonnoble experiences — for example, that a text would think to mention poverty, as *The*

Abbey of the Holy Ghost does, or recognize the possibility that its audience may be of so meager an existence as to have no rooster, as does *The Holy Boke Gratia Dei*, demonstrates a particular attention to an audience of commoners.

In addition to being for a nonnoble audience, the texts representing Innocent's legacy have religious components. They may offer a religious lesson delivered with the force of institutional authority, such as Gaygryge's sermon or Hilton's letter, or represent lay writers articulating religious ideas or practices that are the ultimate result of the education Innocent's decree stimulated (mystical texts, such as Julian of Norwich's *Shewings* or Lollard texts). When in doubt, I consult Boyle's useful diagram of texts inspired by Innocent's decree; though not exhaustive, it at least provides categories to think through as I decide how to characterize a text (Boyle 1985: 38). I should emphasize, though, that these methods of identifying texts that represent Innocent's legacy are guiding principles more than absolute rules.

When a text has been chosen and identified as part of Innocent's legacy, chances are fairly good that it will be quite difficult to *read*, perhaps only available in a very old edition and maybe not even glossed. Rare (though not nonexistent) is the text you will find translated into Modern English. For the instructor who is not a medievalist, this may seem the most discouraging challenge of teaching Innocent's legacy, but it is far from insurmountable. Middle English is, after all, just an earlier version of the language English speakers now use. Remembering that can relieve some of the feelings of intimidation that a page of Middle English can provoke in even highly educated people. It helps, also, to remember that standardized spelling was a later development of English; Middle English was spelled phonetically, so sounding words out will always help. Assistance is also often available in the margins, notes, or glossary of whatever edition you are using. If it is not, the online Middle English Dictionary (quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/) is a useful resource, as are printed Middle English dictionaries available at most libraries and quite affordable to purchase.⁷ Most of all, it is important to remember that Middle English texts are nothing to fear. With only a few exceptions for the most difficult texts, I insist my students read the works we study in Middle English, and they always rise to the occasion. I provide an information sheet to help them as they read (see appendix B), and if I teach a short text lacking a marginal gloss, I make one for my students and find that this small investment of time does help them.⁸

A Rough-and-Ready Do-It-Yourself Guide

Before I built an entire course around Innocent's legacy, I experimented with short units and even single class sessions focused on the flowering of lay religious texts inspired by his decree. In the remainder of this article, I offer some topics and groupings of texts that, in my experience, work well in the classroom for single class sessions or short units. All these lessons would work well in a literary historical survey course — where, as I hope I have made clear here, the idea of Innocent's legacy surely deserves inclusion — but also in special topics courses.

Single Class Sessions Featuring Texts Representing Innocent's Legacy

Middle English texts dealing with death, a topic of great religious import in the Middle Ages, offer an interesting glimpse of medieval culture as well as compelling plot and imagery. The poem “Earth upon Earth,” which survives in early-fourteenth-century manuscripts but was popular and circulated widely for centuries, is a brief, clever, and beautiful meditation on mortality (Perry 2006a [1913]: 106).⁹ The late fourteenth-century “Gast of Gy” is a short prose text — a ghost story relating the tale of a woman being haunted by her husband Gy, who is in purgatory (Bartlett and Bestul 1999).¹⁰ The play *Everyman*, widely anthologized and easily found, offers a “canonical” take on death. Together, these texts offer much variety not just generically, but also in tone and message.

So much attention is given in the literary canon to medieval depictions of Jesus that a lesson focusing on portrayals of his mother, Mary, offers a refreshing change and opportunities to view representations of a powerful female character. Lyrics about Mary abound and offer many different topics and views of Mary; my students have reacted well to the “lullaby” lyrics, which feature a conversation between Mary and a young Jesus, as well as to lyrics featuring Mary standing at the foot of the cross lamenting over or conversing with the dying Jesus.¹¹ One really could make a whole lesson based on the lyrics, but if more variety is desired, I recommend the “Annunciation and Nativity” play from the Chester Corpus Christi cycle, one of a series of plays based on biblical stories performed in the town of Chester as part of the Corpus Christi festival. The play tells the story of the birth of Jesus, with a special focus on social status and femininity, and it features a midwife whose hand shrivels up when she dares to perform an examination verifying Mary's virginity (Mills 1992: 100–24).

Three-Day Units Featuring Texts Representing Innocent's Legacy

This three-day unit emphasizing the variety of lay Christian practice offers rich narrative and religious satire and also serves as a corrective for students who assume that all medieval Christians were uniform, obedient, and orthodox.¹²

Day 1: The early-fifteenth-century anonymous text “Why I Can’t Be a Nun,” in which the narrator, a girl who wishes to become a nun, is visited in a dream by an allegorical character called Experience who gives her an insider’s tour of convents that reveals excesses of evil and sin among vowed female religious (Dean 1991: 227–42).¹³ I pair this text with *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* to get at the idea that while, as the *Abbey* says, many lay people may have been prevented by circumstance from entering vowed religious life, some may have chosen not to because of the kinds of corruption described in “Why I Can’t Be a Nun.”

Day 2: Selections from *The Book of Margery Kempe* and Julian of Norwich’s *Shewings*, written by female lay mystics and now considered canonical—and also the first books known to be written in English by women (Staley 1996; Crampton 1994).¹⁴ Particularly useful for this lesson are the opening sections of each text (for Kempe, chapters 1 and 2, and for Julian, chapters 2–4), which reveal two unlikely paths to piety.

Day 3: The trial records for Margery Baxter and Hawise Moon, two women accused of Lollardy. These texts contain many examples of colorful Lollard polemic (Goldie 2003: 59–69). The anonymous “Epistola Sathanae ad Cleros” [Epistle of Satan to the Clerics], which depicts Lollards as the defenders of the true church and next great enemies of Satan, would nicely complement the trial records (Hudson 1997 [1978]: 89–93). Significantly, these works do not just provide Lollardy as an example of religious diversity overall; they also demonstrate conflicting beliefs and priorities within the Lollard community.¹⁵

Another option for a three-day unit focuses on medieval depictions of Jews, which in texts produced in dominantly Christian western Europe were rarely (if ever) positive. Representations of Jews in Middle English texts are particularly interesting, as Jews existed in England only in texts, having been expelled from England in 1290. Physically absent, they appear to have seized the imagination of English Christians; as characters, they most often play one of two roles (and at times both): the necessary enemy or the inevitable convert.

Day 1: Readings focusing on narratives in the tradition of blood and host libels, which might best be characterized as the medieval Christian equivalent of our own “urban legends.” In these stories, Jews kidnap Christian children or steal consecrated bread from churches for use in rituals. Such tales are scattered throughout medieval Christian texts, but representative samples are available in modern editions (Marcus 1990 [1938]: 121–26; Shinnars 2008: 118–21). Complex and interesting in and of themselves, these stories provide useful background for the following texts.

Day 2: The *Prioress’s Prologue and Tale* and the description of the Prioress in the *General Prologue* of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. Though rarely included in anthologies of English literature, these are easily found in the many available editions (both in Middle English and in modern translation) of the *Canterbury Tales*.¹⁶ The *Prioress’s Prologue and Tale* are compelling—even disturbing—both on a narrative level and in what they imply about the church and its representatives. I consider the Prioress one of the most duplicitous and sinister characters in all of English literature, and after studying her and her story, my students tend to agree. She tells what is, for a nun, a surprisingly gory blood libel story that seems at first like garden-variety Jewish prejudice but also serves a more twisted purpose.

Day 3: The excellent late-fifteenth-century *Play of the Sacrament*, which claims to tell the “true story” of Jewish host desecration (Bevington 1975: 754–88). The Jewish characters in this play are interesting in and of themselves, but even more so because they implicitly serve as proxies for Lollards.¹⁷

I urge and implore teachers of English literature, even if you never teach a unit or lesson on Innocent’s legacy, to find some way to credit the role Innocent played in the development of texts in English. I tell my students that, if they are not descendants of English nobility, they ultimately have Innocent to thank for their literacy in English. Though a little hyperbolic, this is basically true. He is the unacknowledged motivator behind an incredible number of Middle English texts that reached beyond social barriers and addressed audiences of commoners. These texts are valuable as the origins of a literary tradition for nonnobles—the ancestors of working-class literature in English—and also because they offer us a chance to teach that medieval literature is more diverse and sophisticated a corpus than the familiar damsels, knights, and drunken Miller let on.

Appendix A: Canonicity Exercise

Editions and Publication Years of The Norton Anthology of English Literature

1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th
1962	1968	1974	1979	1986	1993	2000	2006	2012

Compare the tables of contents from the first edition and the ninth edition and answer the questions below.

1. You cannot tell much about the editors from the list of them on the title page, but you can draw some conclusions. What differences exist between the first and ninth editions that indicate efforts toward including a more diverse range of people among the editors?
2. Locate two texts that were included in the first edition but left out of the ninth edition; make an educated guess about why they were left out. Then, locate two texts that were not included in the first edition but were added to the ninth edition; make an educated guess about why they were added.

Texts left out of 9th

Texts added to 9th

-
3. You do not have to have read the texts listed in the tables of contents to infer something of what they are about from the titles. Study the first edition table of contents, looking for keywords and clues that reveal what the texts are about. Record topics that seem to be represented in the first edition in the box to the left below. (For instance, titles like “Battle of Maldon” and “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight” suggest *soldiers* as a topic to record.) Then do this for the ninth edition, paying attention to what topics get repeated and what new topics emerge.

1st edition topics

9th edition topics

4. Compare our course schedule to the ninth edition and identify several texts we studied that are not considered part of the canon. If you could choose two texts to add to the 10th edition, which would they be, and why?

Appendix B: Reading Middle English

ME = Middle English; ModE = Modern English

Quick Tips

In ME,

y is the same as *i* (ME *syt* is ModE *sit*).

u and *v* are interchangeable (ME *loue* is ModE *love*).

u, *uu*, and *w* are interchangeable (ME *owt* is ModE *out*).

A long *o* is often written *oo* (ME *noon* is ModE *none*).

The character *þ*, called a thorn, often stands in for *th*.

The character *ȝ*, called a yogh, often stands in for *gh* or *y*.

I is often used in place of *J* in both upper and lower cases.

A lot of times, there is an extra *e* at the end of words.

From this it should be clear that ME spelling is not standard (and often not consistent within texts). But it was phonetic; it helps to read aloud and sound words out, because words are spelled like they sounded to the writer.

Pronunciation Tips

Long vowels

Long vowels are pronounced differently in Middle English because of a phenomenon known as the Great Vowel Shift, which occurred over a period of time but started in the late fifteenth century.

In ME,

ā as in *name* is pronounced “ah,” as in *pot*.

ē as in *feet* is pronounced like the ModE *ā*, as in *name*.

ī as in *five* is pronounced like the ModE *ē*, as in *feet*.

ō as in *root* is pronounced without the roundness of ModE, as in *boat*.

ū does not come up a lot. When it does, it is often paired with another vowel, as in *out* or *thou* and is pronounced to sound like ModE *youth* or *fruit*. Also note that *w* and *uu* are often interchangeable with *u*.

Short vowels

ME short vowels are almost always pronounced as they are in ModE, though with a British accent as opposed to, say, a Chicago one.

ME *smale* is pronounced like *small* in ModE

ME *sette* is pronounced like *set* in ModE

ME *thyng* is pronounced like *thing* in ModE

ME *droppe* is pronounced like *drop* in ModE

ME *dulle* is pronounced like *dull* in ModE

Diphthongs

ME *ai* (or *ay*) is pronounced like *ai* in ModE *aisle* — *saide*, *day*

ME *ei* (or *ey*) is pronounced like *ey* in ModE *hey* — *veine*, *preye*

ME *au* (or *aw*) is pronounced like *ou* in ModE *out* — *cause*, *lawe*

ME *eu* (or *ew*) is pronounced like *ew* in ModE *few* — *newe*, *lewed*

ME *oi* (or *oy*) is pronounced like *oy* in ModE *joy* — *joye*, *coye*

ME *ou* (or *ow* or *ouu*) is pronounced like *ou* in *youth* — *you*, *yow*, *out*, *owt*

Consonants

The initial *h* is silent in short, common words:

In ME *hous*, *helpe*, *him*, *hire*, *hit* (ModE *him*, *her*, *it*), *h* is silent.

When the letters *gn* do not begin a word, the *g* is silent as in the ModE *sign*:

In ME *signe*, *regne* (ModE *sign*, *reign*), *g* is swallowed.

In ME *gnof* (ModE *churl*), *g* is sounded.

All other consonants are usually sounded—even the ones that we do not sound in ModE:

In ME *g* in *gnaw* is sounded, as is *l* in *folk*, *gh* in *knight*, and *w* in *write*.

ME *r* is slightly trilled in the front of the mouth behind the upper teeth.

Notes

1. For the original Latin of the twenty-first canon, see García y García 1981: 67–68. An English translation is available in Copeland and Woods 1999: 392.
2. This edition is not user-friendly for teaching purposes, but *The Holy Boke Gratia Dei* is so interesting that it is worth struggling with. Another edition similarly problematic for teaching is available under the title “Treatises of MS Arundel 507” in Horstman 1895.
3. To my knowledge, the only edition of *Speculum Sacerdotale* is Weatherly 2000 [1936], but this edition has marginal notes, explanatory notes, and a glossary. *Mirk’s Festial* exists in two good editions based on different manuscript versions of the text: Erbe 1977 [1905] contains only a little introductory information, while Powell 2009, 2011 has an extensive introduction.
4. Thanks to Patricia Ingham for sharing her version of this exercise, on which my own relies heavily.
5. The tables of contents for all editions of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*

can be found online (www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/publication_chronology/index.htm).

6. Instructors hardy enough to consider teaching Gaytryge's sermon will find it best presented in Perry 2006b [1913]: 1–15.
7. The online Middle English Dictionary can be frustrating at times for newcomers. My advice is to begin with "Lookups," to search "Headwords and Forms," and to try to truncate the word to its base form and type an asterisk after it. For instance, a search for "callyng" under "Headwords and Forms" yielded no results, but when I truncated "callyng" to "call*" I got good results. My favorite print dictionary is Stratmann and Bradley 2007 [1891].
8. Thanks to my own teacher, Lawrence M. Clopper; my version of this information sheet is greatly indebted to the one I received in his class.
9. The poem is also available in another EETS volume, Murray 1964 [1911], which includes heavy critical apparatus and several versions of the poem.
10. This edition contains a Modern English translation of the text as well as the Middle English text. Another good resource for this lesson plan is Joynes 2001.
11. Both kinds of lyrics can be found in Saupe 1998, a TEAMS text. See especially the sections on "The Nativity" and "Mary at the Foot of the Cross." This edition is an excellent teaching resource, though Marian lyrics can certainly be found in other places as well (see Brown 1924, 1939).
12. Two secondary texts that may help students are Macy 1996: 107–16 and Larsen 2003: 59–72.
13. This text is also available through TEAMS online, www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/nonunint.htm.
14. *The Book of Margery Kempe* is available online through TEAMS, www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/kempint.htm. Two modern translations are also available, the better being Windeatt 2004. The other, Staley 2001, is a Norton Critical Edition with useful critical apparatus but a less readable translation. *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich* is also available online through TEAMS (www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/julianin.htm). The Norton Critical Edition of the *Shewings* (Baker 2005) is in Middle English, but Spearing 1998 is a modern translation of this text (under a different title).
15. A wonderful resource to use to further acquaint students with Lollardy is Stephen Lahey's online comic, *Cadaver Synod 2007* (elsewhere titled *Burning Minds*), which explains the development of John Wyclif, the father of Lollardy, www.unl.edu/classics/faculty/lahey/cadaversynod2007/cadaversynod-p7.shtml.
16. I prefer to use the Norton Critical Edition (Kolve and Olson 2005), which has marginal glosses and footnotes as well as useful background material for the Prioress.
17. For an overview of the Jews as proxy for Lollards, see Beckwith 1992: 65–89.

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Asterisks (*) indicate a listing containing a text or texts representing Innocent's legacy.

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