

THE NEW MIDDLE AGES

# THE MEDIEVAL PYTHON

---

THE PURPOSIVE *and*  
PROVOCATIVE WORK *of*  
TERRY JONES

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*Edited by*  
R.F. Yeager *and*  
Toshiyuki Takamiya



# THE NEW MIDDLE AGES

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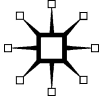
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WORK OF TERRY JONES

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Photo courtesy Anna Söderström.

## INTRODUCTION

This is a book for Terry Jones, from some of his friends and admirers. Over the years, Terry has acquired quite a few of both, of course, and has enjoyed more than a few toasts and accolades honoring his work as a Python, a script writer, an actor and a film director, a television personality, an author of books for children—and of outspoken books and *Guardian* columns for their parents, attacking bigotry and injustice. (Some very serious people urged him to run for parliament once, and he nearly took them up on it. Pity he didn't, in some ways.)

But this book is different from all of that, except in its serious attempt to honor Terry. Here we celebrate the “Medieval Python,” the Terry Jones whose name has been cropping up for more than 30 years in bibliographies and in footnotes in monographs and essays in scholarly journals (many written by contributors herein), the products not of journalists nor publicists nor outraged right-wingnuts but of serious students of the later Middle Ages, spread out across the full spectrum of sophistication and expertise. Had Terry turned out to be the teacher at university he once imagined he might become (pity he didn't, in some ways!), very likely a book of this sort would have fallen his way already, comfortably fitted into the hoary academic genre of *Festschrift*: a German invention of the nineteenth century, presented to a lofty *éminence grise* by his highest-achieving students when the *Überprofessor* had puffed his pipe in his book-lined office for the final time. The idea was, apparently, immortality—generations of acolytes keeping dust off the Great Man's *weltanschauung* by churning out scholarship of their own owing everything to his.

Well, all right for the Germans. But: that's not very much like Terry, is it? Why would an homage to Terry Jones, medievalist, veer far afield from the life of the man, as lived? To know Terry at all, even so much as to brush elbows with him in the underground, is to come away charged by his profound respect for the independent voice. E. Talbot Donaldson, a kindred contrarian, renowned medievalist, and one who happily would have contributed to this book, were he alive today, used to invoke “a man named Smith” whenever someone started a sentence with “In the Middle Ages people thought . . .” “Hearing that,” Donaldson would remark, “‘Smith’ (it could have been Jones!), would immediately have risen up in the back of the room and shouted loudly, ‘No! I didn’t!’”

Which is why, in fact, in a certain sense, this book is a kind of “*um*-*Festschrift*.” No acolytes. (No students.) No institutional colleagues duty-bound to lionize one of their own. Not everyone appearing herein agrees with everyone else, and

some indeed continue in print the vibrant controversy Terry's work—in every medium—has always intentionally generated. Much of that controversy many contributors have carried on in extended conversation, sometimes for years, face-to-face with Terry over pints of “real British beer,” or pursued into the wee hours at his famously hospitable table, followed by a cab ride home, gift of the host's shilling. Thus Nigel Saul takes occasion here to differ politely with Terry's staunch defense of Richard II as “a much maligned ruler . . . obstructed by a gaggle of obscurantist barons, deposed by a slippery usurper and with his reputation besmirched by Lancastrian propaganda” (for the record: a view shared by several others herein).<sup>1</sup> Saul argues here, however, that “it is Richard's tyranny alone that explains his removal from the throne by his cousin in 1399.”<sup>2</sup> Chris Given-Wilson too takes aim—though more obliquely—at Terry's peacemaker king (and, by way of it, propounds a reevaluation of Richard's early antagonist, Richard Fitzalan, Earl of Arundel), in an assessment of “the anger of King Richard II.”<sup>3</sup> And Derek Pearsall also sets out to right the record of medieval monks and friars, as (mis)represented by “a long line of satirists in the estates-satire tradition, Gower and Chaucer [and Terry Jones] among them.”<sup>4</sup>

Nonetheless, not everyone lines up here to argue with Terry, of course. Michael Bennett, for one, controverts his fellow historians Given-Wilson and Saul by reading the evidence for and against Richard II's hot temper somewhat differently. The king, Bennett avers, “had a sense of humor” and could play roles: “as Terry Jones has shown, Richard could do ‘stern’ like the best of kings.”<sup>5</sup> Looking not at Richard, nor at the chroniclers, but rather at a contemporary witness of another order, Peter Nicholson revisits his own important early work on the manuscripts of John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, provoked, he notes, by Terry's suspicions about the timing and causes of revisions in the all-important Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Fairfax 3 (Macaulay's manuscript F). Nicholson's new conclusion is that the alterations, more than being merely scribal, suggest instead that “the poet had a more active part than we realized, to the point that the line between composition and copying becomes blurred, and ‘collaboration’ may be more appropriate than ‘supervision.’”<sup>6</sup> The poet's direct involvement with the changes in MS Fairfax 3 has major significance for Gower studies—and lends substantial support to Terry's grim assessment of the high degree of corruption in the historical record effected by Lancastrian “spin.” Similarly, John Bowers finds himself emboldened by Terry's iconoclastic spirit, from the publication of *Chaucer's Knight* (1980) to “the redating of *An ABC* from the beginning of [Chaucer's] career to the end” in the collaboratively authored *Who Murdered Chaucer? A Medieval Mystery* (2003), to suggest a new chronology for Geoffrey Chaucer's *House of Fame* and *Legend of Good Women*.<sup>7</sup> W. Mark Ormrod too, in presenting one instance of rapacious “Needy Knights” taking advantage of “Wealthy Widows,” credits *Chaucer's Knight* as “an important moment in the study of later medieval knighthood [that] sent something of a shockwave through the academy and produced significant reassessments of the motives, values, and social mores of the knightly class in the era of the Hundred Years' War”—including his own essay, presented here.<sup>8</sup> William A. Quinn, delving into the nature and extent of Chaucer's pacifism (which he terms “silly,” in the Middle English

sense of “spiritually favored, blessed, holy, virtuous”) as suggested by Terry’s less-than-chivalric Knight and other moments in the *Canterbury Tales*, uncovers in his essay, “Moral Chaucer and Philosophical Jones,” a kinship of eirenic spirit that extends throughout the sundry works of Chaucer, Gower—and Terry Jones, invariably outspoken in his condemnation of the senselessness and futility of wars.<sup>9</sup> David Wallace offers a snapshot of a Chaucer similarly disenchanted, post-capture and ransom, in his careful reexamination of “Chaucer, Langland, and the Hundred Years’ War.”<sup>10</sup> And in “Gower in Winter: Last Poems,” R. F. Yeager takes yet another (small) page from Terry’s playbook by interrogating the broad critical acceptance, *prima facie*, of Gower’s complaints about his age, blindness, and decrepitude, to conclude that indeed they may have been (among other things) Gower’s canny device to escape making more Lancastrian propaganda after 1404–05. If true, the change of heart by Chaucer’s friend would reinforce Terry’s dark opinion of Henry IV’s rule, even as it contradicts his view of Gower’s character.<sup>11</sup>

But not everyone writing here has Terry’s work to reinterpret the literary-historical record so directly in focus. Martha Driver and Richard Firth Green both consider his achievements as medievalist-cum-filmmaker. Nevertheless, in these essays too, the contrarian Terry is alive and well. Driver, noting that “Jones’s work might be said to promote the underbelly of the idealized past, forcing viewers to question medieval stereotypes,” presents a thorough, energetic, and penetrating paean to the value for teachers in the classroom of Terry’s work for big screen and television.<sup>12</sup> Green takes a famous interlude with the limb-losing Black Knight from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* as a starting point for revealing an entire subgenre, heretofore unheralded: “that of the bellicose amputee” who “fought upon his stumps.”<sup>13</sup> Green’s essay thus opens a potentially rich new line of inquiry for future investigative reporters, set to plumb such provocative depths as “How much did Terry know while writing the Black Knight scene about Thomas Hood’s poem ‘Faithless Nellie Gray’ (published 1826)—and when did he know it?”

Green’s interest in the reach of literatures more modern into Terry’s medieval scholarship, and vice versa, appears as well in the contributions of John J. Thompson and Toshiyuki Takamiya. Both choose as their subjects postmedieval works. Taking up a prayer roll once the property of the young Prince Henry VIII-yet-to-be, Thompson reviews and refutes a variety of claims about how, and by whom, the roll might have been used, citing as his procedural spark Terry’s reclamations of “real human lives ordered by and caught up in the social hierarchies of their age.”<sup>14</sup> Takamiya centers on another little-known but important text, the *Microcosmus* of Peter Heylyn (yet another Jonesian figure!): “a most prolific controversialist in the seventeenth century.”<sup>15</sup> Takamiya’s careful reading of Heylyn’s magnum opus reveals among the cosmographer’s diverse literary sources Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur* and—more intriguing, perhaps—Heylyn’s recollections of his viewing of a performance of *Macbeth*. And following an even more independent trajectory, Priscilla Martin elects to create her *own* postmedieval piece of fiction. Her short story, “Jack and John, the Plowman’s Tale,” locates its roots in Chaucer and William Langland, and draws inspiration from the medieval imaginary that proliferates in Terry’s fictions for children.<sup>16</sup>

Unusual to find fiction in a Festschrift, of course (the Germans wouldn't have borne it); but then, this is an *Unfestschrift*, intended to honor a most unusual man. Orinary glimpses of Jones-in-progress (the *Unfestschrift* as *bildungsroman*?) are lent by V. A. Kolve and Michael Palin. Kolve, professor emeritus, former president of the New Chaucer Society and the Medieval Academy of America (Terry has an essay in *his* Festschrift too...), contributes "a memory piece...about Oxford as it was half a century ago when Terry Jones came up to read English Language and Literature at St. Edmund Hall" in 1961–62.<sup>17</sup> Then a Junior Research Fellow and tutor to first-years, Kolve "think[s] back on Oxford as it was in those days—the good, bad, and indifferent of it—for whatever light it may throw upon the person Terry would become."<sup>18</sup> Picking up the thread in those days, Palin, F. O. J. [Friend-of-Jones] for life, follows "The Complete Mediaevalist" from Oxford to Edinburgh to London and beyond. Perhaps it is Palin who justly deserves the final—albeit introductory—word: "When I went down to...Terry's house in south London...I couldn't help noticing that his mediaeval library, far from being set to one side after the completion of *Holy Grail*, was expanding by the day. Even as he bent to the task of directing a comedic version of a ritual stoning in first-century Judea, a part of Terry was still as fascinated by Chaucer as it had been when we first met at Oxford fifteen years earlier...A year later Terry was winning plaudits for directing one of the world's funniest films. A little more than a year after that Terry's book *Chaucer's Knight* was being described by the London *Observer* newspaper as 'a brilliant work of literary and historical detection.' Now that sort of thing doesn't happen to many comedy directors."<sup>19</sup>

To which all of us contributing here most heartily agree, while adding "Nor vice versa, either." Pity it doesn't, really.

### Notes

1. Saul, 39.
2. Saul, 52.
3. Given-Wilson, 27.
4. Pearsall, 59.
5. Bennett, 131.
6. Nicholson, 84.
7. Bowers, 105.
8. Ormrod, 137.
9. Quinn, 176.
10. Wallace, 195.
11. Yeager, 87.
12. Driver, 151.
13. Green, 181, 182.
14. Thompson, 216.
15. Takamiya, 229.
16. Martin, 207.
17. Kolve, 13.
18. Kolve, 14.
19. Palin, 58.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE MEDIEVAL WORKS OF TERRY JONES

*Sanae Ikeda*

This selected bibliography lists Terry Jones's works on medieval topics through 2011. The items are classified in two sections: films and documentary TV programs that he directed, wrote, and/or in which he performed; and his scholarly books and articles, and books for children. Works on non-medieval subjects are excluded.

The following abbreviations are used:

- A article published in a book or in a periodical
- B published book
- C children's book, audiobook for children
- D documentary TV program, and its companion book
- F film, and its screenplay
- O other categories
- V video recording
- TJ Terry Jones

#### **I. Films and Documentary TV programs**

**1974**

- (F) *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. Directed by TJ and Terry Gilliam. Written and presented by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Eric Idle, Terry Gilliam, TJ, and Michael Palin. Screenplay TJ. Produced by Mark Forstater, John Goldstone, and Michael White. EMI Films; Sony Pictures Entertainment, 1974. Nominated as the "Best Dramatic Presentation" of The Hugo Awards in 1976.
- (V) VHS. Monty Python Pictures, 1974; DVD. 1998; special ed. Burbank, CA: Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment, 2001.

**1986**

- (F) *Labyrinth*. Dir. Jim Henson. Written by Dennis Lee and Jim Henson. Perf. David Bowie, Jennifer Connelly, and Toby Froud. Screenplay TJ. Prod. Eric Rattray, David Lazer, and George Lucas. TriStar Pictures. 1986.
- (V) DVD. Culver City, CA: Columbia TriStar Home Video, 1986; 1999; anniversary ed. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment. 2007.

**1989**

- (F) *Erik the Viking*. Written and Dir. by TJ. Perf. Tim Robbins, TJ, John Cleese, and Mickey Rooney. Prod. John C. Goldstone. Orion Pictures. 1989.
- (V) VHS. New York: Orion Home Video, 1989; DVD. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2007.

**1995**

- (D) *The Crusades*. Dir. Alan Ereira and David Wallace. Written by Alan Ereira and TJ.

Perf. TJ. 4 episodes. BBC Entertainment. 1995.

Episode 1. Pilgrims in Arms

Episode 2. Jerusalem

Episode 3. Jihad

Episode 4. Destruction

- (V) VHS. 1995; DVD. New York: A. & E. Home Video, 2001.

**1997**

- (C) *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Translated by J. R. R. Tolkien. Read by TJ. Children's audiobook. 2 sound cassettes. London: HarperCollins Audiobooks, 1997.

- (C) *Pearl and Sir Orfeo*. Translated by J. R. R. Tolkien. Read by TJ. Children's audiobook. 2 sound cassettes. London: HarperCollins Audiobooks, 1997.

**1998**

- (D) *Ancient Inventions*. Dir. Daniel Percival and Phil Grabsky. Written by TJ and Daniel Percival. Perf. TJ. Prod. David Souden, and Amanda Wilkie. 3 episodes. BBC. 1998.

- Episode 1. City Life
- Episode 2. Sex and Love
- Episode 3. War and Conflict

(V) VHS. Bethesda, MD: Discovery Channel Video, 1998; DVD. [New York]: Discovery Communications, 2008. Videodisc. [Brighton, England]: Seven Art Productions, 2009.

### 2002–03

- (D) *The Surprising History of Egypt* (released in USA in 2002); or, *The Hidden History of Egypt* (UK in 2003). Dir. Phil Grabsky. Written by TJ and Alan Ereira. DiscoveryChannel.
- (V) DVD. Discovery Channel Video. 2003.
- (D) *The Surprising History of Rome* (released in USA in 2002); or, *The Hidden History of Rome* (UK in 2003). Dir. Phil Grabsky. Written by Phil Grabsky, TJ, and Alan Ereira. Perf. TJ. Prod. Jack E. Smith, and Phil Grabsky. Discovery Channel.
- (V) VHS. 2002. Videodisc. Bethesda, MD: Discovery Channel, 2003.
- (D) *The Surprising History of Sex and Love*. Dir. Alan Ereira and Phil Grabsky. Discovery Channel. 2002.
- (V) DVD. Seventh Art Productions, 2009.

### 2004

- (D) *Terry Jones' Medieval Lives*. Dir. Nigel Miller. Written and presented by TJ. Prod. Paul Bradshaw and Nigel Miller. 8 episodes. BBC Two. 2004. The Episode *The Peasant* nominated for “Outstanding Writing for Nonfiction Programming” at the 2004 Emmy Awards.

- Episode 1. The Knight
- Episode 2. The Monk
- Episode 3. The King
- Episode 4. The Damsel
- Episode 5. The Philosopher
- Episode 6. The Minstrel
- Episode 7. The Outlaw
- Episode 8. The Peasant

(V) DVD. [London]: BBC Video; BBC Worldwide America, Warner Home Video, 2008.

### 2005

- (D) *The Story of 1*. Dir. Nick Murphy. Perf. TJ. BBC. 2005.
- (V) DVD. [Alexandria, VA]: PBS Home Video. 2005, 2006.

**2006**

(D) *Terry Jones' Barbarians*. Written by TJ, Alan Ereira, and David McNab.  
Perf. TJ.

Prod. David McNab. 4 episodes. BBC Two. 2006.

Episode 1. The Primitive Celts

Episode 2. The Savage Goths

Episode 3. The Brainy Barbarians

Episode 4. The End of the World

(V) DVD. Port Washington, NY: Koch Entertainment, 2006, 2007, 2008.

**2008**

(D) *Terry Jones' Great Map Mystery*. Dir. Alan Ereira. Written by Alan Ereira.  
Perf. TJ.

4 episodes. BBC Two Wales. 2008.

Episode 1. The Road to Aberystwyth

Episode 2. The Road to St. David's

Episode 3. St. David's to Holywell

Episode 4. Chester to Holyhead

(V) DVD. [Pyrmont, N.S.W.]: Roadshow Entertainment, 2010.

**2009**

(V) *Chaucer and "The Canterbury Tales."* Perf. TJ. DVD. Artsmagic, 2009.

**II. Articles, Books, Reviews, and Books for Children****1972**

(A) "Attention to Detail: The Workbooks of Ronald Welch." *Children's Literature in Education* 3, no. 2 (1972): 30–37.

**1977**

(F) Chapman, Graham, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, TJ, and Michael Palin. *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (Book). London: Methuen, 1977.

**1980**

(B) *Chaucer's Knight: The Portrait of a Medieval Mercenary*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson; Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980. Second revised edition. London: Methuen, 1985. With new introduction, 1994.

**1981**

- (C) *Fairy Tales*. Illustrated by Michael Foreman. London: Pavilion, 1981; New York: Schocken, 1982.

**1983**

- (C) *The Saga of Erik the Viking*. Illustrated by Michael Foreman. London: Pavilion; New York: Schocken, 1983.

**1985**

- (A) "Fings Ain't What They Used to Be: A Return to Victorian Values." *Listener*. July 11.  
 (C) *Nicobobinus*. Illustrated by Michael Foreman. London: Pavilion, 1985.

**1986**

- (C) Froud, Brian, and TJ. *The Goblins of the Labyrinth*. Illuminated by Brian Froud. London: Pavilion, 1986.

**1988**

- (C) *The Curse of the Vampire's Socks and Other Doggerel*. Illustrated by Michael Foreman. London: Pavilion, 1988.

**1989**

- (O) Review of *Fantasy and Reason: Children's Literature in the Eighteenth Century*, by Geoffrey Summerfield. London: Methuen, 1984. *Children's Literature in Education* 20, no. 2 (1989): 129–30.  
 (F) *Erik the Viking: The Book of the Film of the Book*. London: Methuen Drama, 1989; New York: Applause Theatre Book, 1990.

**1992**

- (C) *Fantastic Stories*. Illustrated by Michael Foreman. London: Pavilion; New York: Viking, 1992.  
 (C) *The Dragon on the Roof*. Illustrated by Michael Foreman. Penguin Children's 60s. London: Penguin, 1992.

**1993**

- (C) *The Beast with a Thousand Teeth*. Illustrated by Michael Foreman. London: Pavilion; New York: Bedrick, 1993.  
 (C) *A Fish of the World*. Illustrated by Michael Foreman. London: Pavilion, 1993.

**1994**

- (D) TJ, and Alan Ereira. *The Crusades*. London: BBC Books, 1994; New York: Facts on File, 1995.
- (C) *Lady Cottington's Pressed Fairy Book*. Illustrated by Brian Froud. London: Pavilion; Atlanta: Turner, 1994.
- (C) *The Sea Tiger*. Illustrated by Michael Foreman. New York: Bedrick, 1994.
- (C) *The Fly-By-Night*. Illustrated by Michael Foreman. New York: Bedrick, 1994.
- (C) "The Tinderbox." In *The Oxford Treasury of Children's Stories*, compiled by Michael Harrison and Christopher Stuart-Clark. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

**1996**

- (C) TJ, and Brian Froud. *The Goblin Companion: A Field Guide to Goblins*. London: Pavilion; Atlanta: Turner, 1996. (Reissued in abridged form as *The Goblins of the Labyrinth* [1986])
- (C) TJ, and Brian Froud. *Strange Stains and Mysterious Smells: Quentin Cottington's Journal of Faery Research*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

**1997**

- (C) *The Knight and the Squire*. Illustrated by Michael Foreman. London: Pavilion, 1997.
- (C) *The Sea Tiger*. Illustrated by Michael Foreman. London: Puffin, 1997.
- (C) *Fairy Tales and Fantastic Stories*. A special fifteenth anniversary edition of TJ's short stories for children. London: Pavilion, 1997.

**2000**

- (A) "The Monk's Tale." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 22 (2000): 387–97.
- (C) *The Lady and the Squire*. Illustrated by Michael Foreman. London: Pavilion, 2000.

**2001**

- (A) "The Image of Chaucer's Knight." In *Speaking Images: Essays in Honor of V. A. Kolve*, edited by Robert F. Yeager and Charlotte C. Morse. 205–36. Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 2001.

**2002**

- (F) Chapman, Graham, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, TJ, and Michael Palin. *Monty Python and the Holy Grail: Screenplay*. London: Methuen, 2002.

- (C) TJ, and Nanette Newman. *Bedtime Stories*. Illustrated by Michael Foreman. London: Pavilion Children's Books, 2002.

**2003**

- (B) TJ, Robert Yeager, Terry Dolan, Alan Fletcher, and Juliette Dor. *Who Murdered Chaucer?: A Medieval Mystery*. London: Methuen, 2003; New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004.

**2004**

- (D) TJ, and Alan Ereira. *Terry Jones' Medieval Lives*. London: BBC Books, 2004.

**2006**

- (D) TJ, and Alan Ereira. *Terry Jones' Barbarians: An Alternative Roman History*. London: BBC Books, 2006.

**2008**

- (A) "Was Richard II a Tyrant? Richard's Use of the Books of Rules for Princes." *Fourteenth Century England* 5 (2008): 130–60.

**2008**

- (A) "Richard II: Royal Villain or Victim of 'Spin'?" *Times of London*, 4 October.

**2011**

- (C) *The Amazing Terry Jones Presents for the Very First Time His Incredible Animal Tales*. Illustrated by Michael Foreman. London: Pavilion Children's Books, 2011.
- (C) *The Amazing Terry Jones Presents His Unbelievable Adventures and Fantastic Stories*. Illustrated by Michael Foreman. London: Pavilion Children's Books, 2011.

## CHAPTER 2

### YOUNG JONES AT OXFORD, 1961–62

*V. A. Kolve*

**M**y title, I confess, claims too much. What follows is not an essay in biography, carefully researched, but a memory piece about Oxford as it was half a century ago when Terry Jones first came up to “read English” at St. Edmund Hall—a three-year course of study leading to an Honours BA in English Language and Literature. I’d earned the same degree a few years earlier as an undergraduate at Jesus College (1955–57), in two years rather than three because I already had an American BA. When Terry arrived in 1961, I was a fifth-year candidate for the D. Phil., working feverishly hard to finish a doctoral thesis on medieval drama. But I was also beginning my fourth year at the Hall, supported by a Junior Research Fellowship. I earned extra money (and valuable experience) by tutoring its first-year men reading English, usually ten in all, preparing them for the “preliminary” exams they would take at the end of their second term and introducing them to fourteenth-century literature in the term after that. I returned to the States—doctoral degree in hand, and with a job awaiting me at Stanford—at the end of that academic year.

So Terry and I had just one year of Oxford in common—his first, my last—too brief a time (and for me too harried) to form a friendship or even a deep acquaintance. That would come later. But university life changed slowly in those days, and as a six-year veteran of the place—in all three ranks, undergraduate, graduate student and young don—I knew both the university and the college reasonably well. Though “Teddy Hall” (as it’s popularly called) is now one of the largest Oxford colleges, with some 400 undergraduates, 220 graduate students, and 40-plus Tutorial Fellows, it was small and intimate at the turn of the ’60s. It had just over 200 students (virtually all undergraduate) and a Governing Body of Fellows, 15 in all, who lunched together Monday through Friday, and dined with the Principal more formally in Hall at least two or three nights a week. Those of us who “lived in” “dined in” more often.



**Figure 1** “Fresher” Terry Jones. By special permission Gillman and Soame Photographers.

But Terry and I had other connections as well, since two of the three men who would tutor him in the years that followed ('62–'64) were among my closest friends. Reggie (R. E.) Alton, who regularly taught for Jesus as well as St. Edmund Hall, had been my tutor too, and Graham Midgley had been one of my examiners in the “Schools” (the 27 hours of final exams that determine the class of your Honours degree). So although Terry’s Oxford and mine were not coterminous, like circles in a Venn diagram there was significant overlap between them. The editors of this volume have invited me to think back on that experience—the good, bad, and indifferent of it—for whatever light it may throw upon the person, both public and private, that Terry has become. That Oxford shaped the ways we thought about ourselves, doubted ourselves, and affirmed ourselves goes without saying. An intense self-fashioning was the goal of those privileged early years.

By way of introduction, I would like to share with you a few of the bawdy jests, the startling demolitions, the irreverent take on things that made Terry’s weekly essays so memorable. How better to account for the protean comedy of

the Python TV circus? the *Holy Grail* and *Life of Brian*? the skeptical eye Terry cast on the *Crusades*, the *Barbarians*, and certain archetypal *Medieval Lives*? Or more to the present point, how better to explain Terry's provocative books on *Chaucer's Knight* and the politics of Chaucer's death? But alas! I have no such memories to share. If Terry ever favored our tutorials with flashes of comparable wit and humor, those flashes, like François Villon's "snows of yesteryear," have left no trace behind. But perhaps I've simply forgotten: Terry has said his earliest attack on the "chivalry" of Chaucer's Knight was mounted in an essay for me.<sup>1</sup>

So I begin instead with an awkward acknowledgment. In 2001, at a three-day symposium marking my retirement from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Terry not only contributed to *Speaking Images*, the volume of essays presented to me on that occasion, a dazzling piece linking Sir John Hawkwood, the English mercenary, to the Ellesmere portrait of Chaucer's Knight, but at the farewell banquet gave the wittiest speech of the evening. Affecting puzzlement and regret, he began by recalling tutorials he'd had with me 40 years before—and couldn't remember a single word I'd said! : On this equally festive occasion, 50 years after our tutorials together, I find myself at a similar loss: I can't remember anything he said either. But perhaps neither of us should be overly embarrassed. Education is a mysterious process, not a drop box for deliveries made from the outside.

In any case, as readers of medieval romance know well, the youth of a hero is often obscure; his full colors aren't on show early on. So it should come as no surprise that my memories of Terry in his first year are not of a precocious Python-in-the-making, fond of pratfalls, saucy remarks, washerwoman drag, and screeching at the top of his lungs. I remember instead a rather intense young man, darkly handsome in a Welsh sort of way, who took his studies seriously and for much of that first year expected to go into teaching as a career. By means none of us could have guessed at then, it's clear he's accomplished that too.

But first a few facts about our hero's early life. Though born in Wales in 1942 to a bank-clerk father and a homemaker mother, he never saw his father, who was serving in the Royal Air Force, until after the war. The happiness of Terry's childhood in Colwyn Bay, four years of being raised by a doting mother and grandmother, came to an abrupt end when his father returned and moved the family to Surrey. Though Terry experienced the move as a rupture, a loss of Eden, it did in time facilitate his entry into the Royal Grammar School, Guildford, a day school founded in 1509 to educate "poor men's sons in the town," and chartered in 1552 as "the Free Grammar School of King Edward VI." It did not, however, always focus on that mission—entrance became highly selective—and has not always remained tuition free; its fees today are substantial. But from 1944 to 1977, including Terry's time there, it was fully funded by the state.

He did well there, serving as Captain of Boxing, Captain of Rugby, and "Head Boy" all in his final year. A multitalented lad, young Jones, ready for Oxford at the age of nineteen. Or better, as he "thinks he thought" then, ready for Cambridge. He'd applied to the College of Gonville and Caius because he was mad for poetry, and "modern poetry" could be studied there. (Not so at Oxford, not for many years to come.) But when Gonville and Caius put him on