

Poetry and Pandemic: New Readings of Chaucer

3 sessions on Zoom: Fridays, Oct 9, Oct 23, Nov 13 | 6:30–8:30 p.m.

Tuition: \$150, \$135 Delancey Society and Members

Led by Professor David Wallace, the Judith Rodin Professor of English and Related Literature at the University of Pennsylvania

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Geoffrey Chaucer survived the great pandemic of 1348 when he was about five years old, saw plague return every ten years, and likely died of it in 1400. Giovanni Boccaccio, from whom Chaucer borrowed most, lived through the 1348 pandemic-- which killed half the population of Florence, including his father (a sanitation official). Boccaccio's *Decameron*, which opens with the most famous description of the plague, is actually extraordinarily positive: poets and writers may help regenerate human society, it suggests, through powers of art, and through laughter. We will begin this short Friday night course by discussing Boccaccio's "Introduction" to the *Decameron*, and also Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale*-- a story of sex and money, religion and marital politics that is very Boccaccian in style. The second meeting will be dedicated to the *Friar's Tale*, which is spookily Halloweenish. The third will move on to the *Miller's Tale*, an Oxford Tale of bums, a window, a red-hot poker, and feared eco-catastrophe (a second Noah's flood). We will be reading a lot of Chaucer aloud, in the original Middle English, but no previous experience is required! And, in good Chaucerian fashion, all are welcome. *Verray* welcome.

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Books Required: any edition of Chaucer in Middle English; the Penguin edition, ed. Jill Mann, is especially good. Online parallel text also available: <http://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/>

For Boccaccio, "Introduction" to the *Decameron*, see:

https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/texts/

David Wallace has been Judith Rodin Professor of English and Related Literature at Penn since 1996. He lives on Delancey Street, three blocks from the Rosenbach. He served as President of the Medieval Academy of America in 2018, and in 2019 was awarded the Sir Israel Gollancz Prize by the British Academy. His most recent book is *Chaucer: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2019).