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Medieval Poetry

1400–1500

Edited by Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards

THE OXFORD HISTORY *of* POETRY *in* ENGLISH

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Dedicated to the Beloved Memory of
Michael O'Neill
1953–2018
Professor of English, University of Durham, United Kingdom
Founding Coordinating Editor, OHOPE,
Great Romantics Scholar and Distinguished British Poet

THE OXFORD HISTORY OF POETRY IN ENGLISH

The Oxford History of Poetry in English (*OHOPE*) is designed to offer a fresh, multi-voiced, and comprehensive analysis of 'poetry': from Anglo-Saxon culture through contemporary British, Irish, American, and Global culture, including English, Scottish, and Welsh poetry, Anglo-American colonial and post-colonial poetry, and poetry in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Caribbean, India, Africa, Asia, and other international locales. *OHOPE* both synthesises existing scholarship and presents cutting-edge research, employing a global team of expert contributors for each of the fourteen volumes.

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Medieval Poetry: 1400–1500

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JULIA BOFFEY
AND
A. S. G. EDWARDS

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General Editor's Preface

The Oxford History of Poetry in English (*OHOPE*) aims to offer a fresh, multi-voiced, and comprehensive survey of its vast and complicated topic: from Anglo-Saxon poetry through contemporary British, Irish, American, and Global poetry, including English, Scottish, and Welsh poetry, Anglo-American colonial and post-colonial poetry, and poetry in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Caribbean, India, Africa, Asia, and other locales.

By 'poetry in English', we mean, quite simply, *poetry written in the English language*: Old English, Middle English, Early Modern English, Modern English. 'English' poetry certainly emerges in Anglo-Saxon England, around the sixth century CE; but, as 'poetry in English' develops, it extends beyond the geographical boundaries of England. Today, poetry in English is planetary. While *OHOPE* necessarily limits the coverage if not the scope simply to come into existence, hopefully the Series will join other international projects in the world-service of 'poetry'.

What do we mean by 'poetry'? While we believe that most readers will know what we mean, the topic is intricate, so much so that a quick definition proves elusive. For example, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) offers six major definitions, with seven sub-definitions, bringing the total to thirteen. The definitions range from 'Imaginative or creative literature in general; fable, fiction', to 'The art or work of a poet', and can include even 'A treatise on the art of poetry', or, '*figurative*. Something comparable to poetry in its beauty or emotional impact; a poetic quality of beauty and intensity of emotion; the poetic quality *of* something.' The earliest attested use of the word 'poetry' traces to the 1380s, in contexts that emphasize the contested truth claims of figurative representation. In Chaucer's *House of Fame*, one of the rivalrous authorities on the Troy story 'seyde that Omer made lyes, / Feynynge in hys poetries' (1477–8). The ending of *Troilus and Criseyde* includes a valediction for 'the forme of olde clerkis speche / In poetrie' (5.1854–5). John Trevisa's translation of Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon* (finished in 1387) connects idolatry and poetry: 'Of þe bryngynge forþ of mawmetrie com wel nyh al þe feyninge of poetrie' (2.279). In the 1390s, by contrast, Chaucer's Clerk sees poetry as an authoritative, illustrious tradition embodied in 'Fraunceys Petrak, the lauriat poete, / … whos rethorike sweete / Enlumyned al Ytaille of poetrie' (*Canterbury Tales* IV.31–3). Intriguingly, none of the *OED* definitions speak of metre, let alone rhyme, and there is no suggestion that poetry includes different 'kinds' (or forms or genres). The recent and authoritative *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (2012), perhaps wisely, does not include an entry on 'poetry' itself. Because poetry remains such an elusive concept—and can include language in distinct metres (such as iambic pentameter) and rhymes (such as the 'Shakespearean' sonnet, rhyming *abab cdcd efef gg*, or three quatrains and a couplet)—we might remain content simply to open the concept up, and let the volumes in the Series speak on their own.

Yet *OHOPE* does proceed through a general rubric. We have encouraged our contributors to address their project through the following formula: *poetry as poetry*—rather than say, poetry *as context* or *in context*. The goal is to highlight the art of poetry itself, as it unfolds historically in time, across idioms, forms, nations, and so forth. Yet we do not think

such a goal at odds with context, nor should it be. Each volume is thus free to situate poetry historically, ideologically, as the editors see fit.

Precisely because 'Poetry in English' spans some fifteen centuries, develops in four major historical 'languages' (Old, Middle, Early Modern, Modern), spread across multiple nations (ever-changing), and includes countless poets, both men and women, the fourteen-volume *Oxford History of Poetry in English* cannot succeed in mapping the full terrain. That has never been the goal. In keeping with the Press's Oxford Series template, the volumes remain necessarily selective: no satisfactorily comprehensive 'coverage' is possible, or perhaps desirable. Each volume does the best it can to remain representative, and fair.

We believe that *OHOPE* fills a gap in the available scholarship and criticism. At present, there is no authoritative history of poetry in English covering British, Irish, American, and Global poetry from the medieval through the modern eras. Readers might like to know that the origins to the present history evidently began with Alexander Pope. In the eighteenth century, Pope *conceived* of a history of 'British' poetry, but it took Thomas Warton to begin writing one, which he left unfinished at his death, still at work on the English Renaissance. Accordingly, the first to complete a comprehensive *History of British Poetry* was W. J. Courthope, who published a six-volume, single-authored work between 1895 and 1905. Other histories followed: in 1947, Herbert Grierson and J. C. Smith coauthored a one-volume *Critical History of English Poetry* (Oxford); in 1961, James Reeves published *A Short History of English Poetry from 1340–1940* (New York); in 1962, Kenneth Hopkins published *English Poetry: A Short History* (London); and in 1981, G. S. Fraser produced *A Short History of English Poetry* (Shepton Mallet). Between 1977 and 1981, Routledge began a *History of English Poetry*, but evidently the series was never completed; only three volumes are in print: *Old English and Middle English Poetry*, edited by Derek A. Pearsall; *Restoration and Eighteenth Century Poetry 1660–1780*, edited by Eric Rothstein; and *Poetry of the Romantic Period*, edited by J. R. de J. Jackson. In 1994, Carl Woodring, working with James Shapiro as Associate Editor, published *The Columbia History of British Poetry*, a one-volume edited collection beginning with Old English Poetry and ending in 1990. In 2010, the most recent attempt at such a history appeared, edited by the late Michael O'Neill, *The Cambridge History of English Poetry*, another single-volume collection, covering England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, with all chapters devoted to a single author or a small group of authors.

As for histories of American poetry, in 1993 Jay Parini published an edited *Columbia History of American Poetry*, making Columbia the first press to print a history of poetry combining 'British' and 'American'—anticipating the present *Oxford History*, yet on a much-reduced scale, minus Global poetry, and now thirty years from its publication date. Earlier histories in American poetry include Horace Gregory and Marya Zaturenska's 1946 *History of American Poetry 1900–1940* (Harcourt Brace) and Donald Barlow Stauffer's 1974 *Short History of American Poetry* (Dutton). No histories of Global poetry in English exist. Consequently, the field remains wide open for a comprehensive history that includes Global, American, and British and Irish poetry, medieval to modern.

The target audience for *OHOPE* is similarly complex, to include the general reader of poetry, students at several levels (upper-division secondary school, undergraduate, graduate), teachers at all levels, literary critics, and textual scholars—effectively, anyone interested in poetry in English. Each chapter aims to meet the primary criterion required for this readership: a combination of both a general orientation to its topic and a fresh

approach and contribution to the field. A comprehensive bibliography will be printed at the back of each volume.

Moreover, each volume aims to feature a stable set of chapters. Not simply will there be chapters on major poets ('Milton'), but each volume aims to include chapters on the following topics, geared to the particular era or century it covers:

- The nature of authorship and literary career, as well as the role of the poet in society.
- Imitation and intertextuality.
- Prosody, poetics, and the nature of literary theory.
- Figuration and allusiveness.
- Modes of representation (e.g., allegory, ekphrasis, and blazon during the Renaissance).
- Genre, mode, and form.
- Translation.
- The material production and circulation of poetry (manuscript, performance, print), including the role of patronage.

OHOPE pays significant attention to such major cultural vectors as religion/theology, politics/nationalism, race/class, and gender/sexuality. However, the goal will be unusual in today's critical climate: to connect such vectors to the *matter of poetry* itself; to discuss 'history' and the 'material' insofar as it allows for the historicisation of poetry *as an art*. Above all, *The Oxford History of Poetry in English* aims to provide an authoritative, useful helpmeet for enjoying and embracing one of the seminal achievements of world-art.

Patrick Cheney

Acknowledgements

The Oxford History of Poetry in English has had a long history. Formally, it began on 16 April 2008, when Andrew McNeillie, then Senior Commissioning Editor of Literature at the Press, invited Patrick Cheney to be General Editor of the Series. The history continued when Penn State University offered its support—in particular, when the Head of the English Department at the time, Robin Schulze, offered financial and administrative support. Cheney then appointed four Coordinating Editors to manage the wide range of coverage for the Series, and we remain indebted to their early work and support: along with Professor Schulze, Robert R. Edwards, Laura L. Knoppers, and Robert Caserio. The Penn State team produced a detailed proposal to the Press, which in turn produced a series of readers' reports, including recommendations for revision, one of which was to widen leadership of the project. At this point, a new set of Coordinating Editors was appointed: along with Professor Edwards for Medieval and Professor Knoppers for Early Modern (now at the University of Notre Dame), Michael O'Neill of the University of Durham for Modern British and Irish, Langdon Hammer of Yale for American, and Vinay Dharwadker of the University of Wisconsin for Global. A revised proposal then went to Press readers, to whom again we remain grateful. When Professor O'Neill passed away in 2018, his colleague at Durham, Stephen Regan, was appointed Coordinating Editor of Modern British and Irish. Recently as well, Professor Hammer has stepped down, and new appointments are underway. We wish to express our gratitude to all these early begetters of *The Oxford History of Poetry in English* (*OHOPE*).

OHOPE is dedicated to the memory of Michael O'Neill, who sadly passed away on 21 December 2018. Not merely was Michael a distinguished Romantics scholar and British poet, but he was a Coordinating Editor of the Modern British and Irish unit of *OHOPE*, for which he provided expert, collegial leadership.

The editors of Volume 3 would like to express their gratitude to Professor Robert R. Edwards of the Department of English at Penn State, for his advice and support. They thank Rachel Addison for her astute copyediting and Mark Ajin Millet, Integra Project Manager, and Aimee Wright, Senior Project Editor of Oxford University Press, for their efficient handling of this volume. We are grateful to all the contributors for their work. This volume is dedicated to the memory of Derek Pearsall (1931-2021), scholar, teacher, and friend.

Contents

List of Abbreviations

BL:	British Library.
BodL:	Bodleian Library.
CUL:	Cambridge University Library.
DIMEV:	Linne Mooney et al., *A Digital Index of Middle English Verse* (online).
EETS:	Early English Text Society; cited by series (e.s., o.s., s.s.), volume number(s) and date(s).
e.s.:	extra series.
MED:	*Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Robert E. Lewis, et al. (Ann Arbor, MI, 1952–2001).
MET:	Middle English Texts (Heidelberg), cited by series number.
MS(S):	manuscript(s).
NIMEV:	J. Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards, *A New Index of Middle English Verse*. London, 2005.
ODNB:	H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (eds). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford, 2004 (also online, with supplements).
o.s.:	original series.
s.s.:	supplementary series.
STC:	A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, revised and enlarged by W. A. Jackson, and F. S. Ferguson, completed by Katharine F. Pantzer, *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, & Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad 1475–1640*. 2nd edn. 3 vols. London, 1976–91.
STS:	Scottish Text Society, cited by series, volume number(s) and date(s).
Wing:	Donald G. Wing, *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books, 1641–1700*. 3 vols. 2nd edn. New York, 1994.

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Editorial Note

All *OHOPE* volumes work from the Series Style Guide, a modified version of the one used by Oxford University Press for humanities publications. Individual *OHOPE* volumes may further modify the Style Guide according to needs—for instance, the need to print and translate Old and Middle English in Volumes 1–3, or of early modern Scots in Volume 4. Because of the linguistic diversity of poetry in Middle English, the editors of Volume 3 have followed the judgement of contributors in matters of quotation and orthography.

Where feasible, then, the standard editions of all authors have been quoted and cited. Primary texts are cited in full in the footnotes on their first occurrence, with abbreviated citations thereafter. Secondary texts are cited in full in the footnotes on their first occurrence in each chapter, and in abbreviated form thereafter.

When difficult words or phrases appear in quotations from primary texts, explanatory glosses are provided.

Quotations from Classical authors generally come from the Loeb Classical Library. For convenience, all Greek words quoted in the texts are transliterated. All Latin quotations are translated into English.

References to NIMEV numbers (see *List of Abbreviations*) identify the primary sources for texts cited. Early printed editions are identified by reference to STC numbers (see *List of Abbreviations*).

Each *OHOPE* volume concludes with a detailed, alphabetised Bibliography, combining primary and secondary sources mentioned in the individual chapters.

CHAPTER 1
Introduction

Julia Boffey & A. S. G. Edwards

> Most of the poets that immediately succeeded Chaucer seem rather relapsing into barbarism than availing themselves of those striking ornaments which his judgement and imagination have disclosed. They seem to have been insensible to his vigour of versification, and to his flights of fancy. It was not indeed likely that a poet should soon arise equal to Chaucer … His successors, however, approach him in no degree of proportion.[1]

Thomas Warton's judgement, in his *History of English Poetry* (1775), established a critical stance towards the poetry of the fifteenth century that was to hold sway for the next two centuries. It was one that saw the poetry of this period as embodying a significant decline from the standards of poetic excellence established by Chaucer. It was not until the latter half of the twentieth century that it was possible to see the beginnings of a new appreciation of the qualities of the poetry of the fifteenth century, an appreciation that over the past fifty years has grown to a spate of radical reassessments of its intrinsic merits and historical importance. This volume seeks to consolidate this new sense of the achievements of the age.

It is appropriate to begin, like Warton, with Chaucer. In the last book of the *Confessio Amantis*, written towards the end of the fourteenth century, Gower claimed that 'the lond fulfild is overal' with Chaucer's songs.[2] With a proper sense of periodization Chaucer died in October 1400. His death thereby served to create a clear division in the literary history of English poetry. Fifteenth-century poetry was to be crucially shaped by the range of its attempts to mirror and modify Chaucer's achievements. Little more than a decade after Chaucer's death Thomas Hoccleve, who may well have known him, assessed his poetic significance. He was 'the firste fyndere (*inventor*) of our fair langage', 'the honour of Englissh tonge', 'flour of eloquence / Mirour of fructuous entendement (*edifying meaning*)'. He was both 'maistir' (*master*) and 'fadir' (*father*).[3] Hoccleve's acclaim set the parameters for what was to be the historical and exemplary sense of Chaucer's importance over the course of the fifteenth century and beyond.[4] But its terms of reference, with Chaucer as the source of what came to be thought of as a specifically English poetic tradition, accommodates only part of the full range of fifteenth-century poetic production. While Chaucer's influence was

[1] Thomas Warton, *History of English Poetry*, revised by Richard Price, 3 vols. (London, 1824), 2.269.

[2] *Confessio Amantis*, 8.2943–7, in G. C. Macaulay (ed.), *The English Works of John Gower*, 2 vols., EETS, e.s. 81, 82 (London, 1900–1901), 2.466.

[3] Thomas Hoccleve, 'The Regiment of Princes', in F. J. Furnivall (ed.), *Hoccleve's Works*: III. *The Regiment of Princes*, EETS, e.s. 72 (London, 1897), 1958–67.

[4] See Caroline Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1375–1900*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1925), 1.14–65 for a detailed record of such references to Chaucer. The literature on Chaucer's influence on fifteenth-century poetry is extensive. Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton, NJ, 1993) remains the most suggestive account; see also Derek Pearsall, 'The English Chaucerians', in D. S. Brewer (ed.), *Chaucer and Chaucerians* (London, 1966), 201–39.

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widely and powerfully felt, its reverberations generated diverse effects, variously inflected by factors of time, occasion, and place, across the landscape of fifteenth-century verse writing. Other earlier poetic traditions, some with lineages stretching well back beyond Chaucer's lifetime, continued to generate response through the course of the century.

If the date of Chaucer's death might seem to constitute a reassuringly firm point of literary-historical reference, there were few indications of such stability in the real world of fifteenth-century England, as David Rundle demonstrates (Chapter 2). 'England', 'English', and 'Englishness' were complicated terms in the islands of Britain.[5] In Scotland, a separate country with its own king, both 'Inglis' (early Scots, a distinct form of English) and Gaelic were in use. Wales, under English rule since the late thirteenth century, had its own flourishing traditions of writing in Welsh; and the principality's charged relations with the English crown were briefly invigorated in the opening decades of the fifteenth century under its prince Owain Glyndŵr, who led an ultimately unsuccessful rebellion before his death *c*1415. In Ireland, largely Gaelic-speaking, English flourished only in the area of the 'Pale', immediately around Dublin. These parts of Britain remained in uneasy relationship with England through the century. And their own distinct literary cultures, especially that of Scotland, show limited response to the expanding literary activity in England.

For those considering themselves English, the century began with a usurpation and ensuing efforts to consolidate the new Lancastrian dynasty inaugurated by Henry IV (1399–1413). These troubled years were also dominated by anxieties about religious orthodoxy, with popular dissemination of Wycliffite ideas prompting Lollard support for movements such as the rebellion led by John Oldcastle in 1414. This rebellion and other manifestations of Lollardy were attacked in verse of different kinds, notably by Thomas Hoccleve.

The desire to promote religious stability was to a degree undercut by various forms of political disorder both outside and within England. The uncertainties arising from this found expression in both short poems and longer works. Lancastrian successes in the Hundred Years' War against France—Henry V's victory at Agincourt in 1415, which produced a range of verse responses; the 1420 Treaty of Troyes which established an English right to the French throne, an event celebrated by Lydgate at the end of his *Siege of Thebes*—brought no lasting stability. By the 1430s, with French forces invigorated after the collapse of the siege of Orleans, and the withdrawal of Burgundian support for Henry VI, the English cause was dramatically weakened. The end of the Hundred Years' War, with French victory at the Battle of Castillon in 1453, saw the loss of all English territory in France, including the long-held territory of Gascony; only Calais remained under English control. That such significant events received only intermittent commentary in verse suggests the weight of their impact.

Political cataclysms at some further distance from English interests and Britain's borders also provoked little in the way of significant verse. The seizure of Constantinople in 1453, and the 1480 siege of the island of Rhodes, for example—two reminders of the strength of the Ottoman empire and its potential threat, not just to Christianity itself, but to western culture—do not seem to have been marked by poetic responses.

This may have been because of the weight of internal preoccupations. The shadow of usurpation lay over the century from its beginning. Its implications for English poetry were marked by Gower in a revision of the prologue to *Confessio Amantis* which changed its dedicatee from Richard II to Henry IV. The reign of Henry IV prompted various literary

[5] For the place of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales in the wider global context, see Christopher Allmand (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History, Volume VII: c.1415–c.1500* (Cambridge, 1998).

expressions of the need for order and stability, detectable among some of the political poems in BodL MS Digby 102. The death of Henry V in 1422 created further instability, with his successor, Henry VI, the last Lancastrian king, only an infant. Henry VI's reign was long but fractured by conflicts arising from competing Lancastrian and Yorkist claims to the crown in the course of the so-called Wars of the Roses. Henry was deposed by the Yorkist Edward IV in 1461. He reclaimed the throne in 1470, but at his death in 1477 was again replaced by Edward. The shifting allegiances and troubles of these decades are reflected in anonymous short poems and carols whose support for one or other faction is occasionally subsumed in a more heartfelt wish for 'concorde & unite'.[6] The reign of Edward IV was followed by the accession of another Yorkist, Richard III. His death in 1485 at the Battle of Bosworth opened the way for Henry VII's inauguration of a new Tudor dynasty, albeit one whose status continued to be marked by periodic unrest with the emergence of different claimants to the throne. Such concern with disorder in Henry's reign finds expression in one of Skelton's earliest poems, an elegy on the death of Henry Percy, fourth earl of Northumberland, killed by rebels in 1489.[7]

The implications of these domestic events for the production and transmission of poetry were necessarily contingent on policy and moment. A number of works commissioned or patronized in court circles in the early decades of the century evidently constituted responses to the new Lancastrian regime, variously lauding and warning those at its heart. In these circles, and for poets like Lydgate and Hoccleve, discussed by Sebastian Langdell and Robert R. Edwards (Chapters 24 and 25), the ethical aspects of Chaucer's poetry, together with its Englishness, made it a powerful touchstone. Some choices of both poetic matter and form look to Chaucer's models. Among works offering commentary on contemporary events and advice to England's rulers, Lydgate's *Troy Book* (commissioned in 1412 by the future Henry V) responds to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (a manuscript of which the king owned); and Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes* (completed in 1411 and dedicated to the future king) includes directions to remember the 'fresch lyflynesse' of Chaucer's 'persone'.[8] Both of these works employ forms given English currency by Chaucer, pentameter couplets and rhyme royal stanzas respectively. On occasions, the use of Chaucerian models was not without its ironies. Later in the century in Scotland, at a time of tense relations between England and its northern neighbour (*c*1477), Blind Hary's nationalistic poetic history *The Wallace* would use iambic pentameter and eight- and nine-line stanzas based on Chaucerian models for his own nationalist ends, as Andrew Galloway shows (Chapter 18).[9]

Not all early fifteenth-century poetic commentators on Lancastrian rule felt under the shadow of Chaucer's influence to the same extent. The anonymous author of *The Crowned King*, writing close to the date of Henry V's Agincourt campaign in 1415, couched his advice to the king in the form of a dream vision in alliterative metre.[10] The choice of form and metre places him at a distance from court-affiliated Lancastrian commentators. Doubtless regional factors were an element in decisions about how to respond to the increasing availability of manuscripts of Chaucer's writings.

[6] See the selection of poems in R. H. Robbins (ed.), *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries* (New York, 1959), 189–227. The quotation is taken from the refrain line in poem no. 79, 'Reconciliation of Henry VI and the Yorkists (1458)'.

[7] Macaulay (ed.), *The English Works of John Gower*, 1.1–34.

[8] A. Erdmann and E. Ekwall (eds), *Lydgate's Siege of Thebes*, 2 vols., EETS, e.s. 108, 125 (London, 1911, 1930), and Furnivall (ed.), *Hoccleve's Works: III*, 4993–5 (180).

[9] Anne McKim (ed.), *The Wallace: Blind Harry* (Edinburgh, 2003).

[10] In Helen Barr (ed.), *The Piers Plowman Tradition* (London, 1993), 205–10.

Some of the verse that emerged in the course of the century was, as already noted, directly prompted by political and military events both abroad and at home. John Page's *Siege of Rouen* offers an unusual first-hand perspective on a military event of 1418–19 in the Hundred Years' War. The *Libelle of Englyshe Polycye*, originating at a slightly later point in the context of the 'werre in Fraunce', presents distinctive political and economic commentary on current events through its analyses of England's trade relations with various countries in the 1430s.[11] Its contemporary appeal to a wide social spectrum is evidenced by the large number of surviving manuscript copies. But it is rare for such poetic voices to achieve distinctive expression about historical matters, present or past. Most often, verse depictions of political events and historical characters are shaped, with varying degrees of explicitness, by faction, individual or regional, and constitute what we would now term propaganda.

There were wider literary consequences to the extended war with France. At the beginning of the fifteenth century England still had a trilingual culture, with French and Latin in fairly widespread use alongside, or (in some contexts) in preference to English. Although this remained the case, the continuing war with France imbued this situation with new complexities. Domestic hostility to the French language may have been a factor in the growth of Anglophone literary culture from the later fourteenth century, one that found expression in a developing sense of a distinctive literary English, as explored here by Jenny Nuttall (in Chapter 5). But at the same time the English presence in France must have exposed some English people to French poetic forms, while the presence in England of noble French prisoners and their households (newly visible after Agincourt and the taking of prisoners for ransom) probably gave French literary culture an increased palpable presence in England. The debt owed by Chaucer and Gower to French models and forms anyway constituted a powerful precedent. The continuing 'anglicization' of French genres and verse forms in the fifteenth century, and the taste for works in French, was thus perhaps at once admiring and a statement of English cultural assertion. This double-edged phenomenon found expression most obviously in forms of what may be broadly thought of as 'courtly' poetry, as discussed by Rory G. Critten (Chapter 17). The bodies of poetry in both French and English associated with Charles of Orleans, resident in England under house arrest for nearly three decades after his capture at Agincourt, are significant products of this complex set of cultural relationships.[12]

There were other Continental literary influences in this period of a less definable kind. The translation into English verse of Latin texts from either the classical past or from the Italian Renaissance, considered here by Marco Nievergelt (Chapter 4), was infrequent and often derivative. Duke Humfrey of Gloucester's associations with Italian humanism are well documented, as is his role in vernacular verse translation of various kinds including this one (on which see A. S. G. Edwards, Chapter 15) and Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* (on which see Robert R. Edwards, Chapter 24). But Lydgate's work is not a direct ('humanist') translation of Boccaccio's Latin, but is based on an early fifteenth-century French prose version of it. Nor is it clear whether another unique Middle English verse rendering, of Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*, is a direct translation of the Latin.[13] Few English

[11] Joanna Bellis (ed.), *John Page's 'The Siege of Rouen'*, MET 51 (Heidelberg, 2015), and George Warner (ed.), *The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye: A Poem on the Use of Sea-Power, 1436* (Oxford, 1926).

[12] Mary-Jo Arn (ed.), *Fortunes Stabilnes: Charles of Orleans' English Book of Love* (Binghamton, NY, 1994); Mary-Jo Arn and John Fox (eds), *Poetry of Charles d'Orléans and His Circle: A Critical Edition of BnF MS. fr. 25458* (Turnhout, 2010).

[13] Janet Cowen (ed.), *On Famous Women: The Middle English Translation of Boccaccio's 'De Mulieribus Claris'*, MET 52 (Heidelberg, 2015).

poets actually ventured to Italy in the fifteenth century. Osbern Bokenham and John Capgrave, members of the Augustinian order, are notable exceptions, but their Italian travels seem to have made little impression on their hagiographic writings. The direct influence of Latin humanism on English poetry of the fifteenth century seems to have been limited. It probably achieved its most distinctive expression in the anonymous translation of part of Claudian's *De consulatu Stilichonis*, that survives in a single manuscript done for Richard, duke of York, composed uniquely in blank verse with the Latin original on facing pages.[14]

The forms of political, economic, and social change which invited poetic experimentation did so in part by expanding the range of environments hospitable to poetic production. Courtly environments—English and Scottish, royal and aristocratic—nonetheless remained pre-eminent nodes of poetic production and consumption throughout the century. The presence of educated and wealthy readers, the possibilities of patronage and preferment, and the availability of skilled scribes and illuminators to record texts in material form must all have contributed to the concentration of poetic energy in these milieux. Much of Hoccleve's occasional poetry was produced in the ambit of the Lancastrian court, based in Westminster and London; in the second half of the century, the poet George Ashby was employed in the signet office and in the service of Margaret of Anjou before his commitment to the Fleet prison.[15] Beyond royal circles, the patronage of a number of aristocratic families can be associated with surviving poems. Lydgate responded to commissions for members of the Beauchamp and Stafford families; Walton's verse translation of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* was undertaken for Elizabeth Berkeley, one of a family of major literary patrons in Gloucestershire. Poetry also flourished in the households of some lesser knights, such as Sir Miles Stapleton of Norfolk, to whom John Metham dedicated *Amoryus and Cleopes*.[16]

The characteristics of court poetry from this period are various. Features of 'courtliness' might include reference to both the general tastes and specific commissions of noble patrons, and allusions to their lineage or the events in which they were involved: Richard Holland's *Buke of the Howlat,* produced mid-century, is dedicated to Elizabeth, wife of Archibald Douglas, earl of Moray.[17] The earliest surviving printed poem by a contemporary poet was a lament for the death of Jasper Tudor, earl of Pembroke, published in 1496.[18] Poems emanating from court environments might also include circumstantial details about particular occasions. The range of William Dunbar's late fifteenth-century output for the Scottish court of James IV indicates something of the occasional variety that might be required,[19] and Dunbar's command of a range of forms and voices illustrates the resourcefulness useful to a court poet, as Pamela M. King shows (Chapter 27). For serious court occasions, allusions to Chaucerian precedents seem to have been appropriate: rhyme royal and ballade stanzas, and (for shorter pieces) variations of English versions of French fixed forms, retained a lengthy cachet.

[14] Ewald Flügel, 'Eine mittelenglische Claudian-Übersetzung (1445) (Brit. Mus. Add. Ms. 11814)', *Anglia*, 28 (1905), 255–99, 421–38.

[15] Mary Bateson (ed.), *George Ashby's Poems*, EETS, e.s. 76 (London, 1899).

[16] See Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate* (London, 1970), 166–8; Mark Science (ed.), John Walton, *Boethius: De Consolatione Philosophiae*, EETS, o.s. 170 (London, 1927); H. Craig (ed.), *The Works of John Metham*, EETS, o.s. 132 (London, 1916).

[17] Ralph Hanna (ed.), Richard Holland, *The Buke of the Howlat*, STS, 5th series, 12 (Woodbridge, 2014).

[18] STC 14477.

[19] Priscilla Bawcutt (ed.), *The Poems of William Dunbar*, 2 vols. (Glasgow, 1998).

The 'courtly' forms and subject matter of verse produced in royal and noble circles were, however, more widely influential. In lesser households, whether those of provincial members of the gentry class, or of the urban elite, or of important ecclesiasts, such verse served a range of educative and recreational purposes. Household reading in these contexts sometimes also comprehended more obviously instructive poems, a number of which had a wide circulation, and included verse instructions on conduct or piety, and fictional narratives and saints' lives promoting exemplary behaviour. Such collections, which include both works by identifiable fourteenth and fifteenth century poets as well as much anonymous verse, are discussed below by Edwards and Boffey (Chapter 8).

Prosperous urban households were also increasingly significant sites of poetic production and use. Here, as in the more rural contexts just invoked, verse served a variety of functions, from the instruction of children and apprentices to the devotional needs of mixed secular communities. Lydgate's *Bycorne and Chichevache*, written for performance in a London merchant's household, offers what was evidently considered a comic take on household dynamics.[20] Civic fraternities in towns and cities were important to poetic production, whether directly as sponsors of verse marking specific occasions, or more diffusely in relation to social connections informing networks of patronage.

Monastic houses, schools, and ecclesiastical establishments in all parts of Britain remained important cultural centres hospitable to verse production. The long list of named poets working in such environments includes Henry Bradshaw and John Lydgate, members of the Benedictine order; John Audelay, Osbern Bokenham, John Capgrave, John Hardyng, John Walton, and Andrew Wyntoun, all Augustinians, and James Ryman, a Franciscan friar. In collections surviving from these environments, English verse sometimes keeps company with Latin and French material. Schools, colleges, inns of court, and government departments were other communities hospitable to literary production. Some, possibly much of the anonymous poetry surviving from such environments is perhaps to be associated with the diffuse 'precariat' of those with loose affiliations to religious houses or ecclesiastical or academic establishments.

Some institutionally sponsored poetry, originating in communities of this kind or with civic bodies, served occasional purposes that included single notable events such as the London sheriffs' feast for which Lydgate provided *The Mumming at Bishopswood*, or royal entries to London and other cities, or the completion of buildings or monuments.[21] But in other instances verse was needed for occasions which came round at regular intervals, as with annual performances of religious plays, and the texts provided for these would have been subject to change and adaptation over time. Civic authorities were the sponsoring agents for some of this drama, especially in urban centres such as York and Coventry, as Tamara Atkin demonstrates (Chapter 14); and religious communities and ecclesiastical households (like that of Archbishop Morton in the 1490s at Lambeth Palace, home to Henry Medwall) were other important centres of play production. The survival of fifteenth-century material of this kind was enhanced by a growing wish to record and preserve it in the context of civic records and chronicles. In the case of Medwall's plays, survival was made more likely by the fact of their transmission into print, a factor which also contributed to the preservation of his name as author;[22] this and other implications of the appearance

[20] Henry Noble MacCracken (ed.), *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate: Part I: Religious Poems; Part II: Secular Poems*, 2 vols., EETS, e.s. 107 and 192 (London, 1911, 1934), 2.433–8.
[21] MacCracken (ed.), *Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, 2.668–71.
[22] STC 17778 and 17779; Alan H. Nelson (ed.), *The Plays of Henry Medwall* (Cambridge, 1980).

of print culture in England in the last quarter of the fifteenth century are discussed by Siân Echard (Chapter 9).

The authors of occasional poetry may not always be identifiable by name, but they can sometimes be attached to place, and to historical moment, from the internal evidence of what they wrote or from the context in which their writings have survived. But a very large quantity of fifteenth-century poetry is nonetheless both anonymous and resistant to localization. The origins of many of the lyrics, carols, charms, comic poems, and short narratives, discussed by Helen Phillips (Chapter 23), and a variety of other kinds of verse loosely categorizable as 'popular', discussed by Ben Parsons (Chapter 22), are impossible to pin down to particular places or contexts and sometimes even to date within a century. Much of this material enjoyed very wide geographical transmission; some of it, such as songs and carols on the holly and the ivy, may have come into being well before the fifteenth century and would remain in circulation well beyond it.[23] Such materials find broader expression and survival in other forms, as illustrated in Julia Boffey's discussion of 'Verse Outside Books' (Chapter 10).

Unsurprisingly, the topics of fifteenth-century poetry are multifarious. The increasing tendency to record and preserve texts of all kinds means that a wide range of material has survived, and from different parts of Britain. More of the 'popular' verse likely to have enjoyed an essentially oral circulation was recorded in written form in the fifteenth century than had been the case in earlier centuries, giving a material posterity to songs and charms and comic narratives. Utilitarian poems, considered here by A. S. G. Edwards (Chapter 15) similarly begin to survive in greater numbers from this period, whether in the form of lengthy verse treatises on topics like masonry and alchemy, or snappier stanzas on health or the weather. But at the heart of much fifteenth-century poetry remain topics that had informed the verse writing of earlier periods. History, both ancient and more recent, made its way into the narratives and chronicles examined here by Venetia Bridges and by Andrew Galloway (Chapters 18 and 19 respectively). The versifying of Christian teaching and narrative is discussed by Takami Matsuda (Chapter 11), hagiography by Cynthia Turner Camp (Chapter 12), and the religious lyric by Christiana Whitehead (Chapter 13). In terms of secular writing, the familiar 'matters' of romance are explored by Aisling Byrne (Chapter 20) and Phillipa Hardman (Chapter 21).

Some new and specific religious preoccupations are discernible, however. Forms of hagiographical and devotional writing received new impetus, in part through the emergence of individual saints' lives by Lydgate, Bokenham, and Capgrave, and also through Lydgate's extremely popular *Life of Our Lady*. Some new emphases are also apparent in the shorter poems discussed here by Christiania Whitehead (Chapter 13). The range of verse here, including the poems of BodL MS Digby 102, the anthology of works associated with John Audelay, James Ryman's collection of carols, and other groups of shorter lyrics and prayers in anonymous collections, reflects a new intensity of engagement with individual pious practice. Lydgate's short religious lyrics contrive this intensity in part by their notably dense texture of liturgical allusion and quotation, a feature also of the burdens and refrains of some popular anonymous carols.

Against the backdrop of spiritual anxieties and political volatility, some of the century's poetry seems also to be preoccupied with reflections on the private self in the public world. Hoccleve's *Series* famously encapsulates these worries, perceptible also in Ashby's

[23] Richard L. Greene (ed.), *The Early English Carols*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1977), 82–4.

Prisoner's Reflections and (sometimes less explicitly) in poems offering advice on conduct, as discussed by Matthew Giancarlo (Chapter 16).[24] Rory G. Critten (Chapter 17) shows how the private self's capacity to negotiate human relationships comes to the fore in some of the century's dream visions and love lyrics, forms of writing in which the world of courtly sociability presents opportunities for exploring aspects of behaviour and community.

Perhaps the most notable strand of the century's poetic concerns is its focus on a literary tradition of writing in English, a new phenomenon made possible by the late fourteenth-century burgeoning of English poetry of different kinds. This was not a monolithic tradition, as James Simpson makes clear (Chapter 3), and it accommodated a variety of forms and conventions, but for poetic writing it offered new vistas of creative possibility, both for composition in the native tongue and for reflections about the making and functions of poetry.

Chaucer was inevitably a pervasive shaping presence in poetic writings throughout this period, both explicitly and implicitly. Some poetic practitioners silently appropriated phrases, lines, or passages from his works, while others drew on Chaucerian topoi or aspects of style. Still others turned to Chaucer's works to provide more complex forms of inspiration: as Rory G. Critten (Chapter 17) and Joanna Martin (Chapter 26) demonstrate, works such as the anonymous *Flower and the Leaf* and Robert Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* both emulate and interrogate Chaucerian models.[25]

The presence of works by Chaucer and Gower in the literary manuscripts accessible to fifteenth-century readers naturally gave prominence to poetic forms with their imprimatur. Pentameter couplets, ballade and rhyme royal stanzas, lyrics shaped on the models of French fixed forms, all became increasingly popular choices for post-fourteenth-century poets, whether for stately long poems or more ephemeral shorter pieces. Alliterative poetry retained its own special prestige, however, as Eric Weiskott shows (Chapter 6): the continuing circulation of *Piers Plowman* and of works in a Langlandian tradition gave alliterative poetry a profile that extended beyond those midland and northerly regions of England with which scholarship has traditionally associated it. Early sixteenth-century poets working in both England and Scotland considered here by Jane Griffiths (Chapter 28)—pre-eminently Skelton and Douglas—were familiar with alliterative forms as well as with the range of those employed by Chaucer. Alliteration continued in wide use as an element of rhymed verse, especially in dramatic texts. And tail-rhyme, ballade and rhyme royal stanzas, tetrameter couplets, and traditional 'ballad' stanzas were employed across a range of works.

One effect of the growing status of English, explored here by Robert Meyer-Lee (Chapter 7), was a new sense of the idea of the author and, by association, of the authorial corpus. The presence of large bodies of work by Chaucer and Gower, primarily fourteenth-century poets but most widely read in fifteenth-century manuscript copies in which various of their works were assembled, must have given prominence to this idea. Thomas Hoccleve's autograph compilations of his own shorter poems are significant early fifteenth-century instances of the impulse to form single-author collections. Other assemblages include collections of the short poems of Lydgate and John Audelay and of the lyric corpora associated with Charles of Orleans and James Ryman.

[24] J. A. Burrow (ed.), *Thomas Hoccleve's Complaint and Dialogue*, EETS, o.s. 313 (Oxford, 1999); Bateson (ed.), *George Ashby's Poems*, 1–12.

[25] Derek Pearsall (ed.), *The Floure and the Leafe, The Assembly of Ladies, The Isle of Ladies* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1990); Denton Fox (ed.), *The Poems of Robert Henryson* (Oxford, 1981), 111–31.

A widespread growth in vernacular manuscript transmission in both manuscript and printed forms took place over the course of the century. It found expression in new forms of transmission, both of author collections and of single works, and also of regional compilations of distinct kinds that reflected the interests of individuals or individual households (Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards discuss these developments in Chapter 8). The emergence of print enabled a further widening of such processes of transmission, as illustrated in Siân Echard's discussion here (Chapter 9). Some works of Chaucer achieved a separate identity in print that they had not enjoyed in manuscript, for example, while the appeal of other works popular in manuscript was further extended. The widening availability of poetic texts was naturally coterminous with widening audiences: those who read and heard English verse must have come to recognize its new variety of forms, and to understand and appreciate their associations.

To return to Thomas Warton and his assertions about the 'barbarism' of fifteenth-century writing. In the last half century literary history and literary criticism have, for the first time, shaken off the view of the literary achievements of the fifteenth century that he so influentially advanced, a view that for too long impeded its appropriate study. Poets such as Lydgate and Hoccleve have risen from dismissive footnotes to become the subjects of full-length studies exploring different aspects of their literary achievements. The importance of a range of other figures, including John Audelay, Osbern Bokenham, and James Ryman, has been brought into focus. The misleadingly dubbed 'Scottish Chaucerians', James I, Robert Henryson, and William Dunbar, are now assessed with a proper sense of their individual distinctiveness. Such critical rehabilitation has been undertaken in the light of a growing understanding of the significance of related social, cultural, and political questions of patronage and of the forms in which literary texts were transmitted. For the fuller appreciation of both the contexts and complexities of fifteenth-century poetry we have to thank a range of modern scholars whose names figure prominently in the following chapters, including John Burrow, Douglas Gray, Richard Green, David Lawton, Derek Pearsall, and A. C. Spearing (many of their works are listed here in the Bibliography). We hope that we and our fellow contributors have profited from the examples that they have given, and that future generations of readers of fifteenth-century verse will profit equally from the essays assembled here.

The poetry and poetic developments covered in this volume are framed by the reigns of the first Lancastrian and the first Tudor king, Henry IV (1399–1413) and Henry VII (1485–1509). The years between 1400 and 1500 saw the consolidation of traditions of poetry in English that had begun to take shape in the fourteenth century, and the development of a new canon of English verse in part shaped by the past but also demonstrating distinct forms of innovation. The essays here thus explore the combinations of tradition and innovation significant to fifteenth-century poetic production, mapping the range of surviving texts and their particular features onto the contours of history and social change, and outlining the characteristics of the different environments in which these texts came into being. The volume's chronological coverage takes in the formation of an influential English poetic canon in both manuscript and early printed forms. It aims to situate this canon in the range of energetic experimentation discernible in the poetry of this century, and in the light of the important innovation of print as a medium for its dissemination.

The volume is constructed in five sections, the first of which covers historical and literary contexts relevant to the creation of poetry 1400–1500 and matters significant to poetic

form and style (this includes reference to the oeuvres of Chaucer and Gower, significant for fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century readers). Next comes a section devoted to the material production, transmission, performance, and audiences of poetry. The third section comprises chapters dealing with the poetic topics and genres characteristic of the period. In the fourth section are chapters on especially important poets, John Lydgate, Thomas Hoccleve, Robert Henryson, and William Dunbar. A final section contains an essay on transitions, taking in poets whose work straddles the late fifteenth and the early sixteenth century, and whose achievements provide a point of connection with *The Oxford History of Poetry in English*, Volume 4.

PART I

CONTEXTS

CHAPTER 2
Contexts of English Poetry 1400–1500

David Rundle

If history was solely as narrated by late medieval chronicles like *The Brut* in England or Walter Bower's *Scotichronicon*—as a march of conflicts and conspiracies that decide the fate of kings and their realms—then, for many in the fifteenth century, history was elsewhere. This was not for want of events historians deemed worth recording: across Scotland and England, of the nine monarchs who died in that hundred years only three did so at home in their bed; the majority were either assassinated or ended their days on military campaign. There were, in both countries, repeated outbursts of civil strife. It was also the century that saw England manage to both win and lose an empire. There were wars but, all the more, there were rumours of wars. For the majority of the population of the island of Britain, who lived on the land or in communities no larger than villages, these events, if they heard of them at all, would have sounded like distant thunder.

For sure, wars could not be fought without men being turned into soldiers, and the bonds of service that saw tenants and servants become retainers to a lord could entail some of them being required to take up arms. If they returned from battle, they might regale family and friends with tales of what had happened. Others might hear of some of the developments on their trips into the local town, if that was one of the occasions when an English royal proclamation was announced. Monarchical government impinged on the localities through its quotidian reach—the coinage, for instance, or the administration of justice, though the latter in fifteenth-century England was notorious for being skewed by lords and their henchmen. Even for the minority who lived in towns, life was shaped less around regnal years than by the cycle of market days and the seasons. When thought was given to a grander sweep of time, it was one in which kings were small figures painted into the depiction of 'Doom', the 'Last Judgement', as often displayed on the wall of the parish church.

This was a world with low life expectancy and sharp social contrasts. It was also one far from universal literacy and from ubiquitous and instantaneous news—and from this vernacular poetry drew some of its power. To understand its limitations and its potential in the societies of fifteenth-century Britain, this chapter will be divided into three sections. We will consider the omnipresence of death, and some of its economic and social impact. We will also survey the range of languages available, and the possibilities for being educated in them. We will, finally, turn to the locations in which poetry was to be found, both on the page and—all the more importantly—in people's mouths.

David Rundle, *Historical Contexts of English Poetry 1400–1500*. In: *The Oxford History of Poetry in English*. Edited by Julia Boffey & A. S. G. Edwards, Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198839682.003.0002

The Shadow of Death

Timor mortis conturbat me. Several late-medieval vernacular poems take as their refrain this line from the liturgy of the Office of the Dead, the most famous being William Dunbar's 'Lament for the Makars'.[1] One glosses the Latin: 'This is in Englis tong to say / The drede of deth does distrowlyt* (*disquiets*) me' (97–8).[2] The poet opens by saying 'this is the song of my old age'. The speaker, then, was one of the lucky ones: individuals could live to advanced years, even beyond the Biblically-allotted three score and ten, but many more died young, even though infant mortality was low compared to other parts of Europe.[3] For those men who had been born into wealth or who had become a monk at one of England's better-provided houses, if they survived until they were twenty-five, they could then have reasonable hope of living into their later forties or early fifties, but the prospect for most women and those of lower birth was not so favourable.[4] Moreover, as the poems suggest, hope could be offset by fear at the capriciousness with which people could be taken from the community. The verses' message of the enormity of death, which we should fear but which we should also look beyond, thinking on the afterlife, was a perennial staple of Christian morality. It had particular resonance, however, in the fifteenth century, living in the shadow of the second global pandemic, known as the Black Death. The bubonic plague reached Italy from Asia in 1347, arriving in southern England and Ireland during the summer of the following year, with Wales, northern England, and Scotland succumbing by mid-1349.[5] Certainty about mortality rates is impossible, but between a third and a half of the population were killed in this one outbreak.

The Black Death, though, was not a single event: plague returned repeatedly, in both the later fourteenth century and the fifteenth. There were national outbreaks in 1400, 1407, 1413, 1434, 1438–9, 1464, 1471, 1479, and 1485.[6] Even in years when it did not have as wide a reach, it could have a deadly impact. For example, in 1457, nearly a fifth of the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury died from it. The house's chronicler records 'this year there was a grave pestilence in the city of Canterbury and various places in the kingdom of England'.[7] Moreover, the Black Death did not stalk the country alone; there were other diseases that similarly terrified fifteenth-century England. In 1427, 'a rheumatic illness known as "the mure"', tentatively identified as a virulent strain of influenza, 'so infected the old along with the young that a great number were led to the grave'.[8] In 1485, itself a plague year,

[1] 'I that in heill wes and gladnes'; see Priscilla Bawcutt (ed.), *The Poems of William Dunbar*, 2 vols. (Glasgow, 1998), 1.94–7. On Dunbar, see Chapter 27.

[2] NIMEV 3743; Richard L. Greene, 'A Middle English "Timor Mortis" Poem', *Modern Language Review*, 28 (1933), 234–8.

[3] On mortality rates, admittedly for a later period, see E. A. Wrigley, R. S. Davies, J. E. Oeppen, and R. S. Schofield, *English Population History from Family Reconstitution 1580–1837* (Cambridge, 1997), 198–353.

[4] M. A. Jonker, 'Estimation of Life Expectancy in the Middle Ages', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society. Series A (Statistics in Society)*, 146 (2003), 105–117; John Hatcher, 'Mortality in the Fifteenth Century: Some New Evidence', *The Economic History Review*, n.s. 49 (1986), 19–38.

[5] For an introduction, see Rosemary Horrox, *The Black Death* (Manchester, 1994), and, for recent emphasis on a global perspective, see Monica Green (ed.), *Pandemic Disease in the Medieval World: Rethinking the Black Death* [The Medieval Globe, i] (Kalamazoo, MI, 2014), available at the Scholars at WMU website.

[6] J. L. Bolton, *The Medieval English Economy 1150–1500* (London, 1980), 6.

[7] Hatcher, 'Mortality', 28; the quotation is from William George Searle (ed.), *Christ Church Canterbury*, Cambridge Antiquarian Society, Octavo publications 34 (Cambridge, 1902), 67.

[8] Quotation from Henry T. Riley (ed.), *Annales Monasterii S. Albani*, 2 vols., Rolls Series 28 (London, 1870–1), 1.19; for brief comment, see Kathleen Pribyl, *Farming, Famine and Plague: The Impact of Climate in Late Medieval England* (Cham, 2017), 232.

parts of England were struck with a new mystery illness so severe that, at Westminster, the coronation of the new king, Henry VII, was postponed. Being nearly entirely confined to England and not to other parts of Europe, it is remembered as *sudor anglicus* ('the English sweat') or 'the sweating sickness', but its pathology remains debated.[9] What is known is that, in contrast to the Black Death, those it affected were more often well-to-do men rather than women or the poor.

What was the cumulative impact of these outbreaks on society? It certainly seems that England in the early fourteenth century was overpopulated for its level of agricultural production, and famine hit in 1315–7. Following the mid-century collapse in numbers, the repeated visitation of epidemics slowed the recovery in population, the size of which continued to be below pre-1348 levels not just for decades but for centuries, only rising to similar figures in the mid- or late eighteenth century. It is also undoubtedly the case that in the plague's aftermath, the numbers in some villages declined to the extent that they were unsustainable and abandoned.[10] This trend was exacerbated by the transfer of farmland from arable to pasture (which required fewer workers). For some, these developments were an opportunity. In the immediate aftermath of the arrival of the Black Death, the transformation from a situation where labour was plentiful and land scarce held potential for those peasants who survived the trauma and were able or willing to migrate. Yet, for a society which believed in the virtue of stasis, with each in their allotted place, this was an unsettling consequence; the attempt, in reaction, to return to the *status quo ante* created tensions that overflowed into the unrest that centred on the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, providing a theme for *Piers Plowman*. That year was by no means the end of discontent, and even in some of the more ostensibly political rebellions of the fifteenth century, like those of 1450, there were some elements of wider social grievance. So, for instance, the cathedral close of Salisbury in 1450 was attacked for a similar reason that some Cambridge colleges had been a target in 1381—because of their association with written records which were perceived to be a force for suppression.[11]

In addition to a tradition of dissent, the second half of the fifteenth century found new cause for complaint. Some of those who bettered themselves through becoming pasture farmers did so by adopting uncultivated strips of formerly common land as their own, marking out their territory by erecting hedges or fences. The processes came to be called engrossing and enclosing, and invited harsh criticism. The most famous literary response appeared in 1516 in Thomas More's *Utopia*, where the fashion for turning land over to flocks was said to impoverish and to create man-eating sheep.[12] Thomas More did not start the backlash: since the 1480s, there had been riots against enclosures in towns like York and Coventry.[13] The discontented often presented themselves as 'the commons' rising against injustice, and, as with Jack Cade's Rebellion of 1450, they had their own poetic

[9] John L. Flood, '"Safer on the Battlefield than in the City": England, the "Sweating Sickness", and the Continent', *Renaissance Studies*, 17 (2003), 147–76. For a recent attempt at identification, see Paul Heyman, Leopold Simons, and Christel Cochez, 'Were the English Sweating Sickness and the Picardy Sweat Caused by Hantaviruses?', *Viruses*, 6 (2014), 151–71.

[10] Christopher Dyer, *Deserted Villages Revisited* (Hatfield, 2010).

[11] I. M. W. Harvey, *Jack Cade's Rebellion* (Oxford, 1991), 124–6; Roger Chartier, 'Jack Cade, the Skin of a Dead Lamb, and the Hatred for Writing', *Shakespeare Studies*, 34 (2006), 77–89; Susan Crane, 'The Writing Lesson of 1381', in B. Hanawalt (ed.), *Chaucer's England* (Minneapolis, MI, 1992), 201–21.

[12] George M. Logan, Robert M. Adams, and Clarence H. Miller (eds), Thomas More, *Utopia* (Cambridge, 1995), 62–4.

[13] Christian D. Liddy, 'Urban Enclosure Riots: Risings of the Commons in English Towns, 1480–1525', *Past & Present*, 226 (2015), 41–77.

manifestations, to which we will turn later.[14] Rebels, that is to say, were often suspicious of the written word but they also used some forms of it as a weapon.

To go beyond these observations and attempt to sense further the impact of mortality upon cultural activities would be to draw inference from our own (recently developed) assumptions about what the psychological effect of a pandemic may be. In the next section, we will see that it may have had some expression far from the narrowly economic but, before we discuss that, we should consider the languages in which the peoples of Britain expressed themselves. In doing this, we will need to reflect on what constituted 'England' in this century.

Languages and Learning

Constance, 1417: a General Council of the Church was gathered in the lake-side city, bringing together clerics from across Western Christendom. They had deeply serious matters to discuss: the most pressing was the need to end the schism during which rival popes claimed the tiara; there was also the need to repress heresy—a matter about which the English had some knowledge, though the main threat was perceived to be the Hussite Reformation in Bohemia; and there was a desire to reform the church's governance. The assembled ecclesiasts, however, also found time to argue over the organization of their own meetings. The original plan had been to divide representation into four parts by geographical area or *natio*: Italy, Germany, France, and England. The belated arrival of delegates from Iberia created the need for a rethink: the simple solution was to have five *nationes*, but the French objected that such an increase was unnecessary, as the *Anglica natio* did not deserve to be given an autonomous role. The French pointed out England's small size, both physically, relative to other European kingdoms, and in ecclesiastical structure—it was home to merely two archdioceses. Of those, the province of York oversaw only three dioceses, 'at least in obedience to the King of England, for the rest are in the kingdom of Scotland and are not subjects of the Most Serene King of England or obedient to him, and are not—nor do they want to be—of the English nation'; of the other, the province of Canterbury, the orator said 'a large part is in Wales'.[15] It was also claimed that of all the dioceses in Ireland, only two acknowledged obedience to the English king.[16]

It fell to Thomas Polton, bishop of Chichester, to respond to this attack.[17] His strategy was to shift definition so he talked of 'the English or British nation'. This allowed him to refute the French swipe about the Scottish bishops for 'they can in no way deny that Scotland is part of Britain, admittedly not as great as England (as much is known to the whole world) and they even have the same language as the English'.[18] More generally, however, it was to

[14] See p. 27 below.

[15] Hermann von der Hardt (ed.), *Magnum oecumenicum Constantiense Concilium de universali Ecclesiae reformatione*, 6 vols. (Frankfurt, 1697–1700), 5 (1699), col. 68. The sees of Scotland had, in fact, been absolved of any English overlordship by Pope Celestine III in 1192.

[16] von der Hardt (ed.), *Magnum oecumenicum Constantiense Concilium*, 5, col. 70; the orator claims there were forty-eight dioceses, but the Synod of Kells in 1152 had established thirty-six dioceses, which had been reduced by mergers to thirty-four by this date.

[17] On Polton's speech, see J.-P. Genet, 'English Nationalism: Thomas Polton at the Council of Constance', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 28 (1984), 60–78; Robert N. Swanson, '*Gens secundum cognationem et collectionem ab alia distincta*? Thomas Polton, Two Englands, and the Challenge of Medieval Nationhood', in Gabriela Signori and Birgit Studt (eds), *Das Konstanzer Konzil als europäisches Ereignis: Begegnungen, Medien und Rituale* (Ostfildern, 2014), 57–87.

[18] von der Hardt (ed.), *Magnum oecumenicum Constantiense Concilium*, 5, col. 87.

Polton's purpose in this debate over Council organization to emphasize not the similarities between the parts of *Britannia* but their diversity. In particular, he belittled the French for having just one language, while Britain (Polton claimed) has five: 'English (which the English and Scots have in common), Welsh, Irish, Gascon and Cornish, and thus [this *natio*] can with all justice represent as many nations as it has different languages.'[19]

Polton's list understates and misrepresents. It forgets the Gaelic of the Scottish Highlands; it mentions the Occitan of the English-controlled lands of Gascony but shows restraint in failing to note that the English king's newly conquered subjects in Normandy spoke French. His speech does serve to remind of us of four significant features of England in the fifteenth century. First, that solipsistic solecism in evidence in more recent times, by which the English assume 'British' is all about them, was already in play, even if in reality English royal control was weak or non-existent. Scotland was determinedly independent and quite where one kingdom ended and the other began was a repeated matter of dispute: for instance, the town of Berwick was at the time that Polton spoke in English hands, only to return in 1461 to Scottish control previously seen in the early fourteenth century, with this reversed again by the campaign of Richard, duke of Gloucester (soon to be Richard III) in 1482. Meanwhile, Wales may have been subdued by the English in the later thirteenth century but, as the revolt of Owain Glyndŵr demonstrated, some of its people were not resigned to peaceable subservience. At the same time, Polton's words also make clear that the lands the kings of England claimed for themselves were not confined to the island of *Britannia*. In neighbouring *Hibernia* or Ireland, undeniably, English control was yet more limited than it was in Wales, being mainly confined to 'the pale' around Dublin. For some monarchs, however, of much greater concern was the tradition of the English crown claiming rights on the mainland of Europe: Polton's own master, Henry V, emulated his great-grandfather, Edward III, in pressing his proclaimed rights to not only the Plantagenet inheritance of Aquitaine but also the crown of France itself. Henry's remarkably successful Blitzkrieg, begun in 1415, saw swathes of northern France, including Paris, fall to English rule, but the attempts to hold onto those lands, and the domestic consequences that ensued, were to define English politics for the following decades, poisoning them with a stench of failure. By the mid-1450s, the holdings in France had been ignominiously reduced to a patch of land around Calais, and the subsequent kings 'of England and France' had at least to make some show of seeking to reverse this decline.

Just as what constituted fifteenth-century England in a political sense did not map neatly onto geography as defined either by classical knowledge or by our own latter-day expectations, so too the fortunes of the English language were not coterminous with the boundaries of the English *regnum*. If we were to accept Polton's repeated assertion that *lingua Anglicana* was the language used north of the border and so describe Older Scots as a form of Middle English, we would need to concede that a keynote of British identity was diversity not solely between languages but also within English, varying in dialect across the island, including within the counties of England. However, during the course of the fifteenth century London English seems increasingly to have established itself as a norm for written language in southern England and the Midlands. This process was strengthened by William Caxton's introduction to Westminster of the German invention of printing. What is more, an 'English-speaking' area did not necessarily mean it solely employed that vernacular. This is exemplified by a mid-fifteenth century manuscript where a set of five English lines of verse

[19] von der Hardt (ed.), *Magnum oecumenicum Constantiense Concilium*, 5, col. 93.

are a mere marginal addition to a book whose main contents is the late fourteenth-century *Pascon agun Arluth*, a poem on Christ's passion which is the premier witness to the poetic tradition in the last of the languages mentioned by Polton: Cornish.[20]

Such cohabitation, where English sometimes had to play a minor role, was not confined to the Celtic fringe of Britain. It had greater significance in the presence of the two supranational languages which were central to English culture. The more localized of these was French. It had obvious use in diplomatic correspondence with those continental authorities conversant in it, not just the kingdom of France but also the duchies of Burgundy and Brittany. Burgundy, for much of the century, incorporated not only the lands around Dijon but also the towns of the southern Low Countries (including Bruges, home to William Caxton for several decades in the mid-century). There was also a tradition of its use in the domestic bureaucracy or royal bureaucracy, and so it was known to a clerk like Thomas Hoccleve, though its role substantially declined in the following decades. Where it did not die was in the law courts, where an antiquated form was the accepted language of England's common law. It also had a poetic presence, and not solely through the works of an émigré like the royal prince Charles d'Orléans, who whiled away his long-term captivity following Agincourt composing verses in both English and French.[21] An incidental demonstration of an ongoing Francophone presence appears in one of the poems with the refrain of '*timor mortis*' mentioned above, where the author contrasts their moral message with fashionable love songs, one in English ('Herte myne …') and one in French ('*Ma bell amour* …').[22]

The importance of French was overshadowed by the language which bound England to the rest of western Europe, that used in the Mass and for communication across Christendom—including by Polton at the Council of Constance: Latin. It was also a major element of royal administration and, at least in the office of the privy seal from the 1430s, was used increasingly at the expense of any vernacular.[23] Its professional applications were complemented by its prestige as a literary language. In prose, it was deployed in various idioms, with there being a particular early fifteenth-century fashion for a florid style seen, for instance, in the first full biography of Henry V.[24] It was also a vehicle for poetic expression, in the hands of authors like John Whethamstede, abbot of St Albans (d. 1465), or among the so-called *grex poetarum* ('flock of poets') that orbited around the court of Henry VII at the end of the century.[25] Latin verses could, indeed, be used to add stature to English poetry, as when Caxton commissioned the immigrant scholar Stefano Surigone to write an epitaph for Geoffrey Chaucer.[26] More fundamentally, knowledge of the Latin language was the measure by which it was judged whether someone was 'lettred' or not—or, as we would put it, literate.

[20] The manuscript is BL MS Harley 1782, with the English added at the foot of col. 3v.

[21] Mary-Jo Arn, *Charles d'Orléans in England (1415–1440)* (Woodbridge, 2000).

[22] Greene, '"Timor Mortis" Poem', 235.

[23] Gwilym Dodd, 'Trilingualism in the Medieval English Bureaucracy: The Use—and Disuse—of Languages in the Fifteenth-Century Privy Seal Office', *Journal of British Studies*, 51 (2012), 253–83.

[24] On the florid style generally, see E. F. Jacob, '"Florida Verborum Venustas": Some Early Signs of Euphuism in England', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 18 (1933), 264–90; on the *Vita et Gesta Henrici V* (attributed to 'Ps-Elmham') and its influence, see David Rundle, 'The Unoriginality of Tito Livio Frulovisi's *Vita Henrici Quinti*', *English Historical Review*, 123 (2008), 1109–31.

[25] David R. Carlson, 'The Civic Poetry of Abbot John Whethamstede of St Albans (+1465)', *Mediaeval Studies*, 61 (1999), 205–42.

[26] David R. Carlson, 'Chaucer, Humanism and Printing: The Conditions of Authorship in Fifteenth-Century England', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 64 (1995), 274–88; Alexandra Gillespie, *Print Culture and the Medieval Author: Chaucer, Lydgate, and their Books, 1473–1557* (Oxford, 2006), 70–2.

Our own concept of literacy is broad and widening; official definitions include within it numeracy, and it has come to be used metaphorically, as in the phrase 'computer literacy'. If we pare it back, however, to its essentials as suggested by its etymology from the Latin *litterae* for letters, it involves the skills of reading and writing, which we might assume are inseparable twins. In medieval and early modern Europe, however, an inability to write did not necessarily imply that one had not learnt to read, and this particularly applied to girls. On the other hand, the most basic witness to having held a pen, signing one's name, may not denote any wider facility at writing. These should serve as a warning that any bald figures given for literacy rates will be overly bold estimates, but it has been suggested that by 1500 about 3% of the adult population of England had some ability to write, comprising 5% of men and 1% of women.[27] Those capable of some level of reading are likely to have been more than double that figure, but there was substantial geographical variation, dependent on the availability of education.

There is one way in which our latter-day perceptions of literacy are more confined for those of the later Middle Ages. In our societies' aspirations for universal literacy, we aim to ensure proficiency in a single language. In post-classical Europe, *literatus* did not retain its Roman meaning of being learned in both Latin and Greek, but it did imply an expectation for being at least bilingual: it assumed that one was educated in Latin and could transfer that skill to the vernacular which one heard at home. The most likely route, then, to becoming fully literate was by having a schoolmaster who was capable of explicating Latin grammar. In doing so, a teacher in the fifteenth-century would use English sentences to introduce elements of Latin and, in the process, help the child also understand that English too was a language with a grammatical structure.[28]

The availability of schoolmasters was not uniform across England. In the last years of the fourteenth century, there were some complaints that there were too many teachers. The claim had anticlerical intentions, asserting that the social order was being disrupted by the low-born receiving education and thus being able to rise up the ecclesiastical hierarchy:

> Now mot ich soutere his sone setten to schole …
> So of that begger's brol a bychop to worthen.
>
> (Now might each cobbler set his son to school …
> So of the beggar's brat a bishop is made).[29]

Contrariwise, in the decades that immediately followed, there were grumblings that the numbers of schoolmasters had declined. Whatever the fluctuations in the early fifteenth century, the year 1440, when the royal initiative of Eton College gained its charter, was to prove the beginning of a sustained increase: a further forty endowed schools were established before the end of the century.[30] Those schools joined existing foundations

[27] Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England* (Oxford, 2000), 18, employing and glossing the figures provided by David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1980). For a general discussion, see R. A. Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and Education, 1500–1800*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 2013).

[28] Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Schools* (New Haven, CT, 2006), 86–127.

[29] 'Piers the Plowman's Crede', lines 744–8, in James M. Dean (ed.), *Six Ecclesiastical Satires* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1991).

[30] Orme, *Medieval Schools*, 218–50; J. M. W. Willoughby (ed.), *The Libraries of Collegiate Churches*, Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues, 15 (London, 2013).

which survived any decline and they were supplemented by other routes to learning: individual schoolmasters could establish a classroom, while some monastic communities took seriously a commitment to educating those children who lived near them. Even with this range, however, the provision was patchy. Most counties had at least one endowed school by the end of our period and the practice of boarding extended their catchment areas, but the numbers for which they catered were small. While gender denied schooling for girls, place of birth defined access to education for many boys.

Whatever their reputation in more recent centuries, schools like Eton could act as motors of social mobility. There was no equivalent in England of Scotland's 1496 Act of Parliament, which stipulated that all lairds and freeholders should send their sons to school 'to obtain perfect Latin' and then study law.[31] That statute hints at the increase in educational institutions that occurred north as well as south of the border (and among the Scottish schoolmasters is counted the poet Robert Henryson at Dunfermline); it may also imply that, at this point, its clientele was largely drawn from those of lesser status than the nobility.[32] It was certainly common practice for the statutes establishing an endowed school, wherever it was in Britain, to require that the classroom should include 'poor students', and so there was some truth to the claim, quoted in the previous paragraph, that education created possibilities for boys born into low status, usually allowing a career in the church. For the founders, their acts of charity had a double benefit: not only was it a good deed in its own right (on which God might look benignly), but it also provided young voices to say or sing masses in which prayers were made for their benefactors and their families. These schools, that is to say, were also chantries, intended to assist the souls of those who had established them through the terrors of purgatory. How far did the insistent presence and capriciousness of death play on those minds which hatched the plans to erect new educational institutions? It is impossible to fully discern their motives—it must be said that such acts of philanthropy were not an invention of the post-pandemic era, nor does the chronology for their establishment fit snugly with the pattern of the plague's virulence; but, as we have seen, that was not the only threat which was feared and the timing of the wider fashion for chantries is suggestive.

There were other new foundations which were chantries with an educational element. Indeed, some of the schools, following the fourteenth-century precedent set by William of Wykeham, bishop of Winchester, were established simultaneously with a university college: thus, Henry VI endowed, alongside Eton, King's College, Cambridge, and, in the following decades, a successor to Wykeham as bishop of Winchester, William Waynflete (himself a former headmaster of Eton), founded two schools, one in his Lincolnshire hometown from which he took his surname and the other in Oxford, with the intention that both should act as feeders to his addition to the constituency of the University of Oxford, Magdalen College. This is not to suggest that all Oxbridge colleges opened in our period fitted this pattern of a double foundation. Moreover, not all students taking a degree had to be a member of a college: many were associated with less permanent structures, run by an individual or small group of dons.[33]

[31] Elizabeth Ewan, 'Schooling in the Towns, c.1400–c.1560', in R. D. Anderson (ed.), *The Edinburgh History of Education in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2015), 39–56; John Durkan, *Scottish Schools and Schoolmasters, 1560–1633* (Woodbridge, 2013), 3–44.

[32] On Henryson, see Chapter 26 below.

[33] J. I. Catto, 'The Triumph of the Hall in Fifteenth-Century Oxford', in Ralph Evans (ed.), *Lordship and Learning: Studies in Memory of Trevor Aston* (Woodbridge, 2004), 209–23.

Both English universities were growing in the fifteenth century, but the expansion in higher education was greater elsewhere. By the end of the century, Scotland had three universities, all of them new foundations (St Andrews, 1413, Glasgow 1450/1, Aberdeen, 1495). It is also the case that, in the lands under the control of the English king, there had been a brief increase in the number of universities, with one established in the crown's French domain, at Caen (1432; after the loss of Normandy, it was refounded by Charles VII). Like schools, all these were male preserves and, in contrast to those places of secondary education, they set a particular expectation on the boys that entered them, usually in their early teens: the students were required to live in Latin, not just reading and writing in it but also using it for after-dinner conversation (only in the sixteenth century was an alternative allowed in new colleges, and that was Greek). This culture defined their library resources, their reading and their own literary productions; some, like John Shirwood, later bishop of Durham (d. 1493), turned their hand to Latin poetry but it must be said that they were only a small minority, prose compositions in Latin being rather more frequent.[34] It is also the case that if a figure like Magdalen's founder, Waynflete, was to be addressed in verse, it was in Latin: his first Oxford schoolmaster, John Anwykyll, had his printed Latin grammar prefaced by Latin elegiacs from the pen of an immigrant poet, Pietro Carmeliano.[35] None of this means, however, that those whose learning reached degree level always spurned vernacular literature. To cite just one example, Thomas Chaundler, warden of Oxford's New College and chancellor of that university, composed plays and dialogues in Latin but he also owned at least one manuscript in English, BL MS Harley 43, John Walton's early fifteenth-century verse translation of Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae*, which he glossed in Latin.

The universities were not the only institutions of higher education in England. While they had faculties for the internationally recognized codes of canon and civil law, they did not dabble in the legal system of common law used in most of the king's courts. For training in that, a young man would have to go to London and to one of the various establishments known as the Inns of Court and the Inns of Chancery. As we have already noted, the main language required for this was a form of French, though Latin was also necessary for some of the essential texts on which the law was based. As with university graduates, this does not mean that common lawyers insistently ignored vernacular literature throughout their lives: Thomas Urswick, who was at Gray's Inn in the 1440s, owned at his death in 1479 both a copy of Jean Froissart's *Chroniques* in French and a manuscript of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.[36]

The formal structures of education that have been outlined in the preceding paragraphs were not the only sources of learning. The child of an aristocratic family, for instance, was unlikely to be sent to a school—the master would come to the household rather than vice versa, and other children may have been allowed to join the classroom (thus the origin of the particular English meaning of a 'private school').[37] Scotland's 1496 Education Act might imply a concern that this did not happen often enough or that its quality was considered

[34] Shirwood wrote an epitaph to John Southwell, seneschal to George Neville, bishop of Exeter, which was recently rediscovered in a manuscript of Oxford provenance; it is now in Princeton University Library, MS Taylor 22; the poem is edited by Don C. Skemer, 'Words Not Written in Stone: John Shirwood's Epitaph for a Canon of Exeter Cathedral', in Colum P. Hourihane (ed.), *Manuscripta illuminata: Approaches to Understanding Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts* (Princeton, NJ, 2014), 108–43.

[35] David R. Carlson, 'The Occasional Poetry of Pietro Carmeliano', *Aevum*, 61 (1987), 495–502 (at 497–8).

[36] J. M. Manly and Edith Rickert, *The Text of the Canterbury Tales*, 8 vols. (Chicago, 1940), 1.616–7.

[37] Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy 1066–1530* (London, 1984).

wanting. In the early sixteenth century, scholars both sides of the border complained that the nobility were more interested in hunting than in books.[38] This did not stop aristocrats being seen as suitable targets for authors' importunings for patronage, as we shall see in the next section: some may have considered themselves too grand for book-learning, but that did not place them above book-owning.

For those lower down the social scale who did not have the opportunity of going to school, learning was through apprenticeship or on the job. For some skills or for running a workshop, a certain familiarity with the written word would have been an advantage or sometimes a necessity, and so this was the impulse to what is now known as pragmatic literacy.[39] Detailed information like business accounts may need to be remembered only for a short time. A traditional format for such ephemeral written records was the wax tablet; few survive from medieval England, though one set was found in a rubbish pit in York, with late fourteenth-century writing both in Latin and in English verse.[40] By the time those tablets were incised and discarded, a significant change had occurred: the availability of paper as a writing surface, alongside parchment. It was not an indigenous product: introduced into Mediterranean Christian culture from Islamic Spain in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, the technology became more widespread, but, apart from the 1490s when there was for a decade or so a paper mill near Hertford, none was produced in the British Isles until the later 1580s.[41] Instead, it was continually imported from mainland Europe. Even with the costs that trade entailed, it was cheaper than parchment, and so catered for a market for whom thrift was a consideration. There was never the intensity of record-keeping that developed in, say, Florence (where literacy rates were higher) but the ability to compile a book on paper did allow the possibility that the information recorded would not only be professional but could be for private reflection or entertainment.[42]

Even when we amplify the definition of literacy by moving beyond the *literati* to those with some pragmatic engagement with writing, our focus remains upon a minority of the population. This does not mean, however, that vernacular poetry was beyond the majority's reach. A textual community encompasses not only those who can create, write, and read texts, but those also who heard them spoken or viewed them as performances. Texts come down to us as shapes drawn on a page but we have a duty to give them their voice.

Poetry's Living Places

London, 1406 or 1407: looking back to those years from the mid-century, John Shirley, a scribe responsible for the circulating of many poems in the English vernacular, transcribed a short *Moral Balade* by the poet and royal tutor Henry Scogan.[43] The opening announces

[38] Durkan, *Scottish Schools*, 23; Cathy Curtis, 'Richard Pace's *De fructu* and Early Tudor Pedagogy', in Jonathan Woolfson (ed.), *Reassessing Tudor Humanism* (London, 2002), 43–77.

[39] M. B. Parkes, 'The Literacy of the Laity', in David Daiches and Anthony Thorlby (eds), *Literature and Western Civilization: The Medieval West* (London, 1973), 555–77.

[40] Michelle P. Brown, 'The Role of the Wax Tablet in Medieval Literacy: A Reconsideration in Light of a Recent Find from York', *British Library Journal*, 20 (1994), 1–16.

[41] Allan Stevenson, 'Tudor Roses from John Tate', *Studies in Bibliography*, 20 (1967), 15–34; R. L. Hills, *John Tate, England's First Papermaker* (London, 1993); for the use of imported paper in England, see Orietta da Rold, *Paper in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2020).

[42] Erik Kwakkel, 'A New Type of Book for a New Type of Reader: The Emergence of Paper in Vernacular Book Production', *The Library*, 7th ser., 4 (2003), 219–48.

[43] NIMEV 2464; on Shirley, see Margaret Connolly, *John Shirley: Book Production and the Noble Household in Fifteenth-Century England* (Aldershot, 1998). The 'Moral Balade' is in W. W. Skeat (ed.), *Chaucerian and*

that the author is sending 'this litel tretys … writen with myn owne hand full rudely' to its intended recipients, whom Shirley identified as the four sons of Henry IV. The title he provides, however, also explains the occasion for which it was a written: 'a souper … in the Vyntre in London, at the hous of Lowys Johan'. In other words, Scogan emphasizes his work's written status, but its first outing to the world was a performance, over dinner, in the house of Lewis Johan, a merchant of Welsh extraction, in London's Vintry ward, just north of the Thames, opposite Southwark.[44]

It was, then, not only those who were born too low to read and write who could enjoy a reading of poetry. This is a truth of which we are already aware, if we care to remember the famous frontispiece of a copy of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* made in the first decades of the fifteenth century.[45] It depicts a double scene, with courtiers, male and female, leaving the city and then sitting *en plein air*, listening to the poet who stands before them in a portable pulpit, declaiming his work. We might think that the presence of the image undermines its content: surely such a lavish illumination was intended to be seen; it is mute and so could not be heard. Yet, its silence was no bar to its being the object of a shared experience. The volume in which it sits is of such a size (at 315 x 220mm, a royal quarto), that two or three viewers could have looked at it together, then passed it along to others in a large group. That is to say, the book itself, and with it any images it contained, could be performative. It played on more sense than just vision; it was made to be touched and, indeed, smelt, but it was also an invitation to hearing. What has been called aurality was an important element in the life of a medieval text.[46]

There are a couple of ways in which the *Troilus* frontispiece may misdirect. First, its al fresco setting, complete with pulpit, should not be taken to suggest that readings were most often a fair-weather picnic pursuit. Shirley's stated timing and location of the performance of Scogan's *Balade*, at dinnertime and indoors, was closer to the norm. The precedent for such events may have been monastic meals but, at those, the monks were expected to eat in silence while one of their brothers read out an improving Latin text. It may be that, in a secular context, the works chosen were not solely ones of vernacular literature or, if they were, they might, like John Gower's *Confessio amantis*, move between English and Latin.[47] Perhaps no works were more appropriate for these readings than poetry, with its metre's invitation to listen to the words spoken aloud. The main difference from monastic practice was that these 'lectures' functioned as an entertainment designed to act as a spur to conversation or debate.

The second issue with the *Troilus* image is that it conjures up an audience which, while mixed in gender, is homogeneous in social standing. In contrast, Shirley's assumption that it was plausible that the royal princes would gather with a merchant host to hear Scogan's

Other Pieces … Being a Supplement to the Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer (Oxford, 1897), xli–iii, 237–44. For discussion, see M. Newman Hallmundsson, 'Chaucer's Circle: Henry Scogan and his Friends', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n.s. 10 (1981), 129–39; J. D. Burnley, 'Scogan, Shirley's Reputation and Chaucerian Occasional Verse', in G. Lester (ed.), *Chaucer in Perspective: Middle English Essays in Honour of Norman Blake* (Sheffield, 1999), 28–46.

[44] On Johan, see A. D. Carr, 'Sir Lewis John—a Medieval London Welshman', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 22 (1966–8), 260–70.

[45] Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 61. For recent discussion, see Joyce Coleman, 'Where Chaucer Got His Pulpit: Audience and Intervisuality in the *Troilus and Criseyde* Frontispiece', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 32 (2010), 103–28.

[46] The term is Joyce Coleman's; see her classic introduction to the topic, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge, 1996).

[47] Joyce Coleman, 'Lay Readers and Hard Latin: How Gower May Have Intended the *Confessio Amantis* to be Read', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 24 (2002), 209–35.

poem (and perhaps fall into discussion afterwards) provides an important corrective. It should encourage us to rein in our natural tendency to want to compartmentalize: scholarship writes in terms of 'courtly culture' and 'civic culture', as it does of 'monastic culture'. Seen from the viewpoint of the verses, however, the world was not so segregated; texts travelled between these locales. In fact, it may be in their ability to foster interaction between these different cultures that the success of vernacular poems lay.

To talk of 'the court' is no more to signify a single location than it does when we discuss 'the civic'. It is most often employed to designate the community around the monarch, wherever they were, but other princes could also 'hold court'. In part, this was a political and quasi-legal role, with the noble showing good lordship to those who lived in their area of influence, but it could also see their castles or palaces as hubs of cultural activity. This was particularly possible when the king was a minor or absent, as was repeatedly the case in both Scotland and England. So, during the long minority of Henry VI, from 1422 until 1437, the king's uncles (two of the princes who had, earlier in the century, been at the supper with Lewis Johan), John, duke of Bedford, regent in France, and Humfrey, duke of Gloucester, protector in England, acted as cultural patrons. Royal birth, however, was not an essential to acting in that role: Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick (1382–1439), was one of England's most substantial landowners to whom his tenants looked for 'good lordship'—when, that is, he was not abroad either on pious pilgrimage or bloody campaigning—and who had the wherewithal to finance both eye-catching events, like a joust at Guînes, near Calais, and more permanent memorials, including his chantry chapel in Warwick, for which he left a bequest and which was built in the years after his death.[48] His sometime secretary was, incidentally, John Shirley.[49]

Courts, in this century as earlier, were hives of hybridity: they took their strength from the eclecticism of the activities that they could licence.[50] With that also came a cavalcade of characters. There was more than a whiff of the menagerie about a court, sometimes literally, given that, alongside the animals needed for hunting, there was a royal tradition of keeping lions, leopards, and other exotic animals. It was within this context that patronage of letters and the learned took place. Those who produced literature included princely captives, not only Charles d'Orléans, whom we have already noted, but also James I of Scotland, who was held in England from a few days before he became king in 1406 until 1424, and who penned *The Kingis Quair* probably in the months before his return to his homeland. The aristocratic author, however, was a rare beast, particularly when it came to penning poetry. Edward IV's brother-in-law, Anthony Woodville, Earl Rivers (d. 1483), may have been responsible for some short verses, but nothing as sustained as his prose *Dictes and*

[48] For his political significance, see Christine Carpenter, *Locality and Polity: A Study of Warwickshire Landed Society, 1401–1499* (Cambridge, 1992) and her 'The Beauchamp Affinity: a Study of Bastard Feudalism at Work', *English Historical Review*, 95 (1980), 514–32. For the joust and Beauchamp's play on his association with Guy of Warwick, see Yin Liu, 'Richard Beauchamp and the Uses of Romance', *Medium Ævum*, 74 (2005), 271–8. For the significance of his chantry chapel and its monument to the earl, see Julian Munby, 'Richard Beauchamp's Funeral Car', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 155 (2002), 278–87; Linda Monckton, 'Fit for a King? The Architecture of the Beauchamp Chapel', *Architectural History*, 47 (2004), 25–52, and Alexandra Buckle, 'Fit for a King: Music and Iconography in Richard Beauchamp's Chantry Chapel', *Early Music*, 38 (2010), 3–20.

[49] See Connolly, *John Shirley*, and also Ryan Perry, 'The Clopton Manuscript and the Beauchamp Affinity: Patronage and Reception Issues in a West Midlands Reading Community', in Wendy Scase (ed.), *Essays in Manuscript Geography: Vernacular Manuscripts of the English West Midlands from the Conquest to the Sixteenth Century* (Turnhout, 2007), 131–59.

[50] For the concept of hybridity in earlier centuries, see Malcolm Vale, *The Princely Court* (Oxford, 2001).

Sayings of the Philosophers.[51] There certainly does not seem to have been the communal habit of sharing love poems which became a feature of the court of Edward's grandson, Henry VIII. Instead, a noble figure most often delegated the production of literary works to others, as can be shown by the example of one prince just mentioned: Humfrey, duke of Gloucester.

Humfrey was more addicted to books than many of his peers in the secular nobility. He amassed a library of probably over 600 volumes, ranging across at least four languages, the fourth being Hebrew, though (given the ban on Jews in England) there was probably nobody in his entourage who could decipher its shapes. There were also at least a few manuscripts in his household in another language, Greek, since one of his secretaries, Antonio Beccaria, produced some Latin versions of some prose works composed in that language.[52] That translator's place of origin, Verona, reminds us that another part of the hybridity of the court was its ability to be an international meeting place. Humfrey employed at least two other 'aliens' as secretaries, one being from Normandy, and the other, like Beccaria, an Italian, Tito Livio Frulovisi from Ferrara, who, when receiving English naturalization, was termed the duke's 'poet and orator'.[53] His compositions included a verse epic celebrating his master's military exploits, written in Latin.[54] The English-born writers who addressed a prince took their place among a wider range of characters.

The example of Beccaria and his study of Greek also serves to highlight two other important factors. First, the books that gravitated around a court were not all the property of a single person. This was not only because there could be both employees with their own learned interests and attendant lords with their own means but also because a court may be made up of multiple households. So, the leading women, the king's consort or the dowager queen, would have their own servants, as would the heir to the throne. To give an example of each as it impinges on English poetry: from soon after her arrival in England in 1445 and for a decade and a half following, Henry VI's wife, Margaret of Anjou, had as one of her clerks George Ashby, who, incidentally, moved into the role from the service of Humfrey, not a friend to Margaret.[55] In the very last years of the century, Henry VII's younger son, later to be Henry VIII, had as his tutor John Skelton, who addressed his charge in Latin verses.[56] Courts were bookish places because they were expressions of more than one identity and homes to more than one person's belongings.

The second point can build on this insight: princes were not in full control of the texts that entered their household. When Humfrey's secretary, Beccaria, produced his translations, he dedicated them to the duke, but that does not mean he had been positively enjoined to undertake them by his master. This situation pertained all the more to authors from outside the court who might send their works to a potential patron speculatively, in the hope that the time and expense they had outlaid would receive some return from the

[51] On Woodville's poems, see Omar Khalaf, 'An Unedited Fragmentary Poem by Anthony Woodville, Earl Rivers in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264', *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 58 (2011), 487–90.

[52] David Rundle, 'From Greenwich to Verona: Antonio Beccaria, St Athanasius and the Translation of Orthodoxy', *Humanistica*, 5 (2010), 109–19.

[53] For Dreu Malfourni, a canon of Lisieux, see Jenny Stratford, *The Bedford Inventories* (London, 1993), 29, 38.

[54] Cristina Cocco (ed.), *Tito Livio Frulovisi, Hunfreidos* (Florence, 2014).

[55] On Ashby see Robert J. Meyer-Lee, 'Laureates and Beggars in Fifteenth-Century English Poetry: The Case of George Ashby', *Speculum*, 79 (2004), 688–726.

[56] For Skelton's service to the future Henry VIII, see Aysha Pollnitz, *Princely Education in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 2015), 43–9, and David R. Carlson, 'The Latin Writings of John Skelton', *Studies in Philology*, 88 (1991), 1–125 (at 42).

lord. It was certainly possible for an author to be snubbed, either not being able to make the presentation or not receiving what they considered due recompense.[57] Over time, a noble's reputation for generosity (or otherwise) would develop, affecting future attempts to seek their patronage. There was, however, a burden of expectation on any prince that they would act virtuously, showing their appreciation of learning and the learned. In short, it was difficult for a noble to reject all literary advances and so book ownership was, for any lord, an occupational hazard.

The arrival of manuscripts at court reminds us that its hybridity thrived on its hosting of outsiders, and its association with literature dependent on interactions with those beyond its walls. So, among those who addressed Humfrey, duke of Gloucester, there were representatives of monastic culture, most notable of them being John Lydgate.[58] There were also those involved in royal administration: Thomas Hoccleve was a clerk of the privy seal, some of whose poems are addressed to members of the nobility.[59] This takes us into an urban setting, though not quite the city where Humfrey had attended that dinner with Lewis Johan: London was physically and legally separate from Westminster, the city of royal government (and Southwark, residence of prisoners and prostitutes, was a separate jurisdiction).

Both England and Scotland were under-urbanized in comparison to, say, the Low Countries or northern Italy. Nor was the fifteenth century a golden age of British towns: most had only a few hundred inhabitants and, for most of the larger ones, their population was in decline. By 'large' is meant between 4000 and 10,000 inhabitants: in the early sixteenth century, nineteen English and three Scottish towns fell into that bracket, while Norwich and Edinburgh were a little above the upper number, and Westminster-London, at about 40,000, was the nearest the whole of Britain had to a metropolis (Paris had more than double the population size).[60] The range of activities associated with the twin cities by the Thames ensured that literacy levels were higher there than in most English communities, and that reading habits were fed by an infrastructure of book production and book trade.[61] The absence of a university encouraged that trade to show a special interest in the provision of vernacular works. Such a focus was enhanced when the printing press was introduced to England, with William Caxton making the shrewd business decision to seek as broad a market as was possible in a society with limited literacy.[62] A corollary was that the learned needed to look to the mainland of Europe to import Latin printed books, but that trade was also channelled through London and Westminster, with Caxton himself involved in it.[63]

We have already sensed how Westminster-London could act as an arena for not only the dissemination of poetry but also its composition and its performance. Its concentration of royal government and commercial significance made it unique, but smaller cities also had

[57] For an example from just outside our period, see David Rundle, 'Filippo Alberici, Henry VII and Richard Fox: the English Fortunes of a Little-Known Italian Humanist', *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 68 (2005), 137–55.

[58] On Lydgate, see Chapter 24 below.

[59] On Hoccleve, see Chapter 25 below.

[60] Maurice Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348–1500* (Harmondsworth, 1990), 87–8; Elizabeth Ewan, 'Hamperit in ane hony came': Sights, Sounds and Smells in the Medieval Town', in Edward J. Cowan and Lizanne Henderson (eds), *A History of Everyday Life in Medieval Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2011), 109–44 (at 109).

[61] C. Paul Christianson, *A Directory of London Stationers and Book Artisans 1300–1500* (New York, 1990).

[62] On print, see Chapter 9 below.

[63] M. T. W. Payne, 'Caxton the Businessman: A New Glimpse', *The Library*, 7th ser., 17 (2016), 103–14; Holly James-Maddocks, 'Illuminated Caxtons and the Trade in Printed Books', *The Library*, 7th ser., 22 (2021), 291–315.

their bustle, as, for instance, William Dunbar reminds us in his vivid depiction of Edinburgh.[64] That latter city was of obvious national importance, while others had a regional hinterland, like York, or created international links through their ports, as did Norwich across the North Sea or Bristol looking towards Europe's western seaboard. Indeed, for both its administrative and trading role, Westminster-London was dependent on the existences of other nodal points across England. For instance, the coinage was minted not only at the Tower of London but also in places like York, Canterbury, and Calais.[65] For the dissemination of information and the running of justice, county towns were essential; some of those had another role in the country's ecclesiastical structure, as the seat of a bishop and thus being a cathedral city. There were many ways in which other urban centres could sustain a culture which could include the presence of poetry.

Recourse was made to verse on special occasions, as when the city of York employed pageants to welcome Henry VII in 1486 and demonstrate loyalty to a king suspicious of its association with the previous régime.[66] It was also, however, part of the fabric of the yearly cycle in some towns, where mystery plays were performed.[67] The presence of poetry was not always a reflection of city government or conventional piety; it could also be oppositional and out of the control of the city fathers. This returns us to a theme on which we touched early in this chapter: the association of protest and poems. Just as towns were centres for the spreading of messages from those in authority, they could also be deployed by those resisting the established structures of power. So, poems of protest were sometimes posted in a public place: during Coventry's enclosure riot of 1496, for example, 'seditious bills' were found pinned to the church door, one with a poem beginning: 'The cyte is bond that shuld be fre! / The right is holden fro þe Cominalte!'[68]

Why express such an attitude in verse? Presumably because when a literate person read it to the others congregated around the door, it was easily memorable. Such jingles took their force from being performed not once but repeatedly: their intention was to move from written to spoken. In other cases, beyond the political and more widely than the urban, poems like ballads or lullabies were inventions of an oral culture which were only belatedly, if ever, transferred to written record. We have seen that English was only one among several languages in use in Britain, and much of the time it was not the most prestigious. We have also noted how rare the talent of writing was. Neither of these factors, however, limited the importance of poetry. On the contrary, the paradox is that the rarity of the ability to read text on the pages rendered some forms of vernacular poetry all the more powerful.

[64] See his 'Quhy will ye, merchantis of renoun', in Bawcutt (ed.), *The Poems of William Dunbar*, 1.174–6.

[65] Bolton, *Medieval English Economy*, 73.

[66] C. E. McGee, 'Politics and Platitudes: Sources of Civic Pageantry, 1486', *Renaissance Studies*, 3 (1989), 29–34; Emma Cavell, 'Henry VII, The North of England, and the First Provincial Progress of 1486', *Northern History*, 39 (2002), 187–207.

[67] On drama see Chapter 14 below.

[68] NIMEV 3322; Rossell Hope Robbins (ed.), *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries* (New York, 1959), no. 25, 63–4.

CHAPTER 3
Literary Traditions

Continuity and Change

James Simpson

In his *Regiment of Princes* (1412), Thomas Hoccleve describes Chaucer (*c*1342–1400) as 'the firste fyndere of our fair langage.'[1] This claim does not mean, as was implausibly claimed in the late nineteenth century, that Chaucer somehow invented, or at least massively restructured, the English language itself.[2] Hoccleve is rather using a technical term, derived from the rhetorical concept of *inventio* (Latin *invenire*, to find).[3] *Inventio* is the capacity to find poetic matter, where 'finding' is as much a psychological as an investigative capacity. The rhetorical concept derives from legal rhetorical practice, where *inventio* embraces the investigative 'circumstances' of an action under forensic examination (why, what, who, when, how, and where);[4] it also embraces psychological meditation on those circumstances so as to invent a plausible case ('*excogitatio rerum verarum aut veri similium quae causam probabilem reddant*').[5] This intensely psychological feature of invention, drawn originally from legal practice, is extended by later medieval writers of poetic treatises to embrace the inner conception, or mental *archetypus*, of a literary work, prior to any execution.[6] Invention, then, is a matter of two things: the poet's psychological projection of the idea of a literary work; and of the poet's dressing that idea with an appropriate, plausible narration.

Hoccleve's description of Chaucer as 'finder' extends Chaucer's achievement from poetic conception to poetic execution: Chaucer is 'the firste fyndere *of our fair langage*' (my emphasis). Hoccleve uses the term 'finder' here, that is, to include both Chaucer's capacity to 'find' poetic matter and also his capacity to embellish that matter through the

[1] Thomas Hoccleve, in Charles R. Blyth (ed.), *The Regiment of Princes* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1999), line 4978. In 1463, George Ashby used the same key phrase with regard to Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate, and with the same extension to stylistic embellishment: 'Embelysshing oure englisshe tendure algate, / *Firste finders* to our consolacion / Off Fresshe, douce englisshe and formacion / Of newe balades'. See Mary Bateson (ed.), *George Ashby's Poems*, EETS, e.s. 76 (London, 1899), 3–6, my emphasis. See also MED, 'fyndere', sense 2(b): 'one who creates literary works; author, writer'.

[2] For which claims, see Christopher Cannon, *The Making of Chaucer's Language: A Study of Words* (Cambridge, 1998), 12–3.

[3] Compare Chaucer's description of Pythagoras as the 'firste finder' of the art of song in *The Book of the Duchess*, 1168. All citations from the works of Chaucer will be cited in the text, and are taken from Larry D. Benson (general ed.), *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn. (Boston, MA, 1987).

[4] For the origins and diffusion of the *circumstantiae*, see Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter (eds), *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300–1475* (Oxford, 2009), 49, and Index of Latin Terms, *inventio*.

[5] 'Invention is the discovery of valid or seemingly valid arguments to render one's cause plausible'. Cicero, in H. Hubbell (ed.), *De inventione: De optimo genere oratorum* (Cambridge, MA, 1949), 1.7.9, 18–9.

[6] See Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria Nova* (*c*1202): 'If a man has a house to build, his impetuous hand does not rush into action. The measuring line of his mind first lays out the work, and he mentally outlines the successive steps in a definite order. The mind's hand shapes the entire house before the body's hand builds it. Its mode of being is archetypal before it is actual' (translation from Margaret F. Nims (trans.), *Poetria Nova of Geoffrey of Vinsauf* (Toronto, 1967), 17). Chaucer adapts this passage precisely in *Troilus and Criseyde*, 1.1065–71.

James Simpson, *Literary Traditions*. In: *The Oxford History of Poetry in English*. Edited by Julia Boffey & A. S. G. Edwards, Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198839682.003.0003

resources of what rhetoricians called '*ornatus*' (*ornament*),[7] so as to produce 'fair' language.[8] Elsewhere in the *Regiment*, Hoccleve praises Chaucer for his *ornatus*, but also for his philosophical depth: Chaucer is both 'flour of eloquence', *and* 'mirour of fructuous entendement' (i.e., *a model of fruitful judgement*).[9] By Hoccleve's account, then, Chaucer does at least three things for the first time: he enlarges the available matters for English poetic writing by his 'finding'; embellishes that matter in new ways; and manifests a profound philosophical depth.

Hoccleve's praise of Chaucer as 'finder' is in substance true. From what is plausibly Chaucer's first published work, *The Book of the Duchess* (*c*1369), Chaucer opens up extraordinary new potentialities for poetic making in English. Already in that work, we can see the following possibilities found and expanded: access to Classical Latin and contemporary French poetic sources; a dynamic mixing of the written and textual on the one hand, with the oral, the lyric and the spontaneous on the other; a represented narrator; a distinction between a narratorial and an authorial voice, such that a text can come to be significantly 'about' the narrator; a correlative appeal to the reader to exercise interpretative choice and discrimination.

As if that set of advances were insufficient, we observe in what is plausibly Chaucer's next ambitious work, *The House of Fame* (*c*1370s), a freakishly precocious poetic talent extending the ambitions of *inventio* yet further. The narrative of this poem is itself fundamentally *about* poetic 'finding', or rhetorical *inventio*. Here Chaucer enormously expands the potential range of poetic matters, or what he calls 'tidings', now incorporating not only courtly matter, but also news of a very much wider range of experiential, class, and gender experience, which will, in turn, elicit a much wider range of rhetorical resources. In particular, Chaucer generates this ambitious 'finding', which will not be exhausted for the rest of his career, through an act of reading: as he reads Virgil's *Aeneid*, he listens his way sympathetically into the female voice (of Dido), with Ovid's help.[10]

Further, in *The House of Fame* Chaucer absorbs and distinguishes his own poetic project from that of Dante, whose *Commedia*, along with the other great Italian vernacular works by Petrarch and Boccaccio, Chaucer would seem to have encountered in his trip to Florence—probably his first to Italy—in 1373. Unlike Dante, Chaucer will consciously restrict his poetic matter to earthly experience. Chaucer's will not be the poetry of transcendental truth, but rather of 'fals and soth compouned' (*House of Fame*, 1029), with all the interpretative challenges for the reader that such a mix involves.

In his next dream poem, *The Parliament of Fowls* (*c*1378), Chaucer also devised a new metrical form for English poetry: the five-stress, seven-line stanza rhyming *ababbcc* (later to become known as 'rhyme royal'); and by the mid-1380s, in *The Legend of Good Women*, he will have initiated another new metrical form of his own devising, the five-stress rhyming couplet (later to be known as the heroic couplet). Both of these five-stress forms

[7] For Chaucer's reception of these rhetorical terms, see James Simpson, '"Gaufred, deere maister soverain": Chaucer and Rhetoric', in Suzanne Akbari and James Simpson (eds), *The Oxford Handbook to Chaucer* (Oxford, 2020), 126–46.

[8] For correlative evidence that Hoccleve is using 'finder' rhetorically, and that he understands rhetorical finding to include embellishment, see Lydgate's praise of Chaucer as the writer who 'fonde the floures firste of Retoryke' (in Joseph A. Lauritis, Ralph A. Klinefelter, and Vernon F. Gallagher (eds), *A Critical Edition of John Lydgate's Life of Our Lady* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1961), 2.1635 (my emphasis).

[9] Blyth (ed.), *The Regiment of Princes*, 1962–3.

[10] For the generative connection to the voice of suffering women by Chaucer as he shapes a vernacular poetics, see especially Jill Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer* (Woodbridge, 2002). For the fertile adoption of an Ovidian perspective across Chaucer's career, see James Simpson, 'Chaucer as a European Writer', in Seth Lerer (ed.), *The Yale Companion to Chaucer* (New Haven, CT, 2005), 55–86.

permitted a much more resonant verse form than the standard four-stress rhyming couplet that had been used to translate French poetry throughout the fourteenth century, and that had been used by Chaucer himself in both *The Book of the Duchess* and *The House of Fame*.[11]

By the mid-1380s, then, Chaucer has staked out, or 'found', poetic territories in English of a very remarkable kind. He has invented a new narratorial presence, new stylistic ranges, and new metrical forms for poetry in English. He will spend the rest of his career working within this capacious set of possibilities. And, so literary history has had it until relatively recently, fifteenth-century English poetic history is thus determined: a history of slavish and insubstantial imitation of Chaucer's project follows, until, with regard to lyric poetry at least, a new set of lyric possibilities opened up in the 1530s.[12] Already in Thomas Warton's view, stated in his otherwise brilliant *The History of English Poetry from the Close of the Eleventh to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Centuries* (1774–81), the tone is set, one way or another, for criticism until the later twentieth century. For Warton, the history of fifteenth-century poetry was, for the most part, a wasteland: after the spring of Chaucer, he says, we expect summer, but 'winter returns with redoubled horrors … Most of the poets that immediately succeeded Chaucer, seem rather relapsing into barbarism, than availing themselves of those striking ornaments which his judgment and imagination had disclosed'.[13]

In this chapter I will not diminish the exceptional quality and achievement of Chaucer's poetic finding and rhetorical embellishment across his career. On the contrary, that set of claims will remain firmly in place. As we look, however, to the ways in which English poets of the late fourteenth century continued to inflect poetic making in the century to follow, I take issue with Hoccleve's claim for Chaucer both as the *only* 'first finder' and as the *first* such finder. Here I will instead attempt to delineate a set of vectors that drive poetic writing in English from the late fourteenth into the fifteenth century. Instead of focusing on Chaucer's projects alone, and instead of giving Chaucer exclusive priority, I isolate, in addition to Chaucer, the following three, roughly contemporary bodies of work (here named by the phrase that best characterizes their influence), each of which significantly influenced poetic writing in English in the following century: the Gower-tradition, the *Piers Plowman* tradition, and historical alliterative poetry. Each of these *corpora* produces accomplished fifteenth-century 'finder-poets', who extend the range of possible matters for poetry in English, and who exploit poetic language in distinctive ways.

The story of prose would of course be different, and would include extraordinary writing by women writers, such as Julian of Norwich, as well, of course, as the influence of

[11] These Chaucerian metrical innovations are adopted by fifteenth-century religious poets who work within only very restricted areas of Chaucer's *oeuvre*. See, for example, Karen A. Winstead (ed.), John Capgrave, *Life of St Katharine* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1999). The work (*c*1445), 8624 lines, in rhyme royal stanzas, divided into five books, is formally indebted to Chaucer.

[12] For the largest scale characteristics of criticism of fifteenth-century English poetry, and the cultural forces driving them, see James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution, 1350–1547* (Oxford, 2002), 34–51.

[13] Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry from the Close of the Eleventh to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Centuries*, 3 vols. (London, 1774–81), 2.51. For a collection of such statements from later twentieth-century critics, see David Lawton, 'Dullness and the Fifteenth Century', *ELH*, 54 (1987), 761–99 (at 761). See also the Oedipal account of early fifteenth-century English poets and 'father' Chaucer by Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and his Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton, NJ, 1993), 23.

Chaucer's own voluminous prose works.[14] My four bodies of work, further, by no means exhaust the list of great late fourteenth-century poets: the *Gawain*-poet is indisputably a very remarkable writer, but without fifteenth-century influence. It should also be mentioned, correlatively, that certain kinds of fifteenth-century poetry have no substantial fourteenth-century precedent, such as the improperly maligned and relatively small body of 'aureate' poetry,[15] or the remarkable examples of dramatic poetry of largely fifteenth-century cycle plays (especially that of the so-called 'Wakefield Master'). In four sections I define, then, the inventive posture of relevant fourteenth-century writers; I also delineate the ways fifteenth-century poets adapted late fourteenth-century *corpora*, starting with reception of Chaucer.

Before we approach our specific *corpora*, we need, however, to delineate the basic inventive postures of vernacular poets, and the historical conditions of those postures, in the fifteenth century. Nicholas Watson has supplied a rich typology of such positioning for medieval English writing, which include the *pastoral* (in the ecclesiastical sense), where writers speak down to those in need of instruction; the *communal*, where a writer speaks as one among equals; and the *patronal,* speaking up to a patron of higher status, where poets use their expertise to inform a readership of 'social superiors of what they wish or need to know'.[16]

For both political and religious historical reasons, fifteenth-century English poets wrote within significantly more constrained circumstances than late fourteenth-century poets. From the 1399 coup d'état by Henry Bolingbroke, England experienced five further violent seizures of the crown (1460 by Edward IV; 1470 by Henry VI (briefly reclaiming his crown); 1471 by Edward IV (again); 1483 by Richard III; and 1485 by Henry VII). Poets found themselves writing within less than wholly legitimate, stable régimes, and often to young and inexperienced kings or future kings (e.g., to the future Henry V before he assumed the crown in 1413, or to the mentally enfeebled Henry VI). And from 1401 England was also subject to a much more aggressive religious policy against the newly-defined Lollard 'heresy', with two draconian pieces of legislation, the 1401 statute *Concerning the Burning of Heretics*, and the English Church's own complementary legislation issued in 1409, known as Arundel's *Constitutions*.[17]

For these historical reasons, and because the English vernacular had become, thanks to later fourteenth-century writers, a vehicle for consequential, public, attention-worthy discourse, fifteenth-century poets wrote for the most part with a much tighter relation to centres of power, with the promise and bane of laureateship coming into focus for political

[14] For the histories of Middle English prose, see A. S. G. Edwards (ed.), *A Companion to Middle English Prose* (Woodbridge, 2004).

[15] Properly defined as an extraordinarily mannered, Latinate style designed for religious subjects, probably in response to the plain English of Lollard, and used for translation of theological material. See James Simpson, 'John Lydgate', in Larry Scanlon (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, 2009), 205–16 (at 212–5).

[16] Nicholas Watson, *Balaam's Ass: Vernacular Theology Before the English Reformation* (Philadelphia, PA, 2022), Ch. 10. I am grateful to Nicholas Watson for sharing this work with me prior to publication.

[17] Available in, respectively, T. E. Tomlins, et al. (eds), *Statutes of the Realm*, 11 vols. (London, 1810–28; rpt. 1963), 2 Henry IV, c. 15, 2. 125–8, and David Wilkins (ed.), *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae*, 4 vols. (London, 1737), 3.314–9.

authors, and the bane of censorship coming into sharp focus for authors of religious matter.[18] Accordingly, whereas fourteenth-century poets had written on the communal model, their fifteenth-century counterparts often wrote on the patronal model. This much more intimate relation with powerful and courtly patrons entails a very significant narrowing of the social, and therefore the corresponding rhetorical, range of Chaucer's *oeuvre* (there is, for example, no significant bourgeois, Chaucer-inspired tradition in fifteenth-century English poetry).[19] Within that narrower social ambit of largely courtly topics and readers, however, fifteenth-century poets creatively exploit the set of late fourteenth-century *corpora*, to which we now turn.

The Chaucer Tradition

The range of Chaucer's poetic *oeuvre* is astonishing. It embraces elegy (both lyrics and longer narratives with inset lyrics),[20] romance, tragedy, hagiography, petitionary poetry (both secular and religious), fabliau, satire, exemplary moral narrative, and animal fable. Plenty of individual works by fifteenth-century poets exploit Chaucerian possibilities, but only one, very large fifteenth-century poetic *corpus*, that of Lydgate, takes shape fundamentally within the range of possibilities opened by Chaucer.

Chaucer was acclaimed before he died. Precisely given that incipient fame, it was essential for early fifteenth-century poets to enlist Chaucer's reputation by way of promoting their own work. Throughout his career, the Benedictine monk John Lydgate (*c*1370–1449/50) evokes Chaucer's name, and defines especially his rhetorical achievement.[21] Rhetorically brilliant, exceptionally wide in his range, generous and generative,[22] and,

[18] For the tighter relation of fifteenth-century poets to patrons, see Robert J. Meyer-Lee, *Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt* (Cambridge, 2007), 3–4 and *passim*. For post-Arundelian religious censorship, see Nicholas Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409', *Speculum*, 70 (1995), 822–64.

[19] There are some rare exceptions: *The Tale of Beryn,* for which see John M. Bowers (ed.), *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1992), 79–164, and John Metham's *Amoryus and Cleopes* (1448–9), for which see the edition by Stephen F. Page (ed.), *Amoryus and Cleopes* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1999).

[20] For the literary Ovidian mode of 'elegy' as applied to late medieval and early modern poetry in English, see Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, 121–90.

[21] Some examples: Lauritis et al. (eds), *Lydgate's Life of Our Lady*, 2.1628–37; Henry Bergen (ed.), *Troy Book*, EETS, e.s. 97, 103, 106 (London, 1906, 1908, 1910), 2.4677–723; 3.560–4, 4197–4263; 4.3519–39; Axel Erdmann (ed.), *Siege of Thebes*, EETS, e.s. 108 (London, 1911), 4501–25; Henry Bergen (ed.), *Fall of Princes*, EETS, e.s. 121, 122, 123, (Oxford, 1924–7)), 1.246–357, 1795–1806, 3.3855–64. For a full set of explicit references to Chaucer by Lydgate, see David R. Carlson, 'The Chronology of Lydgate's Chaucer References', *The Chaucer Review*, 38 (2004), 246–54. For discussion, see Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate* (London, 1970), 65–7, and Lois Ebin, *Illuminator, Makar, Vates: Visions of Poetry in the Fifteenth Century* (Lincoln, NE, 1988), 1–18.

[22] See especially Bergen (ed.), *Troy Book*, 5.3519–26:

> For he þat was gronde of wel-seying,
> In al hys lyf hyndred no makyng,
> My maister Chaucer, þat founde ful many spot;
> Hym liste nat pinche nor gruche at euery blot,
> Nor meue hym silf to parturbe his reste
> (I haue herde telle), but seide alweie þe best,
> Suffring goodly of his gentilnes
> Ful many thing enbracid with rudnes.

above all, gone and lamented: thus the emphases of Lydgatian praise of 'master' Chaucer. The correlative posture for those left behind is due modesty, and a recognition of stumbling inadequacy:

Ther is no makyng to his equipollent*;	*equal*
We do but halt*, whoso taketh hede,	*limp*
That medle of making*, withouten any drede.	*engage in writing poetry*
Whan we wolde his (*i.e. Chaucer's*) stile counterfet,	
We may al day oure colour* grynde and bete,	(fig.) *literary skill*
Tempere oure azour and vermyloun:	
But al I holde but presumpcioun.[23]	

Should we, however, take Lydgate at his word? Might we rather be able to redescribe this posture of stumbling ineptitude as a modesty *topos* produced by a much closer relation to centres of political power?[24]

Chaucer has only two poems that can with any confidence be connected with a patron, his first and his last: the *Book of the Duchess* (*c*1369) has evident connections with John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster; and what is apparently Chaucer's last poem, the witty 'Complaint to his Purse' (1399), which is explicitly addressed to the newly-crowned son of John of Gaunt, King Henry IV. The rest of Chaucer's entire *oeuvre* stands detached from any named or imagined patron, with the possible exception of Queen Anne, allusively referred to in the F Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* (496–7).

The situation with Lydgate is dramatically different, and the difference informs every aspect of his poetry. Lydgate wrote for royalty, the upper nobility, the metropolitan elite, and for ecclesiastical patrons of the highest rank.[25] His *Fall of Princes* contains an account of Chaucer's patronage by aristocrats that is in fact misleading with regard to Chaucer: like Virgil, Dante, and Petrarch, Lydgate says 'Support of princes fond hem ther dispense' (3.3864). The *Fall of Princes*, commissioned by Humfrey, duke of Gloucester (uncle to Henry VI), is itself punctuated by thanks or calls for generous payment (e.g., 2.156, 3.74). Lydgate's final envoy sends the poem off to the duke 'with hand shaking / Of hool affeccioun knelyng on my knee' (9.3599–600).

We have, then, a new configuration of poetic making in post-Chaucerian, Lancastrian England (i.e., from 1399), in which powerful patrons are active agents in the production of poetry (or represented at least as such), and in which poets are much more closely dependent on such patronage.[26] That new configuration, coupled with, or perhaps produced by, the new political conditions of nervous régimes with less than iron-cast legitimacy, has led critics to describe early Lancastrian poets as sycophantic mouthpieces for official lines.[27] In what remains of this section, I resist this argument by defining the early Lancastrian patron-poet relationship through the lens of Chaucerian reception. Chaucer's is

[23] Bergen (ed.), *Troy Book*, 2.4712–8.

[24] See Lawton, 'Dullness and the Fifteenth Century'.

[25] For a survey of the wide and generally very elite range of those patrons, see Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate (1371–1449): A Bio-bibliography* (Victoria, BC, 1997).

[26] John, duke of Bedford, even had images of Lancastrian vernacular poets worked into his magnificent devotional book, *The Bedford Hours* (1414), for which see Sylvia Wright, 'The Author Portraits in the Bedford Psalter Hours: Gower, Chaucer and Hoccleve', *British Library Journal*, 18 (1992), 190–201.

[27] A case most subtly prosecuted by Paul Strohm, *England's Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimation 1399–1422* (New Haven, CT, 1998), and Paul Strohm, 'Hoccleve, Lydgate and the Lancastrian Court', in David Wallace (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge, 1999), 640–61.

an enabling presence in all cases, and, in some genres at least, the occasion for exceptionally powerful admonition to Lancastrian rulers. I exemplify the case with three different genres. Lydgate is the prime example.

Derek Pearsall has made the plausible case that Lydgate's entire set of poetic projects can be described as a set of responses to, and attempts to overtake, equivalent works by Chaucer.[28] The kinds of case I will make now could, then, be made from almost any one of Lydgate's works. For the purposes of this chapter, I restrict myself to three texts exemplifying genres in which Lydgate excelled: elegy; tragedy; and animal fable. In each, Chaucerian positioning enables the Lancastrian voice to operate in a matrix of poetic making different from that of Chaucer.

Lydgate's elegiac *Temple of Glass* (?1420) consists of 1403 lines, in which the narrative is written in five-stress rhyming couplets, while the voices of the lovers and their own patron Venus are presented in rhyme royal stanzas.[29] The dreamer-narrator falls asleep and finds himself 'ravysshid in spirit' to a temple of glass 'on a craggy roche / Like ise ifrore [*frozen*]' (16–20). There he witnesses iconographic images of true lovers (e.g., Dido, Alceste, Griselde, Palamon ('as Chaucer tellith us' (110)), plus three living figures in particular: (i) a woman who makes a complaint before Venus about being locked in unhappy marriage and unable to communicate with the man she loves; (ii) the goddess Venus, who answers the woman with both sympathy and encouragement; and (iii) 'a man that welke al solitarie, / That as me semed for hevines and dole / Him to complein' (550–2)). Hearing the complaint of the male, Venus makes 'a ful bihest: / Perpetuelli, by confirmacioun, / Whiles that thei lyve, of oon affeccioun / Thei shal endure' (1323–6). Each of the human voices in the poem is subject to powerful constraint: the dreamer-narrator starts under conditions of melancholy (going to sleep with 'thought, constreint, and grevous hevines, / For pensifhede and for heigh distres' (1–2); the woman lover can express herself only to Venus; and the male lover walks in solitary grief before presenting his petition to Venus. With exquisite tact and daring, the poem creates the conditions of intensely sympathetic, confidential expression and emotional relief of sorts.

The *Temple of Glass* is, clearly, saturated with Chaucerian references: the temple evokes the 'temple [*of Venus*] ymade of glas' in *The House of Fame* (120); the grieving courtly lovers, both female and male, evoke the narrative of *The Book of the Duchess*; and the iconographic lovers depicted evoke *The Parlement of Foules* (284–94), no less than the specific lovers mentioned are drawn from memorable Chaucerian narratives. The presentation of love's predicaments through bureaucratic textual and theatrical protocols evokes Chaucer's searing 'Complaint to Pity'.[30]

More to the point, the Chaucerian resources *liberate* the poem's suffering aristocratic voices: the poet's own suffering, dreaming, observant narratorial presence obliquely frees the painfully constrained voices of the courtly represented by the narrator. The psychological state of the Lydgatian narrator, that is, allows entry into a poetic world made of both classical (Ovidian) and vernacular (Chaucerian) materials; in that intimate and trusting space, patronal voices are permitted to voice intimate sufferings. The poet's voice is sympathetically proximate and adjacent to both lovers, and to Chaucer. He facilitates the lovers' propitious approach to a higher 'patron', the goddess Venus, from whose 'privité' nothing 'mai be concelid' (795).

[28] Derek Pearsall, 'Chaucer and Lydgate', in Ruth Morse and Barry Windeatt (eds), *Chaucer Traditions: Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer* (Cambridge, 1990), 39–53.

[29] John Lydgate, 'The Temple of Glass', in Julia Boffey (ed.), *Fifteenth-Century English Dream Visions: An Anthology* (Oxford, 2003), 15–89.

[30] For the bureaucratic protocols of Lydgate's elegiac poetry, see Simpson, *Reform and Revolution*, 175–85.

Lydgate is not the only fifteenth-century poet to work within Chaucerian elegiac possibilities. The essential characteristic such poets share is making the poet's poetic finding part of the poem's own narrative. Thus James I, King of Scotland (1394–1437), who was captured in 1407 and remained a prisoner in England until 1424, himself seems to have written a delightfully optimistic text within elegiac conditions. *The Kingis Quair* (1379 lines in five-stress, rhyme royal stanzas, a Chaucerian metre named thus for the fact that King James used it) narrates James' imprisonment.[31] It seems, however, to have been composed immediately after his release from prison and marriage to Joan Beaufort in 1424, and before his return to Scotland, where he was assassinated in 1437.

The poem opens with an account of the sleepless, mentally unsettled king picking up Boethius's *Consolation* in an almost random way. He calls the *Consolation* by the title 'Boece' (16), which is the title Chaucer had given his translation of Boethius' work; this possible reference to Chaucer's translation would be wholly appropriate, since James' act of invention is mediated wholly by Chaucerian example: one thinks most obviously of the *Parlement of Foules*, whose initial reading experience (15–84) invokes a long sequence of otherworldly voyages (Cicero's Scipio, Virgil's Dido, Dante's pilgrim) so as to inflect the new voyage about to be made by Chaucer's narrator. And just as Chaucer's narrator reflects deeply on the *Somnium Scipionis* before sleeping, before going on to effectively rewrite the authoritative text, with significantly new emphases in the dream experience that follows, so too does James rewrite the texts that prompt his act of poetic invention: not only Boethius' *Consolation*, but also, especially, 'The Knight's Tale' (cf. *Kingis Quair* 204–305 with 'Knight's Tale' 1062–111). James does not dream initially, but is inspired to write the poem that we now read, which then includes a narrative of an astral journey, in which James experiences a much more optimistic account of Fortune than Boethius or 'The Knight's Tale' would allow.

James' is an act of distinctively Chaucerian *inventio*, 'This mater new in my mynd rolling' (54). Many of the features of the Chaucerian poetic are found here: access to and adaption of Classical Latin and now contemporary English (i.e., Chaucerian) poetic sources; a represented narrator; texts played through dream experience, which involves a correlative appeal to the reader to exercise interpretative choice and discrimination. James sends his finished text off to 'my maisteris dere, / Gowere and Chaucere' (1373–4), which, along with poems by Lydgate and Hoccleve especially,[32] signal the existence of something that had not confidently existed prior to the early fifteenth century: a poetic tradition—a passing on—of named poets. There are other elegiac poets working in Chaucerian mode who claim attention, but space forbids more than notational reference.[33]

Chaucerian models also inspired something quite different and distinctive in fifteenth-century vernacular poetry in English: large scale, tragic, *romans antiques*. Again, Lydgate demands attention. In his *Siege of Thebes* (1421–2), Lydgate's initial circumstantial positioning (his 'finding') is brilliantly productive, both with regard to Chaucer and to Lydgate's own patrons. Lydgate finds himself riding among the Canterbury pilgrims, who are now returning to London, just as Chaucer had promised they would (General Prologue, 794). Chaucer himself, though, is not named until line 4501. He is, textually, vividly present to the narrator (his words ' … never shal appallen in my mynde / But alwey fressh ben in my memoyré' (44–5)). But he is physically absent from his own pilgrimage. That the intense praise of Chaucer, indeed, is in the past tense marks him out as now dead: Chaucer 'sothly

[31] James I of Scotland, 'The Kingis Quair', in Boffey (ed.), *Fifteenth-Century English Dream Visions*, 90–157.

[32] By Lydgate, especially *The Complaint of the Black Knight*, *The Temple of Glass, Troy Book*, *The Siege of Thebes*, and *Fall of Princes*; by Hoccleve, especially *The Regiment of Princes*.

[33] E.g. Derek Pearsall (ed.), *Floure and the Leafe, The Assembly of Ladies, The Isle of Ladies* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1990).

hadde most of excellence / In rethorike and in eloquences' (41–2, my emphasis); he is the honour 'of wel seyinge first in oure language' (47). It falls to the pilgrim Lydgate to begin the first tale on return to London, which he duly does, in a 4716-line tale delivered in five-stress couplets (Chaucer's invention).

In Chaucer's outward journey from London, the Knight had told the first tale; he had also interrupted the Monk's tragedies (7.2767). On the way back, the Monk Lydgate enters the field of tale-telling first, whence Chaucer's Monk had been chased, and he does so with deliberate aim. The Knight had told a small part of the story of Thebes, translated from Boccaccio's invented portion of the *Teseida* dealing with the lovers Palemone and Arcita; Lydgate opens the Chaucerian story up, by giving the pilgrims the vast Theban prequel to 'The Knight's Tale': Lydgate tells the story of Thebes from its founding by Amphion, through the narrative of Oedipus, to the civil war between Eteocles and Polinices, into which the Argives are drawn for the best reasons and with the worst results, right up to the very point of the *beginning* of the Knight's narrative, with Theseus and the Theban women.

Lydgate does very much the same with Chaucer's treatment of the story of Thebes as he does with Chaucer's treatment of the other great catastrophe narrative of late medieval Europe, that of Troy. Whereas Chaucer had, again following Boccaccio, written a deeply poignant, enclosed narrative of love inset within the Trojan War (i.e., *Troilus and Criseyde*), keeping the larger war at bay, Lydgate writes the large, dark prequel to Chaucer's narrative in his *Troy Book* (1412–20). For both Troy and Thebes, that is, Lydgate opens up Chaucer's narratives to reveal how those detailed, partitioned Chaucerian narratives rhyme with the larger, darker movement of catastrophic history of which they are a part. Lydgate gives us the whole picture in both cases.

In both cases, too, Lydgate writes as a monk to his secular, aristocratic audience. This is not to say that Lydgate primarily moralizes his narratives of polytheistic societies with specifically Christian doctrine. So far from doing that, Lydgate keeps all the gods, polytheistic or the Christian God, out of the story.[34] Lydgate writes as a monk insofar as he writes with a powerful machine of *inventio* at his disposal: the monastic library, with 'an hundred' books 'in [his] celle' (*Canterbury Tales* 7.1971–2), from which he draws the wisdom of ancient societies to address contemporary predicaments. Lydgate emphasizes ethical virtues in his delivery, but not the penitential ethics of Christianity: instead he elucidates the Cardinal Virtue of Prudence, the capacity to see from the present, by reference to the past, into the future, and to judge whether or not an action will be manageable (e.g., 2796–2812, 2891–8, 2952–62, 3442–4).[35] This is the ethics of practical but successful action in the world.

Lydgate's audience of aristocratic male rulers was possessed of another ethical system for practical action in the world, that of chivalric ethics, which principally promoted the need to accrue honour and avoid shame. Throughout both the *Troy Book* and the *Siege of Thebes*, Lydgate represents headstrong male aristocrats making all the wrong, stupid moves under the impulse of honour accumulation and shame avoidance (e.g., *Troy Book* 2.2305–68, 2.3295–318; *Siege of Thebes* 2922–40).

Whereas Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrimage heads *away* from the city, Lydgate's heads back there, and so it well might in the early 1420s: after the premature death of Henry

[34] See James Simpson, 'Human Prudence Versus the Emotion of the Cosmos: War, Deliberation and Destruction in the Late Medieval Statian Tradition', in Andrew Lynch et al. (eds), *Emotions and War* (London, 2015), 98–116.

[35] For the Ciceronian sources of Prudential theory and its later medieval diffusion, see James Simpson, '"Dysemol daies and Fatal houres": Lydgate's *Destruction of Thebes* and Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*', in Helen Cooper and Sally Mapstone (eds), *The Long Fifteenth Century: Essays in Honour of Douglas Gray* (Oxford, 1997), 15–33.

V in August 1422, Parliament determined that governance of England should be shared between John, duke of Bedford and his brother Humfrey, duke of Gloucester. Civil war, which had already afflicted and terribly weakened France from 1407, is the threat that haunts (and visited) England throughout the fifteenth century. In 1422 Lydgate urgently and confidently addresses his narrative of Thebes to his Lancastrian patrons, implicitly urging them to avoid the fate of Thebes with its warring princely brothers, urging them to avoid replicating the fate the Argives. He speaks from the position of learned *clericus* to dangerously powerful soldiers.

The only other fifteenth-century poet to take on Chaucer's *roman antique* material is Robert Henryson (d. *c*1490). Henryson, writing from an entirely different social environment in Scotland, positions himself wholly differently from fifteenth-century English poets. In his darkly intense *Testament of Cresseid* (written probably in the 1470s) his inventive posture is not as advisor to patrons, but as deeply reflective, private, trenchant reader. The poem's power derives partly from its commitment to seeing Chaucer's Criseyde through to her end, where Chaucer had her move painfully out of the picture. The poem's power also derives from the way in which the appalling fate of Cresseid undoes, and exposes the vacuity of, key elegiac poetic resources. As an abandoned leper suffering from a hideous venereal disease, Cresseid delivers, for example, a piercing, rhetorically expert, inset *planctus* (407–69),[36] which is unimaginable without the precedent of the inset complaints in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (e.g., 1.400–20, 3.820–40, and 5.638–44). So far from persuading anyone that she is the victim of Fortune, however, Cresseid's complaint serves only to highlight the failure of that lyric tradition to meet this situation. The only intelligible, human sound worth making is, by the estimation of an old leper lady, the noise of the clapper soliciting alms, making 'vertew of ane neid' (478, a horribly shrunken version of Theseus' identical claim in 'the Knight's Tale' (1.3042)). From this collapse of intelligence, the poem must edge back to some kind of fit human judgement. Judgement comes not, however, from the gods: their savage legal 'sentence' beggars any poetic 'sentence'; neither does it come from the poet: 'Sen scho is deid I speik of hir no moir' (616) is his final disclaimer; and neither does the epitaph Troylus' has inscribed on Cresseid's tomb invest Cresseid's terrible fate with human sense: Cresseid, 'Sumtyme countit the flour of womanheid, / Under this stane, lait lipper, lyis deid' (607–8). The only human 'sentence' on Cresseid, and so the only really intelligible comment on her situation, is made by Cresseid herself. Crucially, it is not a judgement, but an accusation:

> Thocht* sum be trew*, I wait* richt few ar they; *Though, faithful, know*
> Quha findis treuth*, lat him his lady ruse*; *fidelity, praise*
> Nane but my self as now I will accuse.
> (572–4)

So in both these genres, the elegiac and the tragic, Lydgate and other fifteenth-century poets in English position themselves productively with regard to their master Chaucer, to his matter, and, in the English cases, to their patrons. The kinds of case made here about the enabling presence of Chaucer for the fifteenth-century Chaucerian Lydgate could be made for many other genres. Thus both Lydgate and, again, Henryson exploit Chaucerian potential with the animal fable. Lydgate's brilliant and understudied *Churl and the Bird* (of uncertain date), along with Henryson's powerfully corrosive, bleak *Morall Fabillis*

[36] Robert Henryson, 'The Testament of Cresseid', in Denton Fox (ed.), *The Poems of Robert Henryson* (Oxford, 1981).

(2975 lines in rhyme royal stanzas)[37] are the key examples, since they bear all the Chaucerian rhetorical hallmarks (both of *inventio* and *ornatus*) that Chaucer deploys in his own animal fables (especially 'The Nun's Priest's Tale' and 'The Manciple's Tale'), no less than meta-poetic reflection on the use of rhetorical persuasion when addressing the powerful. The *Churl and the Bird* is strikingly forthright about the position of the Chaucerian poet, since the implicit aristocrat in that poem is pictured as deaf to wisdom. The poem ends with the clever bird (i.e., court poet) abjuring the value of speaking to obtuse patrons at all: 'I cast me nevir hensforth, my lyvyng, / Aforn a cherl anymore to syng!' (363–4).[38]

The Gower Tradition

Readers familiar with scholarship on 'English Chaucerians' will perhaps be surprised that I have not discussed Thomas Hoccleve (*c*1367–1426) in any detail under the aegis of Chaucer. To be sure, Hoccleve praises Chaucer and depends on his name to generate his own poetic identity.[39] But even as he does so in the *Regiment of Princes* (1412), he also praises 'my maistir Gower' (1975). In this section I focus on the understudied influence of John Gower (1330–1408), and in particular his *Confessio amantis* (1390–3). Hoccleve is much more, I suggest, a Gowerian than a Chaucerian.

Gower's *Confessio amantis* pretends to be what it is not. It pretends, that is, to be an extended penitential confession, in which the failed lover Amans details his errancy across eight books, devoted in turn to each of the seven deadly sins (Books 1–6 and 8). One of the giveaways of this extended literary feint is the confessor figure—Venus's priest Genius—to whom Amans confesses his lover's sins. Genius is a figure with a long and rich intellectual history;[40] Gower merges four key functions of the Genius figure: a tutelary figure; a conscience figure; a psychological representative of *ingenium*, or imagination, situated between the senses and reason; and a force of sexual desire (thus 'priest of Venus'). Through Genius, Gower angles the entire force of the *Confessio* away from penitential ethics, and turns it instead to matters concerned with love.

That turn towards amorous desire, however, is itself not the whole story: the stories told by Genius to instruct Amans consistently involve *political* issues. The second giveaway of the structure of the whole book is that Book 7 seems to fit neither penitential nor amatory concerns. Book 7 is devoted to the education of the king, especially in the practical sciences. Genius, however, resolves the amatory and the political. In his adjacency to reason, Genius reveals that the psyche is itself a political realm, potentially subject to the tyrant Cupid. The 'political' health of the politic body requires commerce between the abstract force of reason and the desires of the body, just as the ruler of a well-ordered body politic requires dialogue with his people. In the psyche, that mediating figure is Genius himself, whereas in the body politic the mediator is royal council and Parliament. By the end of the poem, Amans is taught, by a cannily subtle pedagogy, to abandon his obsessive pursuit of amatory

[37] Robert Henryson, 'Morall Fabillis', in Fox (ed.), *The Poems of Robert Henryson*.

[38] Citation from *The Churl and the Bird,* in Henry Noble MacCracken (ed.), *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, EETS, e.s. 107, o.s. 192 (London, 1911, 1934), 2.468–85. For analysis of this brilliant poem, see James Simpson, '"For al my body … weieth nat an unce": Empty Poets and Rhetorical Weight in Lydgate's *Churl and the Bird*', in Larry Scanlon and James Simpson (eds), *John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England* (Notre Dame, IN, 2006), 129–46.

[39] Blyth (ed.), *Regiment of Princes*, 1863–7.

[40] Jane Chance Nitzsche, *The Genius Figure in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (New York, 1975).

desire. Instead he regains his proper name, 'John Gower' (8.2321), integrated as he is both personally and as a citizen in the larger body politic.[41]

Gower's inventive posture for this work is exceptionally fertile. Genius as the imagination is the storehouse of images and of narrative: he remembers stories from multiple sources (upwards of eighty of them across the *Confessio* as a whole), frequently from Ovid; as a priest of Venus and confessor, he produces ironic structures, pretending to be based on penitential ethics, when in fact the stories are often an occasion for Amans to indulge his fantasy of erotic satisfaction. But that pretence is also ultimately ironic: Genius as imagination mediates between the senses and reason, to each of which he is psychologically adjacent. The overall drift of the work is away from erotic concerns and towards the political, or, rather, towards understanding the place of the whole body in the political. The reader experiences the drift of the poem, and is educated through that experience.

There are two presiding authorial geniuses, as it were, behind the poem: Ovid and Aristotle. Ovid supplies the posture of the lover-poet giving voice to repressed desire, and also supplies much of the poetic matter of the poem. Aristotle, by contrast, ultimately supplies the poem's fundamental philosophical and structural coordinates: beneath the movement of this text lies an Aristotelian philosophical ground, where the soul is most fully itself when embodied. As an embodied soul, the soul must recognize the whole body, of which it is a part, in any formulation of rule; and as the soul strives to attain its fullest form, so too must it undergo a process of 'enformacion' (to use Gower's term) though teaching and reading.[42] The poem so produced is what might be called a 'person-shaped' poem: the text reaches its own fullest form as the soul of the ideal reader is brought to its own fullest 'form'. The essential sciences within which the poem works are the practical sciences in what was known as the Aristotelian scheme of the division of philosophy: ethics (i.e., governance of the self); economics (i.e., governance of the household); and politics (i.e., governance of the polis).[43] The political order is modelled on the self: the king learns how to govern the polis by governance of his own body in the first instance.[44] Every romance narrative in the *Confessio* is implicitly 'economic', insofar as each addresses governance of the household, including marriage (e.g., Florent (1.1407), Constance (2.587–1612), and especially Apollonius of Tyre (8.271–2008)); many other exemplary narratives of household mismanagement (e.g., Phoebus and Cornide (3.783–817) also point to the broader issue of political governance by exposing household, 'economic' mismanagement.

That discursive structure illuminates Hoccleve's poetic project. Hoccleve's *oeuvre* is distinctive for its sharply focused, extended autobiographical accents. We find nothing comparable in late fourteenth-century writing. His *Male regle* (1405) (448 lines in rhyme royal stanzas), for example, presents itself as a comically self-demeaning portrait of youthful excess; the *Regiment of Princes* (1412) (5463 lines in mostly rhyme royal stanzas) begins with a 2016-line report of a conversation between Hoccleve and an old man, in which the Hoccleve figure complains of his terror of bankruptcy; and the *Series* (*c*1420) (an extended *prosimetrum* consisting of seven miscellaneous texts) begins with a searing complaint about social alienation after a period of mental instability, followed by a dialogue between Hoccleve and a friend in which the dangers of publication are candidly addressed.

[41] For this argument in full, see James Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry: Alan of Lille's Anticlaudianus and John Gower's Confessio amantis* (Cambridge, 1995), 134–299.

[42] Simpson, *Sciences and the Self*, 168–72.

[43] Simpson, *Sciences and the Self*, 219–29.

[44] Elizabeth Porter, 'Gower's Ethical Microcosm and Political Macrocosm', in Alastair Minnis (ed.), *Gower's 'Confessio amantis': Responses and Reassessments* (Cambridge, 1983), 135–62.