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The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer

The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer is a revised version of the first edition, which has become a classic in the field. This new volume responds to the success of the first edition and to recent debates in Chaucer studies. Important material has been updated, and new contributions have been commissioned to take into account recent trends in literary theory as well as in studies of Chaucer's works, although the structure of the book has basically remained the same. Chapters cover such topics as the social and literary scene in England in Chaucer's time, the literary inheritance traceable in his works to French and Italian sources, comedy, pathos and romance in the *Canterbury Tales*, and Chaucer's style. The volume now includes a useful chronology, and the bibliography has been entirely updated to provide an indispensable guide for today's student of Chaucer.

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THE CAMBRIDGE
COMPANION TO
CHAUCER

Second edition

EDITED BY
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PREFACE

This second edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, like the first one, is intended for students, teachers, and all general readers who wish to approach Chaucer's works with the help of an introduction to his texts, and to the contexts in which he composed them. Its main aim is to suggest ways of reading, furnish necessary explanations, and offer first-hand literary criticism, by means of which readers may test their own responses to one of the greatest English poets. The views offered in each essay are individual and to a large extent original ones; they are not meant to be résumés of the current state of Chaucer scholarship or criticism, although Carolyn Dinshaw's contribution explores the ways in which new critical approaches to literary texts put pressure on Chaucer's works. We feel now, as we felt at the time we produced the first edition in 1986, that the reader is best served by a clearly pursued line of argument, which may set off his or her own thinking, rather than an exhaustive survey of the field.

We have kept the basic structure of the old volume, asking contributors to rewrite or update their essays as necessary, but we have also included specially commissioned new essays in order to respond to changing currents in Chaucer criticism. About half the articles in the collection are then, here as before, focussed squarely on one or more of Chaucer's major works, identifying their themes and styles, moods and tones, in such a way as to help the reader to an appreciation of Chaucer's aims and artistry in each case. Alongside these essays are others of a more general kind – focussing on literary or historical background, on style, structure, and afterlife – which not only present the major works in ever-different lights, but also explore their links with many of the minor poems and with other medieval literature. We hope that the combination of the two types of essay will not only give a sense of a larger context for discussion of the individual works, but will also make clear that there is no 'definitive' interpretation of, say, *Troilus and Criseyde* – rather, it can be constantly re-approached via fresh lines of enquiry.

Paul Strohm's essay sketches the general scene, both social and literary, in fourteenth-century England. Ardis Butterfield and David Wallace trace the impact on Chaucer of the cultural and literary reality of France and Italy. Piero Boitani leads the reader through Chaucer's early development in the dream poems, in which books are not just the sources but the subject of his poetry. Mark Lambert discusses the densely textured narrative style of *Troilus*, while Jill Mann focusses on its philosophical themes, on the questions of chance and destiny which Chaucer encountered in Boethius. Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards address the problems presented by the incomplete state of the *Legend of Good Women*, the possibility that it was a royal commission, and the uncertainties of its genre and tone. The next five essays are devoted to the *Canterbury Tales*: first, David Benson discusses the tales in relation to the pilgrimage-frame, and then the four succeeding contributions, by J. A. Burrow, Derek Pearsall, the late Robert Worth Frank Jr, and A. C. Spearing, examine selected tales grouped by mode or genre. Barry Windeatt and Christopher Cannon range widely through Chaucer's works, using comparison and contrast to engage with larger questions of structure and style. James Simpson surveys the principal English and Scots responses to Chaucer between Hoccleve and the 1542 statute permitting the reading of Chaucer's works; and Carolyn Dinshaw takes up the issues of feminist, queer, and postcolonial readings of our author.

Because this book has an introductory function, notes have been kept to a minimum, and it has not been possible to give exhaustive documentation of the history of every critical view presented or discussed. The Guide to Chaucer Studies provided by Joerg Fichte will lead the interested reader to the important works in this field whose influence has helped to shape the individual discussions in this collection, and will also clear several pathways through the dense forest of modern Chaucer criticism. The contributors to this book are the inheritors of a long and rich tradition of Chaucer scholarship, to which they feel themselves indebted. Yet in order to write freshly and freely on works which have been read and written about for six hundred years, they have inevitably had to banish from their texts and their notes many of the very works which have done most to create their own enjoyment. We hope that the final Guide to Chaucer Studies will stand as an acknowledgement of our gratitude to the labours of others. We hope also that this second edition of the *Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, the joint effort – like the first one – of an English and Italian editor, and the product of an international team of scholars, will help to foster in new generations of readers in all countries a love of Chaucer and an interest in Chaucer studies.

PIERO BOITANI
Cambridge, June 2002

JILL MANN

NOTE ON THE TEXT

The text of Chaucer used throughout for quotation and reference is the *Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. L. D. Benson (Boston, 1987/Oxford, 1988). References are normally to individual works, with Book- and line-number; for the sake of concision, however, references to the *Canterbury Tales* are occasionally given by Fragment- and line-number (e.g. 1, 3450 = *Miller's Tale*, 3450).

Abbreviations

BL	British Library
CFMA	Les Classiques Français du Moyen Age
EETS os, es	<i>Early English Text Society</i> original series, extra series
MED	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i> , eds. H. Kurath, S. M. Kuhn, <i>et al.</i> (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1954-)
PL	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus</i> , series latina, ed. J. P. Migne
PMLA	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>

CHRONOLOGY

- c.1240–c.1280 *Roman de la Rose* by Guillaume de Lorris, continued by
Jean de Meun
- 1309 Pope Clement V moves papal capital to Avignon
- 1321 Death of Dante Alighieri
- 1327 Edward III (aged 14) crowned
- 1335–41 Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, *Teseida*
- 1337 Edward lays claim to French crown; beginning of
Hundred Years War
- 1337 Birth of Froissart
- c.1340 Birth of Chaucer
- 1342–3 Petrarch begins *Canzoniere*
- 1343–4 English knights take part in siege of Algeciras (*Gen.
Prol.* 56–7)
- 1346 Victory over French at Crécy; victory over Scots at
Neville's Cross
- 1348–9 Black Death
- 1349–52 Boccaccio, *Decameron*
- 1356 Victory over French at Poitiers; John II of France taken
captive
- 1357 Chaucer in service of Countess of Ulster
- 1359–60 Chaucer taken prisoner in Normandy; ransomed by
Edward III
- 1360 Peace of Bretigny leaves Edward in control of one-third
of France
- 1361 Black Death reappears
- 1361–5 Pierre de Lusignan (Peter of Cyprus; *Monk's Tale*
2391–8) takes 'Satalye' (Adalia), Alexandria, and
'Lyeys' (Ayas) (*Gen. Prol.* 51, 57–9)
- 1365/6 Chaucer marries Philippa, daughter of Paon de Roet

- 1367 Black Prince defeats mercenary army under Bernard de Guesclin at Najera, Spain, gains throne for Pedro the Cruel (*Monk's Tale* 2375–90)
- 1367 Chaucer granted life annuity by Edward III
- 1368 Possible first visit of Chaucer of Italy
- c.1369–70 *Book of the Duchess*
- 1371 French reclaim Gascony, Poitiers
- 1372–3 Chaucer visits Genoa and Florence
- 1374 Death of Petrarch
- 1374 Chaucer appointed Controller of Customs in London
- 1375 Death of Boccaccio
- 1376 Good Parliament condemns waste and profiteering by high government officials
- 1377 Rye and Hastings burned by French
- 1377 Death of Edward III; succeeded by Richard II
- 1377 Chaucer travels to France for negotiations toward marriage of Richard to Princess Marie of France
- 1378 Chaucer visits Lombardy; appoints John Gower as attorney in his absence
- 1378 Great Schism in Papacy; Urban VI at Rome (recognized by England); Clement VII at Avignon (recognized by France)
- c.1378–80 *House of Fame* and *Anelida and Arcite*
- c.1380–2 *Parliament of Fowls*
- 1380–6 Gower, *Vox Clamantis*
- 1380s First version of Lollard Bible
- 1381 Peasants' Revolt (*Nun's Priest's Tale* 3394)
- 1382 Wycliffe's teachings condemned by Blackfriars Synod
- c.1382–6 *Boece* and *Troilus and Criseyde*
- 1385 Death of Bernabò Visconti of Milan (*Monk's Tale* 2399–406)
- c.1385–7 *Legend of Good Women*
- 1385–7 Thomas Usk, *Testament of Love*
- 1386 Chaucer a Member of Parliament for Kent
- 1387 Death of Philippa Chaucer
- c.1387 Chaucer begins *Canterbury Tales*
- 1388 Chaucer's annuity transferred to John Scalby, perhaps at instigation of Merciless Parliament
- 1388 Merciless Parliament; Appellants gain impeachment of officials close to Richard

- 1389–91 Chaucer appointed Clerk of the Works, Commissioner of Walls and Ditches
- c.1390? Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, dedicated to Richard II
- 1393 Gower rededicates *Confessio* to Henry Bolingbroke
- 1394 Richard II renews Chaucer's annuity
- 1396 Truce with France; England retains only Calais
- 1397 Parliament undoes work of Merciless Parliament
- 1398 Banishment of Henry Bolingbroke
- 1399 Deposition of Richard; succeeded by Bolingbroke as Henry IV
- 1399 Henry IV supplements Chaucer's annuity 'for good service'
- 1400 Death of Chaucer

I

PAUL STROHM

The social and literary scene in England

Social structure

Ideas of medieval social organization have much to contribute to the study of Chaucer. Socially and politically inflected topics are manifest within his writings, and socially grounded issues of literary taste and reception are thematically important as well. But, looking beyond particular matters of content, generally held notions about the structure of society also exert a tacit but persistent influence on the structure of his literary works.

Medieval social descriptions are very conscious of degree, and tend to emphasize the relatively small number of people at the top of the social hierarchy. The thirteenth-century legal commentator Bracton is representative when he divides society into those high in the ecclesiastical hierarchy (the pope, archbishops, bishops, and lesser prelates), those high in the civil hierarchy (emperors, kings, dukes, counts, barons, magnates, and knights), and those remaining (a general category of 'freepersons and bondpersons' or *liberi et villani*).¹

Bracton's concentration on prelates and magnates is consistent with formal theory in his day, but we must remember that his category of 'freepersons and bondpersons' comprised an overwhelming majority of the fourteenth-century populace. After the cataclysmic Black Death of 1348–9, the population of England levelled off at about 3,500,000, where it remained for the rest of the century and most of the next.² Among these persons the 150 lords and 2,000 knights and their families upon whom Bracton concentrates would have totalled no more than 8,000–10,000, or considerably less than one-half of one per cent of the whole.³ He is undoubtedly correct in his half-stated assumption that most of the remainder were agricultural workers, with many still bound in some fashion to the land, but other groups are apparent to the modern observer. Taken together, ecclesiastical orders probably included some 50,000 members, or just under two per cent of the whole.⁴ Esquires and other lesser gentry and their families probably comprised about

30,000–40,000 additional persons. Cities were small and city-dwellers were few by standards of today. London and nearby Westminster had a population of some 40,000, and lesser cities (which we might be more inclined to call ‘towns’) such as Bristol, York, Norwich, Gloucester, Leicester, and Hull had populations between 5,000 and 10,000. All told, though, we might suppose that about 100,000–125,000 additional persons were ‘urban’ in some sense of the word.

Latent even within Bracton’s commentary is another way of viewing society which encouraged more recognition of such constituent groups. His division of society into the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the civil hierarchy, and the mass of other persons is based upon the traditional medieval view of the three estates (clerics, knights, and peasants).⁵ Even when treated most hierarchically, the estates of society were also seen as interdependent, with each group contributing in its own way to the good of all. This notion of interdependence issued at times in an alternative view of society, as organic rather than hierarchical. This organic view – often conveyed through extended metaphors of the social estates as members of the body politic – permitted recognition of new classes of persons not clearly accommodated in the more traditional tripartite system. It is to be found less in formal statements than in sermons, statutes, ordinances, and a variety of other irregular and occasional documents.

A sermon delivered in the 1370s by Bishop Thomas Brinton of Rochester supplements the hierarchical view of society with a more organic view of the interdependence of its estates. We are all, he says, the mystical members of a single body, of which the head (or heads) are kings, princes, and prelates; the eyes are judges, wise men, and true counsellors; the ears are clergy; the tongue is good doctors. Then, within the midsection of the body, the right hand is composed of strenuous knights; the left hand is composed of merchants and craftsmen; and the heart is citizens and burgesses. Finally, peasants and workers are the feet which support the whole.⁶ Similar views of society crop up in other occasional and relatively informal papers of the time. A Norwich gild ordinance of the 1380s, for example, takes note in its opening prayer of a ruling stratum composed of the king, dukes, earls, barons, and bachelors; a middle stratum composed of knights, squires, citizens and burgesses, and franklins; and a broader category of tillers and craftsmen.⁷

The middle groupings in Brinton’s sermon and the Norwich prayer embrace persons of different social outlook. The knights – and, in the second half of the fourteenth century, the new class of esquires – enjoyed the same *gentil* status as the great aristocrats, though clearly without enjoying the benefits conferred by the hereditary titles and accompanying revenues of the latter group. Although non-*gentil*, the urban merchants (whose free status

and prosperity entitled them to the titles ‘citizen’ or ‘burgess’) often enjoyed wealth considerably greater than that of most knights.⁸ And even these distinctions mask variations. Many knights and esquires of the period held no land at all and had few or no military obligations, but earned their status through civil and administrative tasks which we might consider essentially ‘middle class’.⁹ While not *gentil*, citizens and burgesses were eligible to serve their cities and shires as ‘knights’ in Parliament, and some were knighted for royal or military service.¹⁰ The ultimate standard for inclusion in these middle groupings would seem not to be rank or title, but simply civil importance and responsibility, however defined.

Chaucer’s own position

Chaucer himself was a member of this middle social grouping, his place within it secured by various forms of what might be called ‘civil service’. He was born in the early 1340s, in a family situation appropriate to a career of royal service.¹¹ His father, John Chaucer, was not only a prosperous London vintner, but had himself served Edward III in such capacities as deputy chief butler (with responsibility for certain customs collections). Chaucer’s own career began in 1357 with his appointment to the household of Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster, and her husband Prince Lionel. In the service of the latter he journeyed between France and England (and was captured and ransomed during a 1359–60 military campaign in France), inaugurating a series of journeys which would take him frequently to France, twice to Italy, and elsewhere in the course of his career. Like many in his station, he married rather advantageously, to Philippa de Roet, daughter of a knight of Hainault (who had come to England in the service of the queen) and sister of Katherine Swynford (soon to be mistress and eventual third wife of John of Gaunt). In 1367, soon after his marriage, he is listed as *valettus* to King Edward III, and by 1368 he is listed among *esquiers* of the royal household. While remaining an esquire and never entering the inner circle of chamber-knights, he nevertheless continued in respected service of one sort or another until the end of his life. In 1374, he shifted from the precincts of the household to the post of controller of customs in London, assisted both by preferment from Edward III and by a timely annuity to him and to his wife from John of Gaunt. Posts and assignments continued after the accession of Richard II in 1377. The latter 1380s marked a period of comparative withdrawal from London activity, possibly tactical in nature since it roughly coincided with the years 1386–9 in which Richard II was severely challenged by an aristocratic coalition. Richard reasserted his royal prerogatives in 1389, and Chaucer soon after received his next royal appointment as clerk of the king’s

works. He continued in various capacities – though none of greater lustre – through the 1390s. When Henry IV supplanted Richard II in 1399, a year before Chaucer's death, he confirmed Richard's annuities and added a grant of his own.¹²

Even so spare a summary of Chaucer's civil career suggests several interesting perspectives on his life and place in society.

(1) Chaucer's position as an esquire of the royal household would have conferred *gentil* status, though he was among the more ambiguously situated members of that somewhat fluid group. Lacking the security from possession of lands and rents enjoyed by the great aristocrats and even by some of his fellow knights and esquires, Chaucer depended for his living upon his career in service. In this sense, the posts and assignments which he held in the course of what Sylvia Thrupp has called his 'versatile' career were not just an expression of his energies or his zest for politics, but were essential to his livelihood and to the maintenance of his station in life.¹³

(2) Chaucer appears to have had a representative career, both as an esquire of the king's immediate household and as a member of the royal party beyond the immediate confines of the court.¹⁴ He would seem to have been rather good at what he did; while not lavishly rewarded, he enjoyed frequent appointments and re-appointments while weathering the extreme and sometimes dangerous factional vicissitudes of his day. His service bridged successfully the careers of three monarchs, and he managed the extremely difficult task of being on good terms both with Richard II and with John of Gaunt and the Lancastrians, even during such points of extreme tension as Richard's clash in 1386–9 with the Appellants, an aristocratic coalition headed by the Duke of Gloucester and including Gaunt's son Henry. In a period of what Thomas Usk called 'confederacie, congregacion, & couyne',¹⁵ Chaucer was necessarily something of a factionalist, allied like Mayor Brembre of London and Chief Justice Tresilian and others with Richard's royal party. Yet – unlike such fellow partisans as Brembre, Tresilian, and Usk, who were beheaded by the Appellants in 1388 – Chaucer seems to have understood the limits of faction, and to have tempered his activity in 1386–8 and possibly in other crucial periods as well.

(3) Patronage based on his literary accomplishments seems not to have been a major factor in Chaucer's civil career. Later we will consider several literary works which may have been written in part to console, compliment, or please his superiors, but most of the facts of his civil career are comprehensible in terms of strictly non-literary talents and exertions. Chaucer's poetry fosters an impression of separation between his public and literary lives, as when the garrulous Eagle in the *House of Fame* chides him for his

habitual withdrawal from the world of affairs to that of books and private reading:

For when thy labour doon al ys,
And hast mad alle thy rekenynges,
In stede of reste and newe thynges,
Thou goost hom to thy hous anoon,
And, also domb as any stoon,
Thou sittest at another book
Tyl fully daswed ys thy look . . . (652–8)

The principal communities of readers

Solitary as Chaucer's own habits of reading and writing might have been, his poetry still shows a notable concern with issues of reception: with situations of telling and listening, of writing and reading, of audience reaction. This concern, in turn, encourages us to imagine the circumstances into which Chaucer actually launched his literary works – for whom he wrote them, and in what ways he expected them to be promulgated. Any attempt to answer these questions is, however, complicated by a number of situations peculiar to the society of Chaucer's day, including the coexistence of older 'oral' and newer 'literary' presuppositions; the relative infrequency of literacy in Chaucer's England; and, especially, the fragmentation of the literate populace into small and relatively self-contained communities of readers, based on considerations of language, geography, production and distribution of manuscripts, vocation, and social class.

The task of determining the boundaries of Chaucer's contemporary audience is complicated by the fact that the circumstances of oral narration in Chaucer's day could have permitted people to *hear* his work without having the occasion (or perhaps even the ability) to *read* it.¹⁶ Chaucer himself seems occasionally unsure about whether he is primarily an *oral* or a *written* poet. We might loosely conceive of his earlier vision-poems as composed to be read aloud to an intimate audience and his *Canterbury Tales* as intended to reach a larger audience in manuscript form, with the mid-career *Troilus and Criseyde* as a watershed. Even so broad a formulation is, however, subject to uncertainties. Chaucer's tone of address to his audience is nowhere more intimate among his narrative poems than in *Troilus*, yet this poem concludes with an apostrophe ('Go, litel bok . . .') which certainly anticipates the circulation of his poem to an enlarged audience in manuscript form. The *Canterbury Tales* are laced with different sorts of references to hearing and reading, often within a single passage. Apologizing for his plain speech in

the *Miller's Tale*, Chaucer seems to imagine his audience both as hearers and as readers of a bound manuscript:

. . . whoso list it nat yheere,
Turne over the leef and chese another tale. (I, 3176–7)

We might provisionally imagine Chaucer writing for an immediate, oral audience and an ultimate audience of readers, though we must add this matter of oral/written to the list of uncertainties which urge caution upon us.

If oral rendition enlarged the possible audience of fourteenth-century works, other considerations were decidedly narrowing in their effect. The already small body of literate persons in England (probably no more than five to ten per cent of the population, even including what M. B. Parkes has called exclusively 'pragmatic' or non-literary readers¹⁷) was further segmented by other criteria into a number of separate 'communities of readers'. Several literary languages remained in competition throughout the second half of the fourteenth century. Though English was gradually coming to the fore, the last quarter of the century still saw Latin as the language of ecclesiastical and theological discourse, and French as the language of statecraft and civil record-keeping, as well as a literary language in some circles. Such geographically based considerations as the different dialects of English, local preference for different forms (such as alliterative as opposed to metrical verse), and physical distance were also centrifugal in their effect. Different vocational and social groupings, while anything but rigid at their outer margins, still fostered divergent tastes among such groups as the aristocracy, the gentry, and the urban middle classes. Such segmentation of the literate populace into different communities or reading publics is most dramatically illustrated by the fact that the three greatest writers of English of the later fourteenth century – Chaucer, Langland, and the *Gawain*-poet – may not have known each other's work. (Chaucer perhaps echoes the opening scene of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in his *Squire's Tale*, and his Parson's dismissive allusion to poetic alliteration or 'rum, ram, ruf' may possibly embrace both writers, but neither these nor other suggestions that they knew each other's work are very persuasive.) In order better to understand how such a situation could occur, we might examine the principal literate communities of fourteenth-century England.¹⁸

The upper levels of the *clergy*, and especially those connected with monastic libraries and scriptoria, were naturally literate. As surviving booklists show, their continuing concern throughout the century was with theological and ecclesiastical matter written in Latin – though literature in all three languages is encountered. Some fourteenth-century manuscripts of

likely ecclesiastical provenance include works in Latin, French, and Middle English, and occasionally both divine and secular works as well; London, BL, MS Harley 2253, for example, not only contains a generous selection of Middle English secular and religious lyrics, but also secular works in French and devotional works in Latin.

Members of the royal family and the fourteenth-century *aristocracy* were drawn to works in chivalry, statecraft, and occasionally theology, particularly in French. In the middle of the century, Henry, Duke of Lancaster, had written a devotional treatise entitled ‘Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines’. In that work, he apologizes for the quality of his native or Anglo-Norman French, on the ground that he is more familiar with English: ‘Si le franceis ne soit pas bon, jeo doie estre excusee, pur seo qu jeo suit engleis et n’ai pas moelt hauntee le franceis.’¹⁹ In style and thrust Henry’s work was somewhat of the older fashion, since the mid-century provided members of the court with ample opportunity to polish their Continental French. A series of lustrous marriages brought Continent-born and -educated wives and their trains to the royal household in the course of the century, including Isabella of France (wife of Edward II and mother of Edward III), Philippa of Hainault (wife of Edward III), and Anne of Bohemia (first wife of Richard II). Additionally, the series of conflicts between England and France known as the Hundred Years War brought the two countries into inevitable association through legations, missions, and – especially – the practice of holding prisoners for ransom (after the battle of Poitiers in 1356, King John of France and a virtual court-in-exile were resident in England throughout most of an eight-year period which lasted until his death in 1364). Extant booklists throughout this period testify to a continuing interest in French literature. At the time of her death, Isabella of France bequeathed to Edward III a number of French books, including a *Brut*, deeds of Arthur, and *Tristan and Isolde*; she owned copies of *Aimeri de Narbonne*, *Percival*, *Gawain*, and other narratives as well.²⁰ Although no bibliophile, Edward III seems to have had some interest in French romance; in one case the Issue Rolls of his reign specify 100 marks ‘for a book of romance . . . for the King’s use, which remains to the chamber of the Lord the King’.²¹ Booklists of Richard II include similar romances (some possibly from his great-grandmother’s bequest), and others including a ‘Romance de la Rose’ and a ‘Romance de Perciuall & Gawyn’, as well as a Bible written in French or *lingua gallica*.²² Froissart, presenting a volume of his poems to Richard, comments that he spoke and read French very well (‘moult bien parloit et lisoit le franchois’), and we have no reason to doubt his word.²³ The interest of the aristocracy was not confined to French. The Duke of Gloucester’s library contained both French romances and Latin theology, and Henry IV was a reader of Latin as well.²⁴ Chaucer’s contemporary, John

Gower, claimed some encouragement from Richard II in undertaking his English *Confessio Amantis*.²⁵ Yet only with evidence of Henry V's preference for literature in his native tongue does English emerge clearly as the preferred literary language of the royal and aristocratic group.²⁶

The situation was different among the lower echelons of the *gentry* – especially among those knights and esquires of the royal household and/or chancery clerks and secretaries and lawyers who comprised what might be considered the ‘civil service’ of the day. There, an emergent public for English literary works provided a receptive milieu for Chaucer and others as well.²⁷ One such writer was Thomas Usk, initially a scrivener or professional scribe who became a political factionalist and convert to the royal party. In the period 1385–7, while in temporary eclipse and awaiting the royal preferment which was to be his undoing, Usk composed a political and spiritual allegory entitled *Testament of Love*, in which he explained his still unusual choice of English as a literary language:

Trewly, the understanding of Englishmen wol not strecche to the privy termes in Frenche, what-so-ever we bosten of straunge language. Let than clerkes endyten in Latin, for they have the propertee of science, and the knowinge in that facultee; and let Frenchmen in their Frenche also endyten their queynt termes, for it is kyndely to their mouthes; and let us shewe our fantasyes in suche wordes as we lerneden of our dames tonge.²⁸

Usk's probable intention in choosing English was to reach an influential audience of persons who could further his civil and factional activities. Less involved in self-promotion, but no less concerned with finding an appropriate audience for his works, was John Gower – a landed esquire with legal training, and a friend and associate of Chaucer. Gower wrote major works in French, Latin, and finally English – not, as one might suppose, from confusion, but with respect to different generic traditions and to different intended audiences. His motive in composing the *Mirour de l'Omme* in 1376–8 was comparatively devotional and private, and his linguistic choice was appropriately conservative. His *Vox Clamantis*, completed about 1385, was written in the voice of Old Testament prophecy, and the choice of Latin, which John Fisher calls ‘the language of serious political discussion’, suits his intended audience of influential clerics and, ultimately, the court. His *Confessio Amantis* (1385–93) addresses its message of political reconciliation to a still wider audience, and is thus written in English, ‘for Engelondes sake’.²⁹ The deliberateness of Gower's respective choices of Latin, French, and English is underscored by the fact that, even after composing his *Confessio* in English, he returned to Latin for his *Cronica Tripertita*, with its serious political motive of Lancastrian revisionism.

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