A COMPANION TO

Medieval English Literature and Culture c.1350–c.1500

EDITED BY **PETER BROWN**

A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c.1350–c.1500

Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture

This series offers comprehensive, newly written surveys of key periods and movements and certain major authors, in English literary culture and history. Extensive volumes provide new perspectives and positions on contexts and on canonical and post-canonical texts, orientating the beginning student in new fields of study and providing the experienced undergraduate and new graduate with current and new directions, as pioneered and developed by leading scholars in the field.

No.	Title	Editors
1.	*A Companion to Romanticism*	Edited by Duncan Wu
2.	*A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*	Edited by Herbert F. Tucker
3.	*A Companion to Shakespeare*	Edited by David Scott Kastan
4.	*A Companion to the Gothic*	Edited by David Punter
5.	*A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*	Edited by Dympna Callaghan
6.	*A Companion to Chaucer*	Edited by Peter Brown
7.	*A Companion to Literature from Milton to Blake*	Edited by David Womersley
8.	*A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*	Edited by Michael Hattaway
9.	*A Companion to Milton*	Edited by Thomas N. Corns
10.	*A Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry*	Edited by Neil Roberts
11.	*A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature and Culture*	Edited by Phillip Pulsiano and Elaine Treharne
12.	*A Companion to Restoration Drama*	Edited by Susan J. Owen
13.	*A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing*	Edited by Anita Pacheco
14.	*A Companion to Renaissance Drama*	Edited by Arthur F. Kinney
15.	*A Companion to Victorian Poetry*	Edited by Richard Cronin, Alison Chapman, and Antony H. Harrison
16.	*A Companion to the Victorian Novel*	Edited by Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing
17–20.	*A Companion to Shakespeare's Works: Volumes I–IV*	Edited by Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard
21.	*A Companion to the Regional Literatures of America*	Edited by Charles L. Crow
22.	*A Companion to Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism*	Edited by Walter Jost and Wendy Olmsted
23.	*A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South*	Edited by Richard Gray and Owen Robinson
24.	*A Companion to American Fiction 1780–1865*	Edited by Shirley Samuels
25.	*A Companion to American Fiction 1865–1914*	Edited by Robert Paul Lamb and G. R. Thompson
26.	*A Companion to Digital Humanities*	Edited by Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth
27.	*A Companion to Romance*	Edited by Corinne Saunders
28.	*A Companion to the British and Irish Novel 1945–2000*	Edited by Brian W. Shaffer
29.	*A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama*	Edited by David Krasner
30.	*A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture*	Edited by Paula R. Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia
31.	*A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*	Edited by Rory McTurk
32.	*A Companion to Tragedy*	Edited by Rebecca Bushnell
33.	*A Companion to Narrative Theory*	Edited by James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz
34.	*A Companion to Science Fiction*	Edited by David Seed
35.	*A Companion to the Literatures of Colonial America*	Edited by Susan Castillo and Ivy Schweitzer
36.	*A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*	Edited by Barbara Hodgdon and W. B. Worthen
37.	*A Companion to Mark Twain*	Edited by Peter Messent and Louis J. Budd
38.	*A Companion to European Romanticism*	Edited by Michael K. Ferber
39.	*A Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture*	Edited by David Bradshaw and Kevin J. H. Dettmar
40.	*A Companion to Walt Whitman*	Edited by Donald D. Kummings
41.	*A Companion to Herman Melville*	Edited by Wyn Kelley
42.	*A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c.1350–c.1500*	Edited by Peter Brown
43.	*A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama: 1880–2005*	Edited by Mary Luckhurst
44.	*A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*	Edited by Christine Gerrard
45.	*A Companion to Shakespeare's Sonnets*	Edited by Michael Schoenfeldt
46.	*A Companion to Satire*	Edited by Ruben Quintero

A COMPANION TO

Medieval English Literature and Culture c.1350–c.1500

EDITED BY **PETER BROWN**

© 2007 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd
except for editorial material and organization © 2007 by Peter Brown; except for chapter 29 © 2007 by Pamela King and chapter 27 © 2007 by Meg Twycross

BLACKWELL PUBLISHING
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK
550 Swanston Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia

The right of Peter Brown to be identified as the Author of the Editorial Material in this Work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

First published 2007 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd

1 2007

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A companion to medieval English literature and culture, c.1350–c.1500 / edited by Peter Brown.
p. cm.—(Blackwell companions to literature and culture ; 42)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN-13: 978-0-631-21973-6 (alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 0-631-21973-0 (alk. paper)
1. English literature—Middle English, 1100–1500—History and criticism. 2. Great Britain—History—1066–1687. 3. Great Britain—Intellectual life—1066–1485. I. Brown, Peter, 1948– II. Series.
PR255.C653 2006
820.9′001—dc22
2005034700

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Set in 11 on 13 Garamond 3
by SNP Best-set Typesetter Ltd, Hong Kong
Printed and bound in Singapore
by COS Printers Pte Ltd

The publisher's policy is to use permanent paper from mills that operate a sustainable forestry policy, and which has been manufactured from pulp processed using acid-free and elementary chlorine-free practices. Furthermore, the publisher ensures that the text paper and cover board used have met acceptable environmental accreditation standards.

For further information on
Blackwell Publishing, visit our website:
www.blackwellpublishing.com

Contents

List of Illustrations ix

Notes on Contributors x

Acknowledgements xv

Abbreviations xvi

Introduction 1

PART I *Overviews* 7

1. Critical Approaches 9
David Raybin

2. English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Deference, Ambition and Conflict 25
S. H. Rigby

3. Religious Authority and Dissent 40
Mishtooni Bose

4. City and Country, Wealth and Labour 56
Sarah Rees Jones

5. Women's Voices and Roles 74
Carol M. Meale

PART II *The Production and Reception of Texts* 91

6. Manuscripts and Readers 93
A. S. G. Edwards

7. From Manuscript to Modern Text 107
Julia Boffey

8. Translation and Society 123
Catherine Batt

PART III *Language and Literature* 141

9. The Languages of Medieval Britain 143
Laura Wright

10. The Forms of Speech 159
Donka Minkova

11. The Forms of Verse 176
Donka Minkova

PART IV *Encounters with Other Cultures* 197

12. England and France 199
Ardis Butterfield

13. Britain and Italy: Trade, Travel, Translation 215
Nick Havely

14. England's Antiquities: Middle English Literature and the Classical Past 231
Christopher Baswell

15. Jews, Saracens, 'Black Men', Tartars: England in a World of Racial Difference 247
Geraldine Heng

PART V *Special Themes* 271

16. War and Chivalry 273
Richard W. Kaeuper and Montgomery Bohna

17. Literature and Law 292
Richard Firth Green

18. Images 307
Peter Brown

19. Love 322
Barry Windeatt

PART VI *Genres* 339

20. Middle English Romance 341
Thomas Hahn and Dana M. Symons

21. Writing Nation: Shaping Identity in Medieval Historical Narratives 358
Raluca L. Radulescu

22. Dream Poems 374
Helen Phillips

23. Lyric 387
Rosemary Greentree

24. Literature of Religious Instruction 406
E. A. Jones

25. Mystical and Devotional Literature 423
Denise N. Baker

26. Accounts of Lives 437
Kathleen Ashley

27. Medieval English Theatre: Codes and Genres 454
Meg Twycross

28. Morality and Interlude Drama 473
Darryll Grantley

PART VII *Readings* 489

29. York Mystery Plays 491
Pamela King

30. The *Book of Margery Kempe* 507
Ruth Evans

31. Julian of Norwich 522
Santha Bhattacharji

32. *Piers Plowman* 537
Stephen Kelly

33. Subjectivity and Ideology in the *Canterbury Tales* 554
Mark Miller

34. John Gower and John Lydgate: Forms and Norms of Rhetorical Culture 569
J. Allan Mitchell

35. Thomas Hoccleve, *La Male Regle* 585
Nicholas Perkins

36. Discipline and Relaxation in the Poetry of Robert Henryson 604
R. James Goldstein

37. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 619
Kevin Gustafson

38. Blood and Love in Malory's *Morte Darthur* 634
Catherine La Farge

Index 649

Illustrations

5.1	Beauchamp Pageants: the earl and his wife and son in a storm at sea	82
6.1	The unique text of Chaucer's 'Adam Scriveyn'	101
7.1	Thomas Hoccleve and Henry V	108
15.1	The Hereford *mappamundi*: Western Europe	263
15.2	The Hereford *mappamundi*: the monstrous races	263
21.1	Last page of a genealogy of the Kings of Britain, from Brutus to Edward IV	362
24.1	The Seven Deadly Sins	413
26.1	Hours of the Virgin, from a Book of Hours	445
26.2	Saints Philip and James with patron and wife kneeling before open prayer books, from a Book of Hours	446
27.1	The Nativity in stained glass at East Harling church, Norfolk	465
29.1	A modern Corpus Christi procession in Valencia, Spain	492
35.1	Portrait of Geoffrey Chaucer, from *The Regiment of Princes* by Thomas Hoccleve	595

Notes on Contributors

Kathleen Ashley is Professor of English at the University of Southern Maine. She has published on cultural performance, hagiography and autobiography, including a co-authored book, *Writing Faith* (1999) and a co-edited volume, *Autobiography and Postmodernism* (1994).

Denise Baker is Professor of English and Associate Dean at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She is the author of *Julian of Norwich's Showings: From Vision to Book* and editor of *Inscribing the Hundred Years' War in French and English Cultures* and the Norton Critical Edition of *The Showings of Julian of Norwich.* She has published essays on Chaucer, Gower, Langland and the Middle English mystics.

Christopher Baswell is Professor of English at UCLA. He is author of *Virgil in Medieval England* (1995), and co-editor of *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*, volume IA: *The Middle Ages* (2002).

Catherine Batt is a Senior Lecturer in the School of English, University of Leeds. Her publications include *Essays on Thomas Hoccleve* (as editor and contributor, 1996) and *Malory's* Morte Darthur: *Remaking Arthurian Tradition* (2002). She is working on a translation of Henry, Duke of Lancaster's devotional treatise, *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines*.

Santha Bhattacharji is a Senior College Lecturer in English at Keble College, Oxford. Publications include *God is an Earthquake: The Spirituality of Margery Kempe* (1997), and the new *DNB* entry for Julian of Norwich.

Julia Boffey is Professor of Medieval Studies at Queen Mary, University of London. Recent publications include *Fifteenth-Century Dream Visions* and, with A. S. G. Edwards, *A New Index of Middle English Verse.*

Montgomery Bohna teaches medieval and early modern British history at the University of Pittsburgh. He has published articles on Cade's Revolt of 1450 and the Lincolnshire Rebellion of 1470.

Mishtooni Bose is Christopher Tower Official Student in Medieval Poetry in English at Christ Church, Oxford. Her most recent publication is 'Vernacular Philosophy and the Making of Orthodoxy in the Fifteenth Century', *New Medieval Literatures* 7 (2005). This is part of a larger study of responses to heresy in late medieval England.

Peter Brown is Professor of Medieval English Literature at the University of Kent. Other edited publications include *A Blackwell Companion to Chaucer* (Blackwell, 2000) and *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare* (1999). He has recently completed a monograph on Chaucer and *perspectiva*.

Ardis Butterfield is Reader in English at University College London. Her recent publications include *Poetry and Music in Medieval France from Jean Renart to Guillaume de Machaut* (2002) and an edited collection of essays on *Chaucer and the City* (2002), as well as articles on Machaut, Gautier de Coinci, Anglo-Norman fabliaux, Gower and Chaucer. She is completing a book on Chaucer and literary relations between England and France in the Hundred Years War.

A. S. G. Edwards is Professor of Textual Studies at De Montfort University, Leicester. He has written on aspects of manuscript production and circulation in later medieval English texts. His *New Index of Middle English Verse* (with Julia Boffey) was published in 2005.

Ruth Evans is a Professor in the Department of English Studies, University of Stirling. She is co-editor (with Sarah Salih and Anke Bernau) of *Medieval Virginities* (2003) and (with Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson and Andrew Taylor) of *The Idea of the Vernacular* (1999). She is completing a monograph on Chaucer and memory.

R. James Goldstein, Professor of English at Auburn University, Alabama, is the author of *The Matter of Scotland: Historical Narrative in Medieval Scotland* (1993) and essays on Middle Scots, Chaucer and Langland.

Richard Firth Green teaches at the Ohio State University. He has written *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages* (1980) and *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (1999).

Darryll Grantley is Senior Lecturer in Drama at the University of Kent. His research interests extend over both medieval and early modern drama; his publications include *Wit's Pilgrimage: Drama and the Social Impact of Education in Early Modern England* (2000) and *English Dramatic Interludes 1300–1580* (2004).

Rosemary Greentree, a Research Fellow in the Department of English, University of Adelaide, has written *Reader, Teller and Teacher: The Narrator of Robert Henryson's* Moral Fables and a bibliography of *The Middle English Lyric and Short Poem*, and co-edited a bibliography of the *Miller's*, *Reeve's* and *Cook's Tales*.

Kevin Gustafson is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Texas at Arlington. His publications include articles on medieval and sixteenth-century English literature, and his edition and translation of *Cleanness* is forthcoming from Broadview Press.

Thomas Hahn has written about Latin literature of the Middle Ages, popular writing in England (romances and Robin Hood), Chaucer and his contemporaries, and medieval and early modern racial and geopolitical notions of identity (especially with regard to India and the New World), as these have circulated through text and image. He teaches English at the University of Rochester, New York.

Nick Havely is Senior Lecturer in the Department of English and Related Literature at the University of York and is author of a number of books and articles on Chaucer, Dante and Anglo-Italian literary contacts from the Middle Ages onwards. He has recently been awarded a Leverhulme Research Fellowship for a project on Dante in the English-speaking world from the fourteenth century to the present.

Geraldine Heng is Director of Medieval Studies and Associate Professor of English at the University of Texas at Austin, and the author of *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (2003).

E. A. Jones is Senior Lecturer in English Medieval Literature and Culture at the University of Exeter. He has published on devotional compilations, and on hermits and anchorites.

Richard Kaeuper (University of Rochester, New York) has written on government finance, law and public order, and chivalry (stressing use of literary sources).

Stephen Kelly is a Lecturer in English at Queen's University, Belfast. He is author of *Langland's Social Poetics: Re-imagining the Cultures of* Piers Plowman (forthcoming) and, with John Thompson and Ryan Perry, *Making Histories: The Middle English Prose 'Brut' and the Bibliographical Imagination* (forthcoming). *Imagining the Book*, co-edited with John Thompson, appeared in 2005.

Pamela King has recently left her post as Head of School at St Martin's College, Lancaster, to take up the Chair in Medieval Studies at the University of Bristol. Her principal publications are on medieval English theatre, literature and art. She is author of *The York Cycle and the Worship of the City* (2006).

Catherine La Farge is Lecturer at the National University of Ireland, Galway. She has written on gender issues in Chaucer and Malory, conversation in Malory, and issues of colonization in medieval travel writing.

Carol M. Meale is Senior Research Fellow, University of Bristol. Among other work she has edited *Readings in Medieval English Romance* (1994) and *Women and Literature in Britain 1150–1500*, 2nd edn (1996).

Mark Miller is Associate Professor of English at the University of Chicago. He is the author of *Philosophical Chaucer: Love, Sex, and Agency in the* Canterbury Tales (2004). His current project is a book on moral psychology in late medieval England.

Donka Minkova is Professor of English Language at UCLA. Her publications include *The History of Final Vowels in English* (1991), *English Words: History and Structure* (with Robert Stockwell, 2001), and *Alliteration and Sound Change in Early English* (2003). She has also co-edited with Robert Stockwell *Studies in the History of the English Language: A Millennial Perspective* (2002) and with Theresa Tinkle *Chaucer and the Challenges of Medievalism* (2003).

J. Allan Mitchell is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Victoria, Canada. He is the author of *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative in Chaucer and Gower* (2004) and is currently preparing an edition of Lydgate's *Temple of Glas* for the Middle English Texts Series.

Nicholas Perkins is a Fellow of St Hugh's College, Oxford, and University Lecturer in English. He is the author of *Hoccleve's 'Regiment of Princes': Counsel and Constraint* (2001), and articles on early and late Middle English writing.

Helen Phillips is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at Cardiff University, Wales. Her recent publications include *Introduction to the Canterbury Tales: Reading, Fiction, Context* (2000), an edited collection of essays, *Robin Hood: Medieval and Post-Medieval* (2005), and articles on medieval and nineteenth-century literature.

Raluca L. Radulescu is Lecturer in Medieval Literature in the English Department at the University of Wales, Bangor. Her publications include a monograph, *The Gentry Context for Malory's* Morte Darthur (2003), edited collections of essays on Malory, gentry culture and the *Brut* chronicle, and a number of articles on medieval literature and historical writing.

David Raybin is Professor of English at Eastern Illinois University and editor of *The Chaucer Review*. His publications include *Closure in the Canterbury Tales: The Role of the Parson's Tale*, edited with Linda Tarte Holley (2001) and *Rebels and Rivals: The Contestive*

Spirit in the Canterbury Tales, edited with Susanna Greer Fein and Peter C. Braeger (1991).

Sarah Rees Jones is a Senior Lecturer in History at the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York. She is the author of articles on the topography of medieval York, Thomas More's *Utopia*, Margery Kempe, the regulation of labour, and the English urban household. She has edited a number of collections of essays on later medieval urban society and culture.

S. H. Rigby is Professor of Medieval Social and Economic History at the University of Manchester. His publications include *Marxism and History*, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages* and *Chaucer in Context*, and he is the editor of *A Companion to Britain in the Later Middle Ages*.

Dana M. Symons is an Assistant Professor at Simon Fraser University, BC, Canada. She has edited a volume in the Middle English Texts Series, *Chaucerian Dream Visions and Complaints*, and has published on medieval romance.

Meg Twycross is Professor Emeritus of English Medieval Studies at Lancaster University, and editor of the journal *Medieval English Theatre*. Her latest major publication (with Sarah Carpenter) is *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England* (2002).

Barry Windeatt is Professor of English at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Emmanuel College. His research focuses on the imaginative literature, visual culture and contemplative traditions of medieval England in a European context.

Laura Wright is a Senior Lecturer in English Language at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Lucy Cavendish College. She is editor of *The Development of Standard English, 1300–1800: Theories, Descriptions, Conflicts* (2000). Her areas of interest are the history of the English language and in particular the history of the London dialect.

Acknowledgements

My thanks are due first to Andrew McNeillie, who suggested that I take on the editing of this Companion. He has remained interested in its welfare in spite of many other commitments. My editorial labours have also been eased by other, generous contributions of professional skill and encouragement. At Blackwell Publishing Emma Bennett, Jenny Hunt, Karen Wilson and Astrid Wind have been models of patience and providers of helpful advice; Glynis Baguley has combined the roles of copy editor and project manager with wit and flair; and at the University of Kent Templeman Library Angela Faunch and Dot Turner have maintained their good humour despite many outlandish requests for the delivery of esoteric documents. The following people kindly helped me to find some of this book's contributors: John Burrow, Chris Cannon, Rita Copeland, Sheila Delany, Hoyt Duggan, Roger Ellis, Judith Ferster, Louise Fradenburg, Robin Frame, Simon Gaunt, Kantik Ghosh, Vincent Gillespie, Jeremy Goldberg, Nicky Hallett, Anne Hudson, Sarah McNamer, Derek Pearsall, Tony Spearing and Paul Strohm. Finally, I gratefully acknowledge the research leave, provided by the University of Kent, which enabled me to bring this project to completion

Canterbury
May 2006

Quotations from writings by Geoffrey Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

Quotations from the Bible are from the English translation of the Latin Vulgate, otherwise known as the Douay–Rheims version.

Abbreviations

CYT	Canon's Yeoman's Tale
DNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, new edn, 60 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)
EETS	Early English Text Society
es	extra series
FrankT	Franklin's Tale
FrT	Friar's Tale
GP	General Prologue
IMEV	Carleton Brown and Rossell Hope Robbins, *Index of Middle English Verse* (New York: Columbia University Press for the Index Society, 1943)
KnT	Knight's Tale
LGW	*Legend of Good Women*
ManT	Manciple's Tale
ME	Middle English
MED	*Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Hans Kurath, Sherman M. Kuhn and Robert E. Lewis, 12 vols (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1954–2001)
MilP	Miller's Prologue
MilT	Miller's Tale
MkT	Monk's Tale
MLT	Man of Law's Tale
OED	*The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn, prepared by J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, 20 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989)
os	original series
PardP	Pardoner's Prologue
PardT	Pardoner's Tale
ParsP	Parson's Prologue
PhyT	Physician's Tale

PL	*Patrologia Latina: Patrologiae cursus completus . . . series Latina (prima)*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 vols (Paris: 1844–64)
REED	*Records of Early English Drama* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979–)
RvT	Reeve's Tale
SIMEV	Rossell Hope Robbins and John L. Cutler, *Supplement to the Index of Middle English Verse* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965)
SNT	Second Nun's Tale
SqT	Squire's Tale
ss	supplementary series
STC	Pollard, A. W. and Redgrave, G. R. (eds), *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland and Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad 1475–1640*, rev. W. A. Jackson, F. S. Ferguson, and K. F. Pantzer, 3 vols (London: Bibliographical Society, 1976–91).
SumT	Summoner's Tale
TEAMS	The Consortium for the Teaching of the Middle Ages
TC	*Troilus and Criseyde*
WBP	Wife of Bath's Prologue
WBT	Wife of Bath's Tale

Introduction

A volume such as this would have been impossible ten years ago. Then, the accent in late medieval English literature was on the 'literary'. Geoffrey Chaucer was in the foreground, shadowed by William Langland and the *Gawain* poet. The fifteenth century was dominated by Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* and the mystery plays, which often seemed like the last gasp of the old order before Humanism and the Reformation destroyed it for good. Medievalists occasionally made forays into critical theory – if only to demonstrate that St Augustine had anticipated Jacques Lacan – and into neighbouring disciplines, especially history, but by and large they gave the impression that the traditional approaches to the traditional canon gave them plenty to do.

That insularity has now gone. The category of 'literature' has broadened and deepened to include other kinds of writing, especially of the religious variety. Of course, religious writing has always been an unavoidable component of medieval literature more generally, insofar as it occurs in the works of canonical authors. But the centrality of religious writing – of which there is an enormous amount as yet under-studied – is now more generally acknowledged as a means of coming to terms with distinctive and influential structures of thought, feeling and representation. Manuals of religious instruction, devotional treatises and mystical writing have been subject to the same kind of scrutiny once reserved for, say, the *Canterbury Tales*. A major impetus for this redirection of focus has been the recognition that the ideas of John Wyclif and his Lollard followers, who placed a high value on literacy, texts, translation and interpretation (especially of the Bible), are crucial to an understanding of the more general status, circulation and meaning of late medieval writing. Furthermore, the polemical works produced by Wycliffites, and the measures taken to counteract them, take us to the heart of religious and political ideology and controversy, offering fascinating and complex objects of study, and providing insights into questions of authority, translation and censorship.

At the same time, more general processes of literary production have become a key interest: the ways in which manuscripts and early printed books were made, how texts

circulated, who commissioned, owned and read them, how literacy interfaced with orality, all impact on the interpretations available to readers in the twenty-first century. Within networks of production and reception, women are now seen as having had functions and roles at once distinctive from and equivalent to those enjoyed by men. The same is true of authorship itself. In recent years, the writings of Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich, in particular, have been subject to intense analysis and debate – a process that is beginning to provide some redress for the previous emphasis on male authorship.

New approaches and new texts have brought into play a wide range of theoretical positions, but critical theory is no longer treated as a thing apart; rather, it is a tool to be integrated with the acts of close reading and interpretation. If a particular approach has become dominant, it is the one (existing in manifold versions and applications) that insists on the vital importance of cultural contexts. Those contexts might be religious, or concern social hierarchy or urban life, or extend to the ways in which late medieval society itself constructed narratives of its own experiences in, say, the form of chronicles. More widely still, the contextualizing framework might include the way in which an entire culture reacts to, engages with and represents the values of another, be they those of continental Europe or of ethnic groups often perceived as threats, such as Jews and Saracens. Whatever the context it is not used – as it formerly might have been – as backdrop, but as one side of a dialogue in which the other interlocutor is the text itself.

A consequence of the changes in focus and perception outlined above is that the timeline of late medieval English literature now looks different. Many more interesting developments are happening in the fifteenth century than was formerly thought to be the case. The medieval and later periods do not now look so fragmented and discontinuous: for one thing, proto-Reformation ideas are shaping literature a century or more before the event. And the framing of cause and effect has become more generous, less narrow: to understand attitudes to the East as they surface in late medieval romance it is necessary to look at earlier experiences of crusade; to follow through the implications and potential of morality drama we need to look at sixteenth-century examples.

A Rumpelstiltskin absent from late medieval English literary studies for ten years would nevertheless find in the present volume some familiar features: it incorporates, as necessary, traditional literary history, and insists on the importance of understanding key linguistic principles of dialect and pronunciation. The newly awakened critic, perhaps after ten years too bleary-eyed to stamp his foot in chagrin, would notice the continuing use of Chaucer as a touchstone for the work of other writers, but would have to recognize that, if not belittled, he is embedded within a much wider framework of literary and cultural activities than formerly. Moreover, those writers once represented primarily as his disciples, notably Thomas Hoccleve, John Gower, John Lydgate and Robert Henryson, are now given much greater prominence on account of their individual merits. Rumpelstiltskin would have to acknowledge, if ruefully, that much excellent new work has been done, however much remains to be done.

A number of factors account for the 'new map' of late medieval English literature. Several are common to the discipline as a whole: the embedding of theory within critical practice; a more catholic sense of what constitutes literature; the disestablishment of a traditional canon; a recognition of the importance of cultural contexts; an interest in the application of postcolonialist approaches to other periods of literature. Some factors special to the study of medieval literature are the outcome of tendencies that have been long in the making but which have now borne fruit. A number have been helped by small but regular and focused conferences, and the publication of their proceedings, as in the cases of manuscript and early book studies, translation and mysticism. Others are the culmination of work by influential scholars who have argued persuasively and consistently for the importance of particular cultural contexts (Lollardy, for example) or for particular approaches (say, through social history). The end result is a field of study which at the present juncture is particularly progressive, open and interactive. No longer is late medieval English literature a series of fragmented minority activities. Instead, as the present volume shows, there is a strong sense of shared interests and common endeavour – seasoned, as always, by a healthy pinch of controversy.[1]

So much for developments within the study of late medieval English literature. How have they affected perceptions of the development of the literature itself? Two authoritative works, recently published and regularly cited in the following chapters, offer their own narratives. The one provided by David Wallace, editor of *The Cambridge History of Medieval Literature* (1999), covers the period 1066 to 1547 with thirty-one essays from different contributors, and is designed as a sequential account of changing literary cultures. It is an account that contrasts with received orthodoxies. Its span puts the 'bottleneck' of the late fourteenth century into a much broader perspective; and it opposes the idea – prominent in the earlier *Cambridge History of English Literature* – that the evolution of literature is tied to the development of national identity. Instead, Wallace's volume aims to defamiliarize present-day assumptions, resist a grand narrative, and capture instead 'some sense of the strangeness, the unlikeliness, the historical peculiarity, of medieval compositional processes' (xiv).

Medieval English literature suggests a multiplicity of possible narratives, not least of which is one that questions the very idea of an 'English' literature without reference to the literatures of Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Similarly, the category of literature itself is not to be confined – as it has been by older critical practice – to works of genius and artistic excellence, but should be broad and inclusive. As far as possible, a medieval text should not be viewed in the isolated and distorting frameworks of modern print production, but instead as a part of a process that brings into play the manuscript culture and social system within which it appeared. That system was Christian, and it is pointless to pretend that medieval literature is a conceptual sphere distinct from the religious one. Thus, the study of the culture of the past, in its fullest sense, provides the best means of understanding the literary compositions produced within it:

> Medieval literature cannot be understood (does not survive) except as part of transmissive processes – moving through the hands of copyists, owners, readers and institutional authorities – that form part of other and greater histories (social, political, religious and economic). (Wallace: xxi)

By contrast, James Simpson in his single-authored *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (2002) – the second volume of the Oxford English Literary History – shows no compunction about creating an overarching schema to explain developments in the history of English literature from 1350 to 1547. For him, the period displays a 'narrative of diminishing liberties' (1), which is the consequence of two distinct but competing tendencies. The 'revolution' enacted by Henry VIII imposed a homogeneity on jurisdiction, religious practice and political life that expressed itself in ideals of unity and novelty – values that were readily internalized in forms of literary expression. Prior to this, the motive force of cultural life, which is to say the dominant feature in literary practice, was reform. Simpson is thus standing on their heads two *idées reçues*: first, that late medieval English literature is essentially static in its modes, genres and ideologies; second, that the sixteenth century is a moment of cultural liberation. Simpson admits that other explanatory frameworks are possible, notably one that sees the shift from manuscript to print as the means whereby literature and language were centralized, but his main concern is to demonstrate the validity of his thesis in relation to a number of key modes and themes.

For instance, in the case of 'the comic' (the subject of an entire chapter), Simpson considers the literary expression of two ethical systems. One is limited to the chivalric class and is providential (an underlying patterning of fate ensures that knights win through by virtue of their status); the other is not limited to any class, and is prudential, one that 'can be practised by anyone with the wit to perceive possible futures' (257). Romance – which is comic in the sense that many romance narratives have happy endings – belongs predominantly to the first system, and yet romance often contains a critique of that system or, as Simpson might say, the means of its own reform. This view runs counter to that of sixteenth-century commentators, who saw the reform of chivalry, from brutal practice to civilizing influence, as an achievement of their own day. In fact, medieval romances habitually bring into question and test the very principles on which their protagonists operate – if only to reassert the validity of those principles. They expose honour to shame, and demonstrate that individual identity depends upon affiliation with a larger social group, and indeed with that group's interactions with other social forces. Repeatedly, those other forces are mercantile and female, and in this lies the key to understanding the ways in which medieval romance tends to urge a re-examination of chivalry: it speaks to the women and merchants – excluded as they were from chivalric status – precisely because they were the target audiences of many of the more popular Middle English romances. Chaucer, for his part, mounted his own critique of romance. For example, he juxtaposed it with fabliau – a type of tale in which the victor is the most prudential person, that is, the most adept manipulator of a given situation. But when Caxton edited Sir Thomas Malory's romances for printing as the *Morte Darthur* (1485), his changes were 'in keeping with the Tudor centralization of chivalry' (292).

Both Wallace and Simpson have received their shares of plaudits and brickbats. Wallace has been thought too pluralist in his willingness to entertain a wide spectrum of competing narratives that might explain the development of late medieval English literature, with the result that his 'history' is fragmented and incoherent.[2] Simpson, by contrast, is open to the charge of being reductive, of subsuming the variety of late medieval writing and the different developmental dynamics of its genres in a single explanatory thesis. The effect can be a distortion or misrepresentations of certain kinds of development in order to save the appearances of the broader narrative.[3] The present book does not attempt a general intervention in either side of the debate, although its orientation is more towards Wallace than Simpson. However, some individual contributors do take positions in relation to one or the other approach, and since both histories are important and durable points of reference, it has been appropriate to take due account of them here.

The overall concept of the present volume, and the topics identified for most of its chapters, was the work of its begetter, Nicholas Havely. I am indebted to him for devising a scheme that has proved resilient but flexible. It has undergone some revision as chapters have been commissioned, and a few new topics have been added. In particular, the organization of the contributions is now quite different from that originally envisaged. The structure is that of a funnel. The book begins with sections that have the broadest circumference, and continues with others that have gradually diminishing frames of reference. The subject matter narrows until the final, and longest, section, deals at length with individual texts. But even a chapter offering the widest possible conspectus brings its ideas to bear on specific literary examples. Conversely, discussion of individual works frequently raises themes that are considered more fully in earlier contributions. The chapters are thus interactive and at the end of each the reader is directed to others that deal with related topics. Each contributor is a specialist in his or her field, and has been encouraged to write in an authoritative but accessible way that will set the reader thinking, open up horizons of meaning, and provide models of interpretative technique. The result is a compendious volume, full of original material and dependable judgements, that will enliven the study, discussion and research of late medieval English literature for many years to come.

Notes

1 Stephen G. Nicholls, 'Writing the New Middle Ages', *PMLA* 120 (2005), 422–41.

2 See John Burrow's review in *Speculum* 76 (2001), 243–5 and the colloquium in *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 23 (2001), 471–519, with contributions by Christine Chism, Theresa Coletti, Fiona Somerset, Sarah Stanbury, Anne Savage and David Wallace.

3 David Aers and Sarah Beckwith (eds), 'Reform and Cultural Revolution: Writing English Literary History, 1350–1547', special issue of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 35 (2005), 3–119, with contributions by David Wallace, Derek Pearsall, Richard K. Emmerson, Bruce Holsinger, Thomas Betteridge and James Simpson.

PART I
Overviews

1
Critical Approaches

David Raybin

Critical theory at the beginning of the twenty-first century has refocused the historicizing of late medieval English literature and culture. A new wave of manuscript studies is bringing deeper understanding of the surviving physical evidence, of early book culture, of reception, and of the trilingual character of late medieval English literature. Feminist analysis and gender-based studies continue to expand our sense of the scope of the history available to be examined. Religious studies, such as those of the Lollard movement or the cultures of orthodoxy and dissent, are refining our understanding of the age's spiritual climate. The scholarship of intertextuality – especially of how earlier writers influenced Chaucer and his contemporaries, and of how Chaucer and Langland influenced fifteenth-century authors – has articulated important continuities between the periods now labelled *medieval* and *early modern*. Studies of popular culture interrogate the historical basis of legend. And philologists old and new are allowing us to see how verbal play and nuance may reveal a writer's stance on pivotal spiritual and political debates. In studies of the past decade, a few emphases are prominent: *Multilingualism and Vernacularity* – what does it mean that writers choose to write in English instead of (or along with) courtly French and learned Latin, and how far may one distinguish London English from concurrent dialects? *Englishness* – what is the new 'England' that writers define in terms of language and geography? *Literary and Social Affinities* – with what circles do writers associate and how do audience concerns create meaning? *Violence and the Other* – against what cultures, classes, beliefs and behaviours do medieval English writers define themselves, and why does violence figure so prominently in this definition through difference? Such strategies as Marxist criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, and deconstruction continue to be practised, but to a large extent their values have been assimilated into the general critical vocabulary.

By the phrase *critical theory* I mean here not only the abstract discourse that scholars use to describe their strategies, but more importantly the *practice* that informs the discipline and the studies to which I will refer. Paul Strohm distinguishes 'engaged or "practical" theory' from its 'hypothetical opposite – "pure" theory, uncorrected or

unchastened by sustained contact with a particular text' (Strohm 2000: xi). Abstract theorists have opened exciting avenues for textual analysis, providing common vocabularies for such analysis. However, in the context of the present volume, which is defined by its concern for the 'particular text', my focus will be less on how writers define their methods than on their practical performance of those methods.

Anthologies

The ways in which editors construct anthologies provide a good baseline for understanding how theoretical reorientations shift our perspectives on earlier texts. The choices made by the anthologists tell large groups of people what they should read, and although editors do not always argue overtly for their choices, a theoretical stance is usually implicit in the selections. Derek Pearsall explains that a comprehensive anthology must include 'larger samples of what is best [in the writing of a period] and smaller samples of what is more representative' and that for reader as well as anthologist 'the two criteria are constantly in operational conflict and in question' (Pearsall 1999: xv). I will look at how three anthologies resolve the conflict.

The most widely read anthology, the book that introduces most North American students to English medieval literature, is the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, now in its seventh edition.[1] The selections representing 'Middle English Literature in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries' are: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; a hefty chunk of Geoffrey Chaucer (including the General Prologue and four tales); some *Piers Plowman*; selections from Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, Thomas Malory and Robert Henryson; three plays; and eleven anonymous lyrics. Although *Norton* is noted for its extensive historical introductions, the texts themselves exhibit a focus on the poetry traditionally rated 'best', along with a sampling of prose, drama, and writings by women. The critical judgement implicit in the *Norton Anthology* asserts that while texts by women must be acknowledged, relatively little else has changed in what we ought to read.

The *Longman Anthology of British Literature*, currently in its second edition, is *Norton*'s chief competitor.[2] Its 'The Middle Ages' section includes everything in *Norton* save *Everyman* and *Noah* (for which *Mankind* and the York *Crucifixion* are substituted) with quite a few additions. Some additions amplify the *Norton* offerings: more Chaucer and a larger sampling of *Piers Plowman*, Julian and Kempe. Other additions insert new perspectives: the political dimension of non-literary works on the Rising of 1381 and 'vernacular religion and repression'; the multicultural voices in insular works from Scotland and Wales; a deepened recognition of fifteenth-century culture as reflected in selections from John Lydgate and Christine de Pizan. Collectively, the additions enact an ambivalent editorial reflection upon the traditional canon. The inclusion of Welsh works (in translation), poetry in Middle Scots, and texts of English political opposition effectively expands the definition of what represents *British* literature and includes more of 'what is more representative', while the expansion of the Chaucer offerings indicates

an editorial commitment to featuring Chaucer as the dominant writer of the age. Notably, neither the *Longman* nor the *Norton* anthology includes either *Pearl* or Chaucer's most spiritual poetry (Man of Law's Tale, Clerk's Tale, Prioress's Tale, Second Nun's Tale). When it comes to what we are supposed to read, we are clearly to favour texts representing forces of religious dissent or secular humour over texts representing spiritual practices we might view as too traditionally medieval.

A more substantial rethinking of what we should read is offered in Derek Pearsall's *Chaucer to Spenser: An Anthology of Writings in English 1375–1575*. The editor's theoretical stance is articulated in two decisions. First, the volume's scope, manifested in its title, restructures a student's encounter with Chaucer by asserting a continuity between fourteenth- and sixteenth-century English literature. Second, the volume's individual selections reflect a theory of inclusiveness that juxtaposes aesthetically significant literary texts with texts having less literary appeal but which provide a historicized context for reading.

Pearsall seeks to manifest the 'common cultural tradition' that binds together the *Parliament of Fowls* and the *Shepherd's Calendar* because he fears that Chaucer, 'Taught so frequently now as the sole representative of English writing before Shakespeare . . . is in danger of being read and learnt about in a vacuum' (Pearsall 1999: xv). Many proponents of the term *early modern* assume that a vast wasteland separates Tudor literature, appreciated as introducing the modern world, and medieval literature, disparaged as an immature other that briefly flourished with Chaucer. In highlighting fifteenth-century traditions that both reflect the rich heritage of Chaucer and his contemporaries and anticipate the accomplishment of Spenser and his, Pearsall contests the notion of rupture: 'every text looks both backward and forward', with continuities being 'as well worth stressing as changes' (Pearsall 1999: xv–xvi). His selections simultaneously assert the excellence of Chaucer and his contemporaries (the large space given to Chaucer underpins the volume), direct a reader to appreciate the merits of a wide range of fifteenth-century writers, and allow one to see the themes and generic choices linking many sixteenth-century writers to their predecessors. The cumulative effect of the volume is to present a few writers (Chaucer and eight others) as principal conversants in a broader literary discussion that belies the notion of a discontinuous or valueless fifteenth century.

The Triumph of History

In the same year (1999) that *Chaucer to Spenser* challenged the *Norton* idea of what we should read, the creators of the massive *Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, privileging its title's 'history' over its 'literature', took the complementary step of promoting a historicism oriented towards anthropology as *the* proper method for selecting and reading texts, which are to be chosen on criteria other than simple literary merit. Proselytizers for a particular theoretical perspective often argue the whys of their

choices. Editor David Wallace and his collaborators contend that history is necessary to literary understanding and, further, that literary texts are neither more valuable than, nor easily distinguishable from, other texts. To appreciate Wallace's perspective, one may turn to a collection of essays entitled *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-century England* that he edited with historian Barbara A. Hanawalt. In their introduction, the editors boast of how combining new subjects of study with improved theoretical constructs has made fifteenth-century English studies 'one of the most dynamic growth areas in both literary and historical scholarship':

> This may be, in part, because the fourteenth century has been overworked, but it may also be that medievalists, now somewhat more theory-literate, are better equipped to address the challenges of this difficult period. The extraordinary range of subject matters in this volume . . . attests to the emergence of a new fifteenth-century England. The Wars of the Roses, Caxton and Malory – subjects that loom large in traditional accounts of the period – play a negligible role in this volume. Rather, the essayists direct our attention to the smaller, local dramas that occupied many and various segments of the population. (Hanawalt and Wallace 1996: x)

Indeed, although the majority of the contributors to *Bodies and Disciplines* are affiliated with programmes in English literary studies, the essays focus primarily on facets of local, institutional and corporeal history. Civil and ecclesiastical court records, guild ordinances and household books are brought to bear upon both written and enacted texts as the authors demonstrate how 'the freedoms and constraints endured and enjoyed by different bodies, or the same body at different moments', may be 'considered as part of greater social strategies' (xi). The fifteenth century becomes an exciting area for literary study precisely because its written texts, presumed to lack the aesthetic qualities offered by Chaucer or the *Gawain* poet, lend themselves to the kinds of socio-cultural analysis favoured by new historicism.

The attitude that situates literature as adjunct to history permeates the interpretation of English medieval literary history promulgated in the *Cambridge History*. Literary subjects that have traditionally formed the core of such a history receive limited attention, while subjects more congenial to non-literary historical analysis are accentuated. The titles of the volume's large sections and their chapters offer a succinct representation of Wallace's theoretical design. *Writing in the British Isles* includes chapters entitled 'Writing in Wales', 'Writing in Ireland', 'Writing in Scotland, 1058–1560', 'Writing history in England' and 'London texts and literate practice', effectively ignoring the existence of English-language literary texts. *Institutional Productions* includes chapters on 'Monastic productions', 'The friars and medieval English literature', 'Classroom and confession', '*Vox populi* and the literature of 1381' and 'Englishing the Bible, 1066–1549'. An interest in the collective will thus obscures questions of aesthetics and design posed by single authorship. The chapters in *After the Black Death*, the literary heart of the volume, acknowledge individual authorship but reject the traditional notion of a Ricardian literary renaissance centred upon three magnificent poets. Indeed, the *Pearl*-

poet is not afforded a chapter and receives mention only in passing.[3] The volume's final section, *Before the Reformation*, consists of chapters that highlight the institutional conflicts that opposed traditional and dissident religion and politics. Where the older model of literary history, like the standard anthology, prizes aesthetically or technically admirable literary texts, the *Cambridge History* privileges social structures, events and themes.

It is evident that *Chaucer to Spenser* and the *Cambridge History* are founded upon distinct theoretical stances: Pearsall champions a *literary* history that documents the ebb and flow of creative achievement linking greater and lesser Ricardian, fifteenth-century and Tudor poets; Wallace favours a *cultural* history that contextualizes the texts – all texts with non-literary ones often privileged – produced by medieval and Tudor writers as reflections of their conflicted societies. This gap notwithstanding, the volumes share a perspective that defines almost all substantial studies of medieval literature published in the last decade. Whether a scholar looks at written texts or enacted texts, whether her interests lie in politics or poetry, drama or faith, whether he is intrigued by a text's ideology or enthused by its aesthetic, the critic's principal task is to enhance scholarly understanding of the relationship of the text to the ever more broadly conceived historical context in which it appeared. In the remainder of this chapter I will discuss some of the areas in which practical theorists address this hunger to historicize and some of the ways in which their efforts have advanced understanding of the late Middle Ages in England.

Multilingualism and Vernacularity

The circumstances of late medieval England have attracted exciting new thinking about how, in practice, languages interact and evolve, and how, in consequence, one properly approaches texts whose linguistic identity is either mixed or insecure.[4] The interest may relate to the fact that at the beginning of the twenty-first century such conditions are current; as Tony Hunt notes in comparing contemporary to medieval culture, 'outside a few western societies with a strong sense of language identity and near-universal literacy, conditions which obviously did not obtain in medieval Britain, *multi*lingualism is the norm' (in Trotter 2000: 131). To think seriously about the multilingual character of late medieval Britain poses a vigorous challenge to the age-old assumption that the way linguistic things worked out was inevitable. The traditional view is that English triumphed easily and necessarily over French and Latin to become the dominant language of both literature and common speech, with Chaucer playing an important role in the literary arena. Arrests to this view have emerged in three main areas. First, the records show that the ascendancy of English as the language of learned and aristocratic discourse came late, while French and Latin were used widely throughout the fourteenth century and well into the fifteenth. Second, English was itself a much less homogeneous language than the standard explanation assumes, as myriad regional dialects joined with Welsh and Middle Scots to create a linguistic map in which London's Middle

English was one of many coexisting forms. The appearance in 1986 of *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English* (ed. A. McIntosh, M. L. Samuels and M. Benskin, 4 vols. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press) has enabled the identification of these regional English dialects and the better pinpointing of textual and scribal provenance. Third, the swelling of Chaucer's English vocabulary reflects the way language generally expanded in his era. Christopher Cannon has shown that Chaucer introduced new words at a steady pace throughout his literary career, using many of them only once, and that Chaucer's behaviour in this regard was both typical of his literary-minded predecessors and contemporaries and natural in a trilingual society (Cannon 1998: 90, 129–30).

These challenges to imagining an English-language Middle Ages correlate with a broad range of theoretical advances. Reception studies demand that texts be examined in the context of their production, distribution and audience. Marxist studies resist the notion that an individual can institute broad change. New historical studies privilege cultural studies over the study of individual texts, insist that we interrogate the bases of our cultural assumptions, and distinguish our standards from those of a culture under examination. Postcolonial studies (one of the least developed and most promising areas of study)[5] expose the practice of equating a hegemonic cultural group with the local culture that it dominates. As D. A. Trotter says,

> The study of the linguistic situation of medieval Britain . . . requires . . . a determined refusal to hide behind the artificial barriers of either allegedly separate languages, or (perhaps above all) conveniently separated disciplines, each hermetically sealed against the dangers of contamination from adjacent fields of enquiry, and each buttressed by its own traditions or (less charitably) insulated by its own uncritical and self-preserving conceptions. (Trotter 2000: 1)

A happy result of this problematic is that large-scale collaborative projects have been created to rethink why multilingualism matters. Trotter's *Multilingualism in Later Medieval Britain* unites linguists from six nations for a dialogue on (1) multilingual *contact* (the environments in which English interacted with Welsh, Latin and Anglo-Norman); (2) linguistic *mixing* – that is, the functionality of macaronic texts in the business world, the rules governing intratextual code-switching, and the appropriation of phrasal verb structures in literary and non-literary texts; and (3) the general permeability of language use in what was a thoroughly multilingual culture. This area of newly theorized research is thus conceived in a vein similar to the *Cambridge History*, where the results combine the work of specialists not only in the languages of England – Old English, Middle English, Latin and Anglo-Norman – but also in those of Wales, Ireland and Scotland.

Coming to recognize the multilingual character of medieval English culture has also enabled manuscript studies to flourish. Another example of collaborative research exists in an international project that exemplifies directions in which such studies are moving. London, British Library MS Harley 2253 has long been valued for the secular and political lyrics that mark it as possibly 'the most important single MS of Middle English poetry'.[6] Had this unique manuscript not survived, scholars might reasonably surmise

that few lyrics on subjects other than religion were composed in Middle English prior to Chaucer. G. L. Brook's edition of *The Harley Lyrics* (1948; 3rd edn 1964) clusters the more famous poems into a manageable volume, but by isolating the lyrics from their manuscript context, Brook obscured the fact that 'In manuscript the English poems are *not* gathered in one place: they appear intermittently across seventy pages, and mixed in with them are forty-odd items' (Fein 2000: 5). The codex's highly varied items are written in Middle English, Latin and Anglo-Norman, so that to study the Middle English lyrics in the context of their presentation (determined by the principal scribe's selections and organizational choices) and probable reception requires thinking, like the scribe, trilingually. Susanna Fein's *Studies in the Harley Manuscript* is a collection of sixteen specialist essays that examine this manuscript in terms of its scribes, contents, social contexts and languages. Theories informing projects like this one base themselves on the evidence of the book as a unique archaeological object with verbal content, created at a precise point in time for a specific purpose and a specific audience. As is being increasingly recognized, work on individual manuscripts, on the codicological activity of specific regions or by specific persons, on the identities of readers, patrons and scribes, and on networks of transmission and reception, all promise to reveal larger historical patterns by which we may restructure our knowledge. As it is almost always the case that medieval English books hold texts in more than one language (and even when they don't we may wonder why), what they may tell us about multilingual contact remains a field of great current interest.

Englishness

If late medieval English was not simply the language created and used by Chaucer and the Chancery scribes, and if the largest of the British isles was a space where French and Latin mixed with the various native dialects, then what does 'England' mean, and what distinguishes a literature as 'English'?[7] A number of recent books, responding to various theoretical pressures, have examined different aspects of this subject. Helen Cooney opens her collection, *Nation, Court and Culture*, with a chapter in which Pearsall rejects the idea of a distinctly English late medieval consciousness and thus sets a standard against which the arguments for 'Englishness' in the remainder of the volume may be measured. Pearsall's argument is that, notwithstanding Chaucer's famous evocation of 'Engelond' in the opening of the *Canterbury Tales*, neither he nor his contemporaries nor his fifteenth-century successors thought of England as a definable insular nation or of 'Englishness' as a distinguishing natural consciousness. To the contrary, Chaucer, John Gower, William Langland, the *Gawain* poet, Lydgate, Thomas Hoccleve, Malory, William Caxton, John Shirley and their aristocratic and royal patrons all 'were fluent in French and steeped in French culture'; and even as Henry V, the most strenuous advocate for the use of English, was writing in this language 'to announce the victory at Agincourt' to 'the mayor and aldermen of London', he was 'writing in French to his brothers' (in Cooney 2001: 22, 19).

The remainder of *Nation, Court and Culture* responds, obliquely, to Pearsall's argument. Thinking in terms of 'geopolitical theory', John Scattergood finds in the nationalistic poem 'The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye' a 'concern with borders and their preservation' that is 'based on a knowledgeable analysis of European economics and trade' and contemplates a common Anglo-Irish interest (in Cooney 2001: 49, 44–5). Exploring ideas of nationhood in manuscript collections from across the fifteenth century, Phillipa Hardman shows movement from a deep concern with Englishness to an 'uncomplicated, even sentimental sense of England signal[ling] that among the community of readers . . . the anxieties of the previous hundred years were felt to be laid to rest' (in Cooney 2001: 69). Other contributors get at the idea of fifteenth-century Englishness by addressing its apprehensions in terms of the particular historical circumstances in which literature was produced. Whether one wrote political verse for the Lancastrian court or composed in such less public genres as *dit amoureux*, complaint, allegory and carol, we find what Cooney categorizes as 'writers clinging anxiously and with some tenacity to the old certitudes and conventions surrounding the concepts of nation and court' (2001: 14). Over the course of the century English writers might have grown more secure in their national identity, but they remained insular in temperament.

Patricia Clare Ingham, in her *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain*, uses psychoanalysis to query the notion of 'Englishness'. Focusing on the particular example of the 'diametrically opposed . . . political agendas' that informed medieval British responses to the Arthur legend, Ingham shows that 'the meaning of British sovereignty in Arthur's story . . . was contested throughout England, Wales and Scotland from Monmouth's time well into the late medieval period' (Ingham 2001: 23). The prophetic character of Arthur's projected return was employed as a symbol of British sovereignty by such diverse figures as Richard II, using his Welsh connections to defend his throne, Henry Tudor, exploiting Welsh ties as he raised the banner of Arthur against Richard III at Bosworth, and Owain Glyndwr, leading a messianic Welsh rebellion against Henry IV. In literature, Arthurian hopes and anxieties fed into the genre of romance as it developed in England and Wales in books as varied in their nationalist sensibilities as *The Red Book of Hergest*, the alliterative *Morte Arthure* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Ingham's psychoanalytic approach reminds us of the inseparability of fear and desire and demonstrates how unfeasible it is to contemplate a uniform notion of 'Englishness'.

Yet as interpreters of an earlier culture we want spatial-temporal unities and historical categories we can grasp. The editors of *Essays on Ricardian Literature in Honour of J. A. Burrow* accept their honoree's notion of a distinct Ricardian literature even as they recognize the limitations of studying literature as a distinct discipline and urge us to expand our horizon. In the book's opening essay A. C. Spearing argues that Ricardian poetry displays no 'unifying vision' and that the works even of Chaucer, Langland and Gower 'record a struggle to find ways of saying things for which their culture provided no ready formulations or artistic forms' (in Minnis, Morse and Turville-Petre 1997: 22). The book's editors emphasize the incongruity of seeking unity in individual voices by

juxtaposing more formalist examinations of prominent individual writers with more generalizing chapters that encourage us to think about the kinds of values and cultural conditions that define a common literary or historical moment. Charlotte Morse's closing essay explores the convoluted history of critical response to Burrow's positing a distinct Ricardian poetry comparable to Elizabethan or Romantic poetry, suggesting that medievalists now adopt the term *Ricardian studies*, which she sees as analogous to the popular locution *medieval studies* in that it rejects the ahistorical privileging of a single voice found in a phrase like *the age of Chaucer* in favour of the kind of current cross-disciplinary cultural exploration that acknowledges multiple and conflicting voices. Morse's conclusion crystallizes the stakes involved in medievalists' embracing inclusive theoretical constructs in our exploration of 'Englishness':

> Broadening Burrow's perspective to Ricardian studies, embracing the issues he addressed, and expanding beyond them gives us the flexibility to keep the aesthetic, rhetorical, political, ethical, spiritual and intellectual dimensions of Ricardian writing alive in and to the culture we inhabit. (In Minnis, Morse and Turville-Petre 1997: 344)

Reception, Patronage, Literary and Social Affinities

Who were the people who wrote literary texts in medieval England? What did they read? With whom did they associate? Who were their readers and how did their response differ from ours? Who were their patrons? For a few late medieval writers we can find substantive answers to these questions, but for many of their contemporaries the questions can be answered only in small part, and sometimes hardly at all. Literary historians therefore are devising new critical strategies to get at answers, so much so that the kind of localization of literary production imagined in these questions underlies much of the historicizing quest that marks current medieval literary study.

The publication in 1989 of Paul Strohm's *Social Chaucer* encouraged medievalists to return to thinking about literature in terms of an author's local associations. This idea is not new, but in drawing a picture of what he calls 'the king's affinity' Strohm advances the Marxist/historicist project of interrogating literary production and reception in the context not only of the vertical structures of patronage, but also the lateral structures uniting people in comparable social circumstances. More recently, Strohm has pursued a series of studies that use the symbolism of particular historical events as a springboard for exposing hidden structures and conflicts in the larger culture. In *Hochon's Arrow* he interrogates the unfulfilled threat made by a servant of the magnate Thomas Austin to shoot Mayor Nicholas Brembre's associate Hugh Fastolf, and unveils the factional politics that were lived daily by the London citizenry in the 1380s. In *England's Empty Throne* (1998) he examines official accounts of the unprecedented burning for heresy of William Sautre in 1401 and argues that the Lancastrians used such relatively insignificant threats as those posed by Lollardy to create a language that justified their usurpation and continuing occupation of the throne. As these examples suggest, Strohm is as

much interested in how observers read the events as in the events themselves, and it is reflective of his evolving interest in historical contingency that in his recent books the writings of chroniclers have largely displaced literary texts.[8]

Strohm is more extreme in his theoretical commitment to history as the primary object of study than are most literary scholars, but even when answers to the questions of literary association appear in more familiar guises, a historicist bent is rarely absent. Thus when Christine Chism treats 'the revival of the dead and the past' in eight standard alliterative works, she predicates her analysis on the poets' common interest in the 'embodied and spectacular performance of history'. Chism acknowledges the importance of such literary qualities as metre, genre and voice, but her book's announced theoretical agenda is unabashedly cultural and historical: 'these poems (1) investigate the historical antecedents of medieval structures; (2) dramatize the questioning of cultural centers from outsider (or provincial) perspectives; and (3) centralize the historical contingencies of a world in flux rather than aiming primarily at more transcendent concerns with the afterlife' (Chism 2002: 1–2). Starting from a perspective that locates culture in historical event rather than in aesthetic accomplishment, she finds historical testimony even in works belonging to the *Pearl*-tradition of meditative devotion.

Locating culture in the literate audience of fifteenth-century writers who canonized Chaucer as the father of English poetry, Seth Lerer's *Chaucer and his Readers* embraces a historicism that proclaims that 'the aim of literary studies should be, not the interpretation of individual texts, but the study of the conventions of interpretation, and thus of the production and reception of texts' (Lerer 1993: 8, quoting Victoria Kahn). Dismissing the value of the singular literary endeavour as a cultural indicator, Lerer challenges modern readers to embrace textual variation and thereby to appreciate textual instability or *mouvance* as a distinguishing characteristic of literary production and reception in a manuscript culture. All Chaucer manuscripts presumably date to the fifteenth century or later. These manuscripts, which inscribe medieval response, show that Chaucer was read minutely, personally, and with a deep respect for what later writers saw as his definition of poetic practice. The fifteenth-century Chaucerians' imitation of and self-imposed subjection to the master's method, authority and immediate relevance thus illuminate the cultural significance of Chaucerian practice in ways that an untheorized devotion to a putatively recuperable fourteenth-century Chaucerian text makes obscure.

Religion

No community was more important to a writer in our period than that which nurtured one's belief. Three principal directions, based on the monumental work of scholars in the 1980s and early 1990s, have competed to redirect study of late medieval religion. Eamon Duffy, focusing on the institutionalized operation of faith, has assembled a compendium of information on traditional practices. His position is that we should

seek to understand how most people thought and behaved. Anne Hudson and Margaret Aston, fastening upon oppositional beliefs, have amassed voluminous documentation of Lollard practices. Their position is that by focusing on dissident thought and behaviour, we can come to understand the tensions affecting both dominant and resistant belief. Carolyn Walker Bynum, directing attention to women religious, has documented the particularities of female spiritual practice. Her premise is that patriarchal documentation simultaneously appropriates and marginalizes the affective spirituality practised by large numbers of women and many men.[9] Taken together, the volumes produced by these archival scholars have offered medievalists much information upon and against which to construct theoretically informed analyses that spotlight the political character of late medieval spiritual practice. Curiously, it is Duffy's work that has generated the least direct interest, perhaps reflecting the scholarly tendency to be more interested in opposition than in dominant practice.

David Aers and Lynn Staley view spiritual discourse as inherently political. In their jointly authored *The Powers of the Holy* they postulate that in the closing years of the fourteenth century, before Bishop Arundel joined with the newly triumphant Lancastrian monarchs to enforce political and religious orthodoxy, writers who resisted a fairly mild communal pressure to conform 'were able to express divergent views and explore issues relating to both power and authority'. In particular, Langland, Julian of Norwich and Chaucer used the relative freedom afforded to literary discourse to challenge spiritual and political orthodoxy in ways that reflect, more or less cautiously, sympathy to Wycliffite concerns. Aers claims that Langland and Julian addressed the fractious issue of the 'humanity of Christ' by using images that privilege dissent, while Staley contends that Chaucer and Julian used the language of devotion to advance perspectives that covertly challenged the 'dominant ecclesiastical and political institutions' on whose good will and support they ostensibly depended. Through dextrous use of the language and imagery of gender, the three writers 'signal their awareness – inevitably political – that the call to Christ is a call to consciousness' (Aers and Staley 1996: 261–3). Aers and Staley's argument depends on a recognition of how politically charged are the intertwined languages of orthodoxy and dissent on the one hand, and the intertwined moods and subjects of female 'affective' piety and male 'analytic' piety on the other.

Sarah Beckwith's *Signifying God* similarly asserts the interconnectedness of the spiritual and the political as figured in the dissent-riddled symbolism of the York Corpus Christi plays. These popular spectacles incorporated performers and audience in an inherently politicized response to orthodox authority: performing the sacred in a public space necessarily obscured the boundaries between sanctified and profane spaces both symbolic and physical. As Beckwith puts it, 'When Corpus Christi, the little host under clerical jurisdiction and subject to strict ritual control and construction, is extended into the drama of the town, it risks its own meanings, finding them difficult to guarantee' (Beckwith 2001: 47). To dramatize the suffering of Christ was to appropriate a theological discourse that questioned the substantive nature of the sacrament. The fact that the corporate community of York manufacturers and labourers living

in the very seat of English ecclesiastical authority involved itself in this vital debate as a municipally sanctioned spiritual practice requires us to read the York plays as political statement.

Violence and the Other

An idea shared by almost all the scholars I have mentioned is that history lies on the margins. It is in the victims, the resistant ones, and the individuals and groups subjected to authoritarian discipline, that a culture's desires are articulated, even though their voices are often muted or denied the attribution of eloquence afforded the sanctioned literati. The study of late medieval literature, so long focused on retrieving the polished diction of the canonical greats, has moved, in search of their history, to the edges, both geographically to Wales, Scotland, Ireland and the north of England, and textually to the manuscripts, chronicles and ecclesiastical and governmental documents that record less exquisite aesthetic moments. I will close this digest by addressing the theory governing approaches to two current issues at the edge of traditional literary work: violence (which is inextricably associated with power) and the Other, as psychoanalysts term the ego's apprehension of difference from itself.

The violence that maintained the social order is frequent in medieval texts, sometimes overt, sometimes simply threatened. Corinne Saunders's *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* stands at what the author calls 'the convergence of two streams of scholarly discourse', the one situating itself at the critical distance of 'a historian of *mentalités*' seeking to inscribe acts of rape and abduction in the specific 'cultural, literary, and imaginative contexts' of medieval England; the other defining itself in the strict terms of current gender theory, responding to rape as the act that 'epitomizes all that is most fundamental and offensive in the power relationships of the sexes, in the social construction of gender differences, in the ferocious ideologies of hegemony and power' (Saunders 2001: 1–2). The former approach acknowledges culture difference; the latter insists on the primacy of essentialist values. As a literary historian focusing on the denotation of a word, *raptus*, Saunders places her study primarily in the *mentalités* camp, but as a modern feminist scholar, a woman reading and responding to a language enunciated almost entirely by men, she brings to the surface the horror embedded in unemotional male diction. Sexual violence is thus historicized as part of the cultural legacy of patriarchy.

Violence often becomes a response to what is perceived as Other, that is, what is peculiar, disturbing, resistant, transgressive, or foreign. Because these notions are personal, critical foci vary according to what it is about ourselves we wish to uncover in the past. Most recently, scholarly interest has fastened upon women and men who resisted the heterosexual norm: elective virgins and homosexuals.[10] For example, Sarah Salih offers an illuminating discussion of gender in regard to the distinctly medieval professions of virginity. Drawing upon Bynum's assertion that medieval religious women 'strove not to eradicate body but to merge their own humiliating and painful flesh with