

A COMPANION TO
CHAUCER

EDITED BY PETER BROWN

Blackwell Publishers

A Companion to Chaucer

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.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 A Companion to Romanticism | <i>Edited by Duncan Wu</i> |
| 2 A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture | <i>Edited by Herbert F. Tucker</i> |
| 3 A Companion to Shakespeare | <i>Edited by David Scott Kastan</i> |
| 4 A Companion to the Gothic | <i>Edited by David Punter</i> |
| 5 A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare | <i>Edited by Dymphna Callaghan</i> |
| 6 A Companion to Chaucer | <i>Edited by Peter Brown</i> |
| 7 A Companion to English Literature from Milton to Blake | <i>Edited by David Womersley</i> |
| 8 A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture | <i>Edited by Michael Hattaway</i> |
| 9 A Companion to Milton | <i>Edited by Thomas N. Corns</i> |
| 10 A Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry | <i>Edited by Neil Roberts</i> |
| 11 A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature | <i>Edited by Phillip Pulsiano and Elaine
Trebarne</i> |
| 12 A Companion to Restoration Drama | <i>Edited by Susan J. Owen</i> |
| 13 A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing | <i>Edited by Anita Pacheco</i> |
| 14 A Companion to English Renaissance Drama | <i>Edited by Arthur Kinney</i> |
| 15 A Companion to Victorian Poetry | <i>Edited by Richard Cronin, Alison Chapman
and Anthony Harrison</i> |
| 16 A Companion to the Victorian Novel | <i>Edited by Patrick Brantlinger and
William B. Thesing</i> |

A COMPANION TO
CHAUCER

EDITED BY PETER BROWN

Blackwell Publishers

Copyright © Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2000, 2002
Editorial matter, selection and arrangement copyright © Peter Brown 2000, 2002

First published 2000
First published in paperback 2002

Blackwell Publishers Ltd
108 Cowley Road
Oxford OX4 1JF
UK

Blackwell Publishers Inc.
350 Main Street
Malden, Massachusetts 02148
USA

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purposes of criticism and review, 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, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

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

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A companion to Chaucer / edited by Peter Brown.

p. cm. – (Blackwell anthologies)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-631-21332-5 (hbk. alk. paper) — 0-631-23590-6 (pbk. alk. paper)

1. Chaucer, Geoffrey, d. 1400 – Handbooks, manuals, etc. 2. Chaucer, Geoffrey, d. 1400 – Knowledge and learning. 3. Civilization, Medieval, in literature. 4. Literature and society – England – History – To 1500. 5. England – Civilization – 1066-1485. 6. England – Intellectual life – 1066-1485. I. Brown, Peter, 1948– II. Series.

PR1906.5 C66 2001

821'.1 – dc21

00-039735

Typeset in 11 on 13pt Garamond 3
by Best-set Typesetter Ltd., Hong Kong
Printed in Great Britain by T. J. International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall
This book is printed on acid-free paper

Contents

List of Illustrations	viii
The Contributors	ix
Acknowledgements	xv
Abbreviations of Chaucer's Works	xvi
The Idea of a Chaucer Companion	1
<i>Peter Brown</i>	
1 Afterlife	8
<i>Carolyn Collette</i>	
2 Authority	23
<i>Andrew Galloway</i>	
3 Bodies	40
<i>Linda Ebrsam Voigts</i>	
4 Chivalry	58
<i>Derek Brewer</i>	
5 Christian Ideologies	75
<i>Nicholas Watson</i>	
6 Comedy	90
<i>Laura Kendrick</i>	
7 Contemporary English Writers	114
<i>James Simpson</i>	

8	Crisis and Dissent <i>Alcuin Blamires</i>	133
9	France <i>Michael Hanly</i>	149
10	Games <i>Malcolm Andrew</i>	167
11	Genre <i>Caroline D. Eckhardt</i>	180
12	Geography and Travel <i>Scott D. Westrem</i>	195
13	Italy <i>David Wallace</i>	218
14	Language <i>David Burnley</i>	235
15	Life Histories <i>Janette Dillon</i>	251
16	London <i>Michael Hanrahan</i>	266
17	Love <i>Helen Phillips</i>	281
18	Modes of Representation <i>Edward Wheatley</i>	296
19	Narrative <i>Robert R. Edwards</i>	312
20	Other Thought-worlds <i>Susanna Fein</i>	332
21	Pagan Survivals <i>John M. Fyler</i>	349
22	Personal Identity <i>Lynn Staley</i>	360

23	Science <i>Irma Taavitsainen</i>	378
24	Social Structures <i>Robert Swanson</i>	397
25	Style <i>John F. Plummer</i>	414
26	Texts <i>Tim William Machan</i>	428
27	Translation <i>Roger Ellis</i>	443
28	Visualizing <i>Sarah Stanbury</i>	459
29	Women <i>Nicky Hallett</i>	480
	Index	495

Illustrations

1.1	The 'Hoccleve Portrait' of Chaucer	9
3.1	Zodiac man	41
3.2	The sanguine body and personality	43
3.3	Personification of the planetary force of Mars	46
7.1	The Wilton Diptych	116
12.1	The Lambeth <i>mappamundi</i>	207
12.2	The Gough Map of Britain	209
20.1	The Three Living and the Three Dead	345
23.1	Bloodletting man	387
23.2	Alchemical processes and receipts	392
26.1	The Franklin's Prologue	436
28.1	A messenger hands an image of the lady to Machaut	460
28.2	The Holy Trinity	464

The Contributors

Malcolm Andrew is Professor of English Language and Literature at the Queen's University of Belfast, where he has become increasingly involved in management during the past few years. His main publications include *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript* (with Ronald Waldron, 1978), an annotated bibliography of writings on the *Gawain*-poet (1979), *Two Early Renaissance Bird Poems* (1984) and the Variorum Edition of the General Prologue of the *Canterbury Tales* (with Charles Moorman and Daniel J. Ransom, 1993).

Alcuin Blamires is Reader in English at Goldsmiths College, University of London. He has specialized recently in research on the medieval debate about women, on which he has published articles, an anthology of texts and the monograph *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (1997). Another interest is coming to fruition in a co-authored book (with Gail Holian) on *Roman de la rose* manuscript illumination. His current project is a book on Chaucer, gender and ethics.

Derek Brewer is Emeritus Professor of English of Cambridge University and a Life Fellow of Emmanuel College, of which he was Master from 1977 to 1990. His latest book is *A New Introduction to Chaucer* (1998), a radically updated version of the book of the same title first published in 1984. He was a contributor to and joint editor of *A Companion to the Gawain-poet* (1997, repr. 1999) and has published books and many articles on medieval and other English literature, on which he continues to work.

Peter Brown is Senior Lecturer in the School of English and Director of the Canterbury Centre for Medieval & Tudor Studies at the University of Kent. His books include *The Age of Saturn: Literature and History in the Canterbury Tales* (with Andrew Butcher, 1991), *Chaucer at Work: The Making of the Canterbury Tales* (1994) and, as editor and contributor, *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to*

Shakespeare (1999). Present projects include the editorship of *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, i: 600–1500.

David Burnley is Professor and Head of the Department of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Sheffield. He has published numerous articles on medieval language and literature as well as the history of English and is the author of *Chaucer's Language and the Philosophers' Tradition* (1979), *A Guide to Chaucer's Language* (1983) and (with M. Tajima) an annotated bibliography, *The Language of Middle English Literature* (1994). His most recent book is *Courtliness and Language in Medieval England* (1998). He has just completed a revised second edition of *The History of the English Language: A Source Book* and is working on a CD-ROM introduction to Old English.

Carolyn Collette is Professor of English Language and Literature on the Alumnae Foundation and a member of the Medieval Studies Program at Mount Holyoke College, Massachusetts. She is currently President of the North American Branch of the International Courtly Literature Society. Her current research is appearing in a series of articles on the ideal of the good wife in late medieval and early modern Anglo-French literature. She has just completed her most recent book, *Species, Phantasms and Images: Vision and Medieval Psychology in the Canterbury Tales* (2000).

Janette Dillon is Reader in Drama at the University of Nottingham, where she teaches and researches in medieval and Renaissance literature as well as drama. Her *Geoffrey Chaucer* was published in 1993, and her most recent books are *Language and Stage: Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* (1998) and *Theatre, Court and City 1595–1610: Drama and Social Space in London* (2000).

Caroline D. Eckhardt is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Pennsylvania State University, where she is also Head of the Department of Comparative Literature. She has written on the General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* and other Chaucerian topics, and on Arthurian literature, including the historical uses of the prophecies of Merlin. Her most recent book is a two-volume edition of *Castleford's Chronicle, or The Boke of Brut* (1996); she is presently at work on a third volume.

Robert R. Edwards is Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Pennsylvania State University and a life member of Clare Hall, Cambridge. He is the author of *The Dream of Chaucer* (1989) and *Ratio and Invention* (1989), and editor of John Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* (forthcoming), selections from *Troy Book* (1998) and *The Poetry of Guido Guinizelli* (1987). His current book project focuses on Chaucer's representation of antiquity and modernity.

Roger Ellis is Senior Lecturer in the School of English at the University of Cardiff. He has written on Chaucer, Hoccleve, the Middle English mystics, medieval transla-

tion and St Birgitta of Sweden; he has organized conferences on medieval translation and St Birgitta, and edited the proceedings of the former as *The Medieval Translator* (6 vols to date).

Susanna Fein is Professor of English at Kent State University. She writes on Middle English manuscripts, alliterative and devotional verse, and Chaucer. She is co-editor of *Rebels and Rivals* (1991), a collection of essays on the *Canterbury Tales*. A recent book, *Moral Love Songs and Laments* (1998), examines seven longer lyrics of the *Pearl* tradition. She is also a contributor to and editor of *Studies in the Harley Manuscript* (2000) and general editor of an in-progress edition and translation of MS Harley 2253's full contents.

John M. Fyler is Professor of English at Tufts University, Massachusetts. He edited the *House of Fame* for the *Riverside Chaucer*, and is the author of *Chaucer and Ovid* (1979) and a number of essays, most recently 'Froissart and Chaucer' in *Froissart across the Genres*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (1998). He is currently completing two books, one a collection of essays on *Troilus and Criseyde*, the other a study of medieval ideas about the nature and origin of language, in particular as they appear in the poetry of Jean de Meun, Dante and Chaucer.

Andrew Galloway is Associate Professor of English and Medieval Studies at Cornell University. Currently editor of *The Yearbook of Langland Studies*, he has written most recently on medieval historical writing (in the *Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* [1999]), textual scholarship of *Piers Plowman* (*Studies in Bibliography* [1999]), and eleventh-century Latin satire (*Medium Ævum* [1999]). He is collaborating in an annotation of *Piers Plowman* and, with Russell Peck, an edition of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*.

Nicky Hallett is Lecturer in the School of English at the University of Kent at Canterbury. She is a member of the Canterbury Centre for Medieval & Tudor Studies and teaches, among other subjects, courses on medieval women writers and readers and on women's auto/biography. Her research is in social ostentation in art and literature of the Middle Ages; her recent publications are on Anne Clifford (1590–1676) and Virginia Woolf, and a book, *Lesbian Lives: Identity and Autobiography in the Twentieth Century* (1999).

Michael Hanly is Associate Professor of English at Washington State University and researcher in a medieval history unit, based in Paris, of the Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS-UMR 8589). His articles have appeared in *Romania*, *Traditio*, *Viator* and *Multilingua*, and his critical edition of the *Apparicion maistre Jehan de Meun* (1398) by Honorat Bovet will appear in 2001. He is working on a project examining literary transmission between Italy, France and England in the time of Chaucer.

Michael Hanrahan is Lecturer at St John's College in York. He has published articles on Chaucer and Thomas Usk and is presently completing a book on the cultural responses to treason and scandal at the court of Richard II.

Laura Kendrick is Professor of English at the Université de Versailles, where she directs the Department of Humanities. She has written two books about medieval literature and play, *Chaucerian Play: Comedy and Control in the Canterbury Tales* and *The Game of Love: Troubadour Wordplay*. Her latest book, *Animating the Letter: The Figurative Embodiment of Writing from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (1999), is on the image of medieval writing.

Tim William Machan is Professor and Chair of English at Marquette University, Milwaukee. He has published widely on medieval language, literature and manuscripts. His most recent book concerns the sociolinguistics of late medieval society.

Helen Phillips is Senior Lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Liverpool. Her latest books are *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, co-edited with Nick Havely (1997) and *An Introduction to the Canterbury Tales: Reading, Fiction, Context* (2000). She is currently working on a study of fifteenth-century feminism.

John F. Plummer is Professor of English at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. He is the author of *The Summoner's Tale: A Variorum Edition of the Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* and of articles on Chaucer, Arthurian romance and medieval drama. At present he is working on a study of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* Host, Harry Bailly, and a book on the self in the Arthurian romances of France and England.

James Simpson is Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English at the University of Cambridge and a Professorial Fellow of Girton College, Cambridge. He has published widely in the field of medieval literature, with many articles and two books, *An Introduction to Piers Plowman* (1990), and *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry: Alan of Lille's Anticlaudianus and John Gower's Confessio Amantis* (1995). He is currently working on a literary history of the period 1350–1550.

Lynn Staley is Harrington and Shirley Drake Professor in the Humanities at Colgate University, Hamilton, NY. She is the author of *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Literature*, with David Aers (1996), *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (1994), *The Shepherds Calender: An Introduction* (1990) and *The Voice of the Gawain-poet* (1984), and editor of *The Book of Margery Kempe* (complete text, modernized spelling and notes: 1996). She is presently working on a book on Ricardian court culture and completing a translation of *The Book of Margery Kempe* (2000).

Sarah Stanbury teaches in the English Department at the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Massachusetts. She is the author of *Seeing the Gawain-poet: Description and the Act of Perception* (1991) and co-editor of *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature* (1993), *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory* (1997), and currently of the Web project, Mapping Margery Kempe <www.holycross.edu/kempe>.

Robert Swanson is Reader in Medieval Church History at the University of Birmingham. His books include *Church and Society in Late Medieval England* (1989) and *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215–c. 1515* (1995). His current work focuses on the place of indulgences in late medieval English religion, and on the economic impact and implications of the church and spirituality in pre-Reformation England.

Irma Taavitsainen is Senior Fellow of the Finnish Academy and Professor of English Philology at the University of Helsinki. She has compiled *Handlist X: Manuscripts in Scandinavian Collections* of *The Index of Middle English Prose* (1994). Her most recent book is *Writing in Nonstandard English* (1999, with Gunnel Melchers and Päivi Pahta). She is at present working, together with a research team, on a project on *Scientific Thought-styles: The Evolution of Medical Writing*. She is also an editor of the *Journal of Historical Pragmatics*.

Linda Ehram Voigts is Curators' Professor of English at the University of Missouri–Kansas City. She has produced with Patricia Deery Kurtz a CD-ROM database of information on more than 8,000 scientific and medical texts in Old English and Middle English: *Scientific and Medical Writings in Old and Middle English: An Electronic Reference* (2000). She has published editions and studies of many of these texts and is now working on an edition of the Middle English version of Bernard of Gordon's *De pronosticiis*.

David Wallace is Judith Rodin Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Pennsylvania. His most recent book is *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy*; he has also edited *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*.

Nicholas Watson is Professor of English at the University of Western Ontario. He is author of *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* (1991) and numerous studies of medieval English religious writing. His most recent publication (with Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Andrew Taylor and Ruth Evans) is *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280–1520* (1999). He is presently working on a book entitled *Balaam's Ass: Vernacular Theology in Medieval England*.

Scott D. Westrem is Associate Professor of English and of Comparative Literature at the Graduate Center and Lehman College of the City University of New York. His most recent work includes *Broader Horizons: Johannes Witte de Hese's Itinerarius and*

Medieval Travel Narratives (2000) and, with Charles Ryskamp, *The Works of John Chalkbill* (1999). He is one of four co-editors of *Travel, Trade and Exploration in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia* (2000). Projects nearing completion include books on the Hereford *mappamundi* and on an unstudied world map at the University of Minnesota, and a critical edition and translation of the pilgrimage narrative of William of Boldensele (1336).

Edward Wheatley is Associate Professor of English at Hamilton College, Clinton, NY, where he has also served as Chair of the Medieval and Renaissance Studies Program. He has published *Mastering Aesop: Medieval Education, Chaucer, and his Followers* (2000). He is currently working on a project on blindness in medieval literature and history.

Acknowledgements

My first thanks go to Andrew McNeillie for suggesting the project and for providing subsequent, highly congenial, encouragement. His colleagues at Blackwells, particularly Alison Dunnnett and Jenny Lambert, have steered the typescript skilfully through the various stages of its production. The copy-editor, Gillian Bromley, a model of equanimity and efficiency, has introduced more clarity and consistency than the book would otherwise have. Norman Blake, Al David, Derek Pearsall and John Ganim were enthusiastic endorsers of the idea of a *Companion to Chaucer*, and they made many helpful suggestions about its direction, design and content. I have also come to rely on the good judgement of my colleague, Nicky Hallett. The brunt of a demanding schedule has been shared, and occasional bouts of editorial exasperation relieved, by my family—Helen, Oliver and Louisa, to whom I dedicate this book.

Canterbury
January 2000

The editor and publishers are grateful to Houghton Mifflin for their kind permission to reproduce extracts from the following edition, to which all line references refer:

Benson, Larry D. (editor), *The Riverside Chaucer*. Third edition. Copyright © 1987 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Used with permission.

Abbreviations of Chaucer's Works

<i>Anel</i>	<i>Anelida and Arcite</i>
<i>Astr</i>	<i>A Treatise on the Astrolabe</i>
<i>BD</i>	<i>Book of the Duchess</i>
<i>Bo</i>	<i>Boece</i>
CkP	Cook's Prologue
CkT	Cook's Tale
CIP	Clerk's Prologue
CIT	Clerk's Tale
CYP	Canon's Yeoman's Prologue
CYT	Canon's Yeoman's Tale
For	Fortune
FranT	Franklin's Tale
FrP	Friar's Prologue
FrT	Friar's Tale
GP	General Prologue
<i>HF</i>	<i>House of Fame</i>
KnT	Knight's Tale
<i>LGW</i>	<i>Legend of Good Women</i>
<i>LGWP</i>	<i>Prologue to the Legend of Good Women</i>
ManP	Manciple's Prologue
ManT	Manciple's Tale
MerT	Merchant's Tale
MilP	Miller's Prologue
MilT	Miller's Tale
MkP	Monk's Prologue
MkT	Monk's Tale
MLE	Epilogue to the Man of Law's Tale
MLI	Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale

MLT	Man of Law's Tale
NPP	Nun's Priest's Prologue
NPT	Nun's Priest's Tale
PardI	Introduction to the Pardoner's Tale
PardP	Pardoner's Prologue
PardT	Pardoner's Tale
ParsP	Parson's Prologue
ParsT	Parson's Tale
<i>PF</i>	<i>Parliament of Fowls</i>
Purse	Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse
Ret	Chaucer's Retraction
<i>Rom</i>	<i>Romaunt of the Rose</i>
RvP	Reeve's Prologue
RvT	Reeve's Tale
ShT	Shipman's Tale
SNP	Second Nun's Prologue
SNT	Second Nun's Tale
SqT	Squire's Tale
SumP	Summoner's Prologue
SumT	Summoner's Tale
<i>TC</i>	<i>Troilus and Criseyde</i>
Th	Tale of Sir Thopas
ThP	Prologue to the Tale of Sir Thopas
Ven	Complaint of Venus
WBP	Wife of Bath's Prologue
WBT	Wife of Bath's Tale

The Idea of a Chaucer Companion

Peter Brown

From his own reading, Chaucer was familiar with the notion of an authoritative companion providing direction to an individual otherwise lost and uncomprehending. In the *Somnium Scipionis*, which was, together with its commentary by Macrobius, a model for the *House of Fame*, Scipio's grandfather, Africanus, assumes the role of interlocutor. He appears within a dream to explain, from the vantage-point of the starry heavens, the political future of Carthage, Scipio's destiny as its conqueror and the insignificance of human ambition. The *Divine Comedy*, which influenced Chaucer throughout his writing career, shows how Virgil leads Dante through hell and purgatory, explaining the twists and turns of divine justice, keeping Dante to the path and gradually effecting his enlightenment. Appearing in a work Chaucer translated, the *Consolation of Philosophy*, Lady Philosophy uses scholastic discourse and force of logic to reason Boethius out of an abject acceptance of his state of imprisonment, and into a frame of mind in which an existential freedom becomes possible.

All three companions are the best imaginable, and yet they have considerable disadvantages and limitations. None is real, but instead a figment of a dream vision or an other-worldly experience. All of them emerge uninvited and unannounced (however welcome their arrival) to intrude on the narrator's consciousness and cause considerable mental and emotional disturbance. Even their beneficial effects can be felt for only so long: Africanus disappears with Scipio's dream; Virgil cannot enter paradise and must cede his place to Beatrice, leaving Dante momentarily bereft; and Philosophy can help Boethius only in so far as he is prepared to accept the harsh truth of her arguments. The point in each case is that the subject who benefits from a learned and didactic companion must at some point achieve an independence and intellectual growth that render the continued services of the companion otiose. The companion is not a substitute for personal knowledge, but a means whereby it is accessed, communicated, absorbed, internalized, applied.

In his own writing, Chaucer explored the limitations of companions yet further, expressing deep scepticism and ambivalence about their usefulness – a reflection of

his complex negotiations with authority more generally, in both its written and social forms. Thus the *Book of the Duchess*, his first major work, omits a conventional companion or guide altogether, to focus instead on three figures (the dreamer, Alcyone, the man in black) tormented by mental states for which there is no obvious or immediate relief. Here, the work of companionable guide or therapist is displaced, by way of a distinctly unauthoritative narrator, to the reader, who must perforce make connections between the three figures according to the clues that Chaucer has left, and thereby devise knowledgeable explanations of the predicaments that face them. When Chaucer does introduce a more traditional companion into another of his dream visions, the *House of Fame*, it is not as a person but as an eagle. Although effective in securing the rescue of a lost and disoriented narrator, this companion is garrulous, exults in knowledge for its own sake, and is over-helpful on matters which, though they might be of great academic interest, are not of immediate concern to 'Geffrey' as he dangles, terrified, in the bird's claws. In other genres, too, companions are revealed as ridiculous, ineffectual, or both. The authority of Harry Bailly, self-appointed major-domo of the Canterbury pilgrims, is undermined on numerous occasions, notably by the Miller and Pardoner. The loquacious Pandarus, companion to Troilus, is silenced once the shallowness of his advice is exposed.¹

It is to be hoped that the present book avoids some of the worst shortcomings of Chaucer's fictive companions. Nevertheless, it acknowledges the force of his misgivings about them. It does not seek to intrude as a declamatory 'last word' on any of the topics it covers, but rather to provide stimulating advice and guidance; to identify the terms of current debates, exploring their ramifications and applications; to demonstrate how, in practice, particular ideas and theories affect the interpretation of Chaucer's texts; and to suggest further routes of enquiry. In the manner both of the literary companions Chaucer read about and of the ones he created, it insists on strenuous engagement with the writings and ideas it discusses, offering its users models of approach and encouraging them to achieve independence of thought as rapidly as possible.

Students All

For all their best attempts to open up and make available the cultural contexts of medieval literature, books such as this can seem to intimidate by the very wealth of expertise on display. But it is as well to bear in mind that, whether the user be a professional academic steeped in specialist lore, a teacher in a college or school, a graduate researching a thesis, or an undergraduate or sixth-former working on an essay, we are all students and, the further advanced, the more aware of what we do not know. The present volume has been compiled with all such students of Chaucer in mind. It contains enough original research and new syntheses to interest long-established scholars. At the same time it provides accessible coverage of key contexts for those less well acquainted with Chaucer studies.

What can such students of Chaucer expect the *Companion* to provide? It is predicated on the reasonable assumption that the experience of reading Chaucer's works prompts numerous questions about the circumstances in which he lived and worked, and about the effects of those circumstances on what he wrote and how we now understand it. So each chapter strikes a balance between textual analysis and cultural context; but the kind of context varies. Some chapters stay within a literary frame of reference, exploring the genres or modes (such as comedy) available to Chaucer, or placing him in relation to other authors writing at the time, or discussing the production and circulation of texts in a manuscript culture, or emphasizing the importance of translation, or narrative, within late medieval literary practice, or looking at his linguistic or stylistic situation. Another, related, group of chapters covers broader cultural topics in order to account for some of the factors that sustained and conditioned him as a writer, such as structures of literary authority; kinds of social organization and their ethical principles, including those of chivalry; the range of audiences for which Chaucer wrote; and the political nature of London and the court, considered as literary milieux.

The largest group of chapters takes as its general area of interest the recovery of those medieval structures of thought, feeling and imagination, now lost or half-buried, that are subtly and sometimes radically different from our own, and that formed Chaucer's operating assumptions. Religious ideology in all its manifestations – including pilgrimage and Lollardy – is important here. But there are other explanatory systems, with which Christianity had an uneasy relationship, on which Chaucer draws extensively: those of faery, for example, or of the pagan world, or of astrology – the last of these underpinning accounts of the human body and of scientific procedures. One of the notable features of all of these systems is that they crossed cultural boundaries: they were not the quaint beliefs of a small society, but the general inheritance of the Latin West. Quite how wide Chaucer's cultural perspectives were is clear from underlying concepts of geography and travel, and from his own life history, especially his extensive first-hand experience of France and Italy.

Of course, narrative poetry – what Chaucer mainly wrote – is not cultural history but a multi-faceted account of individuals living within particular (if imagined) times and places. Thus it is that a further group of chapters draws attention to other expressions of social practice, including games, love, visualizing, concepts of personal identity and, in relation to these, the different aptitudes and sensibilities of men and women. Whether the student's curiosity focuses on language, Christianity, eroticism, astrology, concepts of the self, pilgrimage, violence, heresy, London, Europe or any of a host of other topics, this book will provide food for thought, and extend horizons.

Designs on Chaucer

Determining the structure of the *Companion*, and of the individual chapters, was no easy matter. Initially, my thoughts were much helped by existing guides and

companions to Chaucer's works, and it seemed sensible to organize the book according to Chaucer's individual compositions, partitioning the whole according to the customary tripartite schema: *Canterbury Tales*; *Troilus and Criseyde*; dream visions and minor poems.² To do so would have ensured a broad coverage of Chaucer's works, but it risked alienating users with an over-familiar approach, and it would have entailed ungainly repetition of key topics. 'Love', for example, or 'chivalry' might legitimately have been discussed in relation to a number of different Chaucerian texts. On reflection it seemed better, more exciting, to foreground issues and themes rather than named texts. The result is a novel and intriguing division of content that allows for and encourages movement across different compositions, and beyond literary frames of reference. To avoid the problem of repetition in the discussion of texts, contributors were asked to nominate, from the entire range of Chaucer's works, three passages which they would be prepared to discuss in detail in relation to the chapter title. Clashing choices were thereby identified early and renegotiated, ensuring a properly varied coverage.

Arriving at a satisfactory list of chapter titles caused more headaches. The first step was to draft a comprehensive list of all those topics on which a reader of Chaucer might require discussion. Adding items to the list became a kind of parlour game played with colleagues, students and, on one occasion, a casual acquaintance on a railway journey from London to Canterbury. The opening gambit was: 'If you were reading this or that work by Chaucer, what would you need to know more about in order to make better sense of what he wrote?' The outcome was a list of well over one hundred items. Some had natural affinities with others; some were more difficult to group. Eventually, through a process of trial, error and re-sorting, the categories emerged that now form the chapter titles. Thus 'community, church, estates, fellowship' were subsumed by the chapter on 'Social Structures', while 'faery, dreams, folklore' appear under 'Other Thought-worlds'. However, the titles are not mere flags of convenience; on the contrary, they are viable terms of analysis, rooted in current discussions about the nature and meaning of Chaucer's literary output. As authors have developed their arguments, certain topics have been stressed at the expense of others, but it has seemed more important to promote vigorous argument rather than to attempt an unattainable ideal of complete coverage.

Armed with my highly condensed prospectus, I began to think of how best to engage appropriate contributors – ones who would respond in authoritative but flexible and sympathetic ways to the aims of the volume. In this I was much helped by well-placed colleagues in England and the United States, who put forward recommendations that otherwise, through my own ignorance, would not have arisen. By this means the book has acquired a very strong field of essayists from Europe and North America. Since many of the topics offered to them have been a little out of the ordinary, either in content or scope, there is little in the *Companion to Chaucer* that can be read as a routine treatment of a standard subject. There is much here that is fresh and invigorating, and that makes new and significant contributions to matters of concern among students of Chaucer.

Each contributor has produced an original essay that conforms to certain criteria designed to both ground and challenge the reader of Chaucer: an account of existing scholarship in a given area; a discussion of the key issues; an application of those issues to specific passages from Chaucer's works; and an annotated bibliography of some twenty items for reference and further reading. Every chapter subdivides into a number of distinct sections, and each section is signposted (as in this introduction) so that a user is directed quickly to the pages that are most relevant to a particular area of interest. Where the material covered by one contributor relates to that covered by another, cross-references are given at the end of the chapter. As such features indicate, the *Companion* repays browsing. And, just as it does not privilege one kind of user over another, so it attempts to secure a broad equality of treatment for the different chapter topics by placing them within that most levelling of classifications, the alphabet. Alternatively, a student focused on a particular topic, or a specific composition by Chaucer, can turn to the index to discover where to find useful discussions. All line references are to the *Riverside Chaucer*, cited in the Acknowledgements above (p. xv).

'I make for myself a picture of great detail'

The analogy urged earlier between Chaucer's fictive companions and this volume cannot be pressed too far. Chaucer and his works have themselves become the terrain – difficult and delightful in turn – in need of a mentored map. Nor, in this *Companion* at least, does any one contributor attempt to provide an *ex cathedra* reading of all the contours and features that constitute 'Chaucer' in the manner of an Africanus, a Virgil or a Lady Philosophy. Instead, various individuals, 'ful nine and twenty in a compaignye', offer their considered opinions. As in the case of Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims, there are competing points of view, potential clashes of temperament and ideological differences – all of which increase the need and opportunity for informed and lively debate.

If there is a concept, lying deeper than the idea of a companion, that articulates the kind of essay found in this book, as well as the experience of compiling it, then it might be caught in the words of the subheading above, used by Milman Parry to describe the process of trying to understand Homeric poetry in its historical context.³ At first glance the statement seems to reflect a straightforward concept of the literary historian as archaeologist, perhaps as restorer of a shattered mural, deferential to the inheritance of the past, dedicated to the accumulation of more and more fragments of evidence, and working with the aim of producing an intricate, objective account of a remote society and the place within it of a literary artefact.

But implicit in Parry's words are ideas that suggest a more complex model of enquiry. In the first place, the undertaking is highly reflexive, with a strong personal dimension. The relationship between past and present is effected by means of a subjective agent, 'I . . . myself', who contributes an individuated slant to the evaluation

of empirical data. Then again, the enquirer's characteristic activity is fabrication, an act of making, an essentially artificial reinvention of the past from the available information. Finally, that reconstruction is itself a representation, a 'picture' betraying the hand of its maker, but also incorporating selection, foregrounding, emphasis and all the other artistic techniques that contribute to a convincing and effective portrayal.

Once made, the picture becomes the focus of the literary historian's interest, replacing the original object of enquiry, while at the same time providing an analytical frame in which to examine further configurations of text and context. Nor is the scrutiny only in one direction. The relationship between past and present is that of a dialogue whereby the modern enquirer asks questions of and through a carefully made picture only to find – disconcertingly – that the picture itself interrogates the very basis of her or his own presumptions. In the case of Chaucer, the exploration of half-forgotten belief systems, and the realization that they were valid working premises in a poetry that had wide appeal, alerts us to the relativity of our own assumptions and credos. As the next chapter shows, his reputation has changed its nature quite drastically as successive generations of readers have discovered in his writings features that have responded to their own cultural preoccupations.

Chaucer Stellified

This *Companion* is nothing if not an historical exercise, and an attentive user should take away an enlarged sense of the circumstances in which Chaucer wrote, of the literary possibilities open to him, of the extent to which he was actively engaged with many of the political and religious issues that beset his society. But as well as making Chaucer the occasion for cultural explorations of the past, it also highlights the extent to which what Chaucer wrote is itself a precious record of the thoughts and feelings that constituted human experience as he knew it. That record deserves our continuing respect, intellectual interest and enthusiasm because it is exceptionally rich, complex and innovative. Capable of sparking flashes of sympathy and recognition across six centuries, of being remarkably present to our reading consciousness, it is nevertheless the record of a culture only half familiar. The other half is alien, a foreign country, and all the more intriguing for that. This book will act as a Baedeker to its deeper exploration, and perhaps enable some to become explorers in their own right.

We should not imagine that relationship in linear terms, with Chaucer's works receding further and further into the past. On the contrary, thanks to the endeavours of all kinds of students, our familiarity with and understanding of what Chaucer wrote makes him seem closer than ever. As it happens, the year 2000 encourages us to celebrate Chaucer as a star in the literary firmament, and he would have enjoyed the compliment. Aware of the possibilities, as well as the pitfalls, of enduring literary fame, he imagined somewhat apprehensively (as that same companionable eagle bore 'Geffrey' aloft) what it might be like to be 'stellified' among the gods (*HF* 584–93).

Taking a cue from this conceit, the trajectory of our relationship with Chaucer might be that of an elliptical orbit, its shape governed by the alternating gravity and levity of his writings. As we move first towards him, then further away, now closer, now more distant, we glimpse features of his writings from new and often startling angles. The coincidence of the millennial year with the 600th anniversary of Chaucer's death prompts the hope that this exhilarating parallax will continue to provoke surprise, delight, and curiosity both in medieval Chaucer and in our postmodern selves.⁴ This book is intended to aid and sustain that process.

NOTES

- 1 Cf. Peter Brown, *Chaucer at Work: The Making of the Canterbury Tales* (London and New York: Longman, 1994), 6–8.
- 2 As in the three *Oxford Guides to Chaucer* (Oxford: Clarendon), written by Helen Cooper (*The Canterbury Tales*, 1989), Barry Windeatt (*Troilus and Criseyde*, 1992) and Alastair Minnis (*The Shorter Poems*, 1995). As examples of earlier guide-companions, see *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion*, ed. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and Beryl Rowland, ed., *Companion to Chaucer Studies*, rev. edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).
- 3 Milman Parry, 'The historical method in literary criticism', *Harvard Alumni Bulletin* 38 (1936), 778–82 (p. 780), repr. in *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. Adam Parry (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 408–13 (p. 411).
- 4 See the introduction to *Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales*, ed. Steve Ellis, Longman Critical Readers (London and New York: Longman, 1998), 1–22.

Afterlife

Carolyn Collette

Chaucer's afterlife constitutes a reputation virtually unique in the history of English literature. More than any other English writer, Chaucer has been constructed and deconstructed by successive generations of his readers. Beginning in the fifteenth century with a group of writers who felt themselves either directly connected to him through acquaintance, as did Thomas Hoccleve, or spiritually connected to him through admiration and literary aspiration, as did John Lydgate and the Scottish Chaucerians, Chaucer's reputation as an author has been founded in, but also quite separated from, his work. In reading the multiple volumes of allusions to Chaucer in the six hundred years since his death, one sees his reputation flourish and diminish. Within this pattern of change one fixed point stands out: Chaucer the man – his learning, temperament, disposition – is as much a centre of allusion and critical discussion as his works. Michel Foucault notwithstanding, the record shows that Chaucer the man has been central to the idea of Chaucer the author.

Thanks in large measure to the work of Martin Crow and Claire Olson in editing the *Chaucer Life-records* (1966), the outlines of Chaucer's life are now apparently clear: we know somewhat of where he travelled and when, what offices he held, whom he served; yet until very recently these facts, as well as the real substance of his life – his passions, hopes and fears – were unknown. As a result, over the centuries he has served as a useful cipher on to whom critics and editors could project their own ideas of what he must have thought, felt and been like, depending on the cultural circumstances in which they wrote. All this has made for a rather lively afterlife for this fourteenth-century writer of whose inner life we know for certain very little beyond the fact that it created a literary genius of the highest order .

Caroline Spurgeon's *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357–1900* and Derek Brewer's later work, *Chaucer: The Critical Heritage*, both contain an extensive range of allusion, citation and reference, drawn largely from the comments

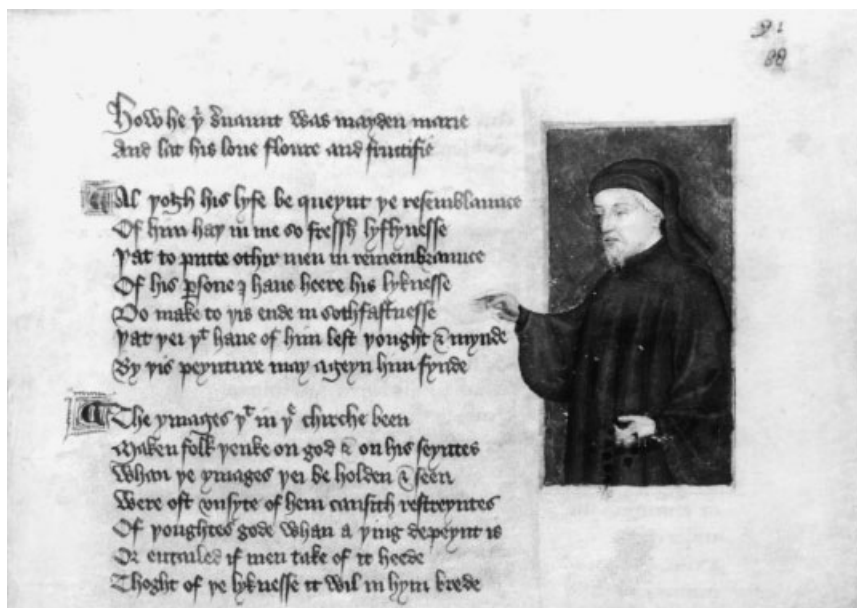


Figure 1.1 The 'Hoccleve Portrait' of Chaucer. From the *Regement of Princes* by Thomas Hoccleve. London, British Library, MS Harley 4866, fo. 88 (1411–12). [By permission of the British Library.]

of writers and essayists. In addition, both scholars have contributed important summaries of the ebb and flow of Chaucer's reputation, Spurgeon in the extensive analytical introduction in the first volume of her three-volume work, and Brewer most notably in 'Images of Chaucer, 1386–1900'. Their research demonstrates that, for most of the time between the fifteenth century and the twentieth, Chaucer's literary reputation, the sense of what kind of a writer he was, sprang from a sense of who he was as a person – how he thought, what he knew, what he believed, how he was shaped by the age in which he lived. The fifteenth, sixteenth and nineteenth centuries are particularly rich periods for considering the phenomenon of high interest in Chaucer the man. Although each period produced a criticism distinctly related to its own peculiar historical circumstances, all three periods constructed Chaucer similarly as a figure of unusual intellectual *virtu*; in all three periods the record of allusions shows he appeared as a benign yet essentially distant figure of power and learning who showed a way to a better England. In many respects the early fifteenth-century Hoccleve portrait (figure 1.1) represents the continuity at the centre of the idea of Chaucer over time: a seemingly gentle and wise man, adorned with symbols of his craft and art, points towards something invisible to us, but visible to him as he focuses his eyes on the lower middle distance, on a plane we cannot access.

The Fifteenth-century Chaucer

The fifteenth-century Chaucer, as Seth Lerer and A. C. Spearing have argued, is a father figure to writers who see in him both the patriarch of their craft and, as Spearing argues, the source of their anxiety: 'The son wishes to inherit the authority of a father who has denied that any such inheritance is possible and has in any case ended his own fatherhood . . . As father, he made possible their very existence as English poets, yet, as his successors, they inevitably came too late' (Pinti 1998: 160). Lerer goes even further, asserting that Chaucer's fatherhood renders readers as well as writers childlike; he discusses 'the ways in which Chaucer's authority subjects his readers, subjugating them into childhood or incompetence' (Lerer 1993: 5).

But the records Spurgeon and Brewer have amassed reveal an even more complicated dimension to the fifteenth-century idea of Chaucer. At the same time that he is termed 'father' to the writers who followed him, he is also constructed as a benefactor to a larger posterity: all those who speak the English language. He is pictured as simultaneously writing within and standing outside of the language he used. In an image that several Renaissance critics later recall, John Lydgate in his *Fall of Princes* terms Chaucer the lodestar of English: 'Whom al this land sholde off right preferre, / Sithe off our language he was the lodesterre' (Brewer 1978: i, 52). Chaucer serves as a guide, a fixed point by which to navigate the possibilities of expression, a figure both dominating and yet external to the world of fifteenth-century poetry. From that vantage point he is able to exert his beneficent influence over the common tongue. The anonymous author of a *Book of Curtesye*, c.1477, suggests the same distant quality through a rich agricultural metaphor. He terms Chaucer and John Gower 'faders aun-cyente' who 'Repen the felde fresshe of fulsomnes / The flours fresh they gadred vp & hente / Of siluer langage / the grete riches'. The metaphor of reaping a harvest implies the plenty of Chaucer's verbal imagination: he is the farmer who sows language and reaps a harvest of rhetoric. In contrast, the current generation of writers, coming after, must 'begge' the 'grete riches' of 'siluer langage' from them. But, at the same time that the writer acknowledges that Chaucer and Gower have dominated literary language, he also implies an important gift inherent in that dominance when he says, 'For of our tunge they were both lok & kaye.' This statement of despair about the father figure who pre-empted the opportunities of his literary heirs, barring their way to independence and innovation by the lock of his prevenient genius, also asserts Chaucer's gift to the speakers of 'oure tunge', for whom he provides the key of expression (Brewer 1978: i, 73).

In this period Chaucer is repeatedly figured as the poet of new beginnings, of potency and life. In *The Life of Our Lady*, Lydgate describes Chaucer as the one who first made 'to distille and rayne / The golde dewe dropes of speche and eloquence / Into our tunge, thurgh his excellence / And fonde the floures, firste of Retoryke, / Our Rude speche, only to enluymyne' (Brewer 1978: i, 46). For Lydgate, Chaucer is the

father who has generated a new spring of linguistic possibility. William Caxton repeats this theme of potency and fertility in his epilogue to Chaucer's translation of Boethius, where he implies that Chaucer's fatherhood is realized by his relationship to the 'moder tonge': 'Therefore the worshipful fader & first foundeur & enbelissher of ornate eloquence in our englissh. I mene / Maister Geffrey Chaucer hath translated this sayd werke oute of latyn in to oure vsual and moder tonge' (Brewer 1978: i, 75). The result of this translation is aureate diction and 'ornate wrytyng' (76) located in the substance and power of his pithy style: 'For he wrytteth no voyde wordes / but alle hys mater is ful of hye and quycke sentence' (75).

The opinion that Chaucer's genius was realized in his ability to transform English appears frequently, as in this translated couplet from his fifteenth-century epitaph: 'By the verses [that he composed] in his [British] mother tongue he made it [as] illustrious as, alas, it had once been uncouth' (Brewer 1978: i, 79), as well as in John Shirley's 'Prologue to the Knight's Tale', c.1456: 'þe laural and moste famous poete þat euer was to-fore him as in þemvellishing of oure rude moders englissh tonge, clepid Chaucyer' (Spurgeon 1925: i, 54). Praise of Chaucer the author is thus praise of the man who was able to generate a literary language out of a previously unauthorized mother tongue. In this light the language of fifteenth-century allusions to Chaucer as a poet of the 'fresshe' and 'newe' is a language of fertility and generation, of the 'floure of Retoryke', generated by a father who may indeed have left his literary heirs crippled, but whose genius at the same time empowered all his other heirs, by showing them how to unlock the riches of their common tongue.

The Renaissance Chaucer

In the sixteenth century Chaucer's reputation as a master of literary expression slipped out of focus; as his language began to seem more and more distant, his achievement dimmed. Sir Philip Sidney seems to sum up the tenor of this vein of criticism when he praises the *Troilus*, but concludes, 'Yet had he great wants, fitte to be forgiuen, in so reuerent antiquity' (Spurgeon 1925: i, 122). At the same time that praise for Chaucer as a father of English poetic expression waned, another idea of Chaucer came forward: the Chaucer who is a man of learning, philosophy and occult science. The tradition that Chaucer was unusually learned and wise appears as early as Hoccleve's reference to Chaucer as a highly educated poet, 'vniuersal fadir in science', 'hier in philosophie / To Aristotle / in our tonge' (Brewer 1978: i, 63). A persistent but unfounded tradition that Chaucer attended university appears to have been widely accepted by sixteenth-century scholars. John Leland's biography of Chaucer (c.1540–5), which circulated widely in manuscript, reinforced this sense of him as highly learned, exerting a powerful and long-lived control over the shape of Chaucer's reputation. Leland built on the tradition of the wise Chaucer, constructing him as a universal scholar and an auto-didact in a description which other writers borrowed and helped disseminate:

He left the university an acute logician, a delightful orator, an elegant poet, a profound philosopher, and an able mathematician . . . Moreover, he left the university a devout theologian . . . while he so applied himself at Oxford, he also pursued his studies elsewhere, and by long devotion to learning added many things to the knowledge he had there accumulated. (Brewer 1978: i, 91)

Chaucer's reputation for learning made him an attractive figure to Reformation propagandists. For Protestants, Chaucer's reputation for wisdom indicated that he could see beyond the prejudices of his own age to anticipate a time when England would be free of the excesses of Romish superstition. John Foxe, anxious to appropriate Chaucer's reputation for wisdom to his own purposes, praised him in his 1570 *Ecclesiasticall history containyng the Actes and Monumentes of thynges passed in euery Kynges tyme in this Realme* as author of the *Jack Upland* (a Lollard attack on corrupt friars), and therefore a proto-Protestant sympathizer. Foxe melded Chaucer's learning with his supposed Protestant leanings, appropriating England's greatest poet to his cause as a faithful witness in the time of Wyclif (Brewer 1978: i, 107). Chaucer, like Gower, was 'notably learned, as the barbarous rudenes of that tyme did geue . . . so endeuoryng themselues, and employing their tyme, that they excelling many other in study and exercise of good letters, did passe forth their lyues here right worshipfully and godly, to the worthye fame and commendation of their name' (Spurgeon 1925: i, 105). Chaucer, says Foxe, 'saw in Religion as much almost, as euen we do now, and vttereth in hys works no lesse, and semeth to bee a right Wicleuian, or els was neuer any, and that all his workes almost, if they be throughly aduised, will testifie (albeit it bee done in myrth, and couertly)'. Chaucer was able 'vnder shadowes couertly, as vnder a visoure' to convey truth 'and yet not be espyed of the craftye aduersarie' (Spurgeon 1925: i, 106).

The idea of Chaucer's learning in this period seems at odds with the prevailing sense of his language as rough and rude. This dichotomy demonstrates the bifocal nature of his reputation: his poetry might be difficult to appreciate, but he had gained status as a venerable figure separate from his works. As Foxe noted, his works and Gower's were exempted from censorship in Henry VIII's *Acte for thaduancement of true Religion and for thabolishment of the contrarie* of 1542–3. (In this period Chaucer is paired with Gower in many allusions, suggesting that the sixteenth century thought of him as part of a literary tradition, not necessarily as the singular genius he seemed a hundred years earlier.) Richard Puttenham refers to him in *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) as the most renowned of the early English poets, 'for the much learning appeareth to be in him aboute any of the rest' (Brewer 1978: i, 126). Gabriel Harvey's *Marginalia* emphasizes Chaucer's scientific learning: 'Notable Astronomical descriptions in Chawcer, & Lidgate; fine artists in manie kinds & much better learned then owre moderne poets. Chauwcers conclusions of the Astrolablie, still excellent, vnempeachable . . . A worthie man, that initiated his little sonne Lewis with such cunning & subtill conclusions, as sensibly, & plainly expressed, as he cowld deuise.'¹ in a much-quoted continuation of the same passage, Harvey went on to assert the Renaissance principle that great poetry springs from great learning:

Other [*sic*] commend Chawcer, & Lidgate for their witt, pleasant veine, varietie of poetical discourse, & all humanitie: I specially note their Astronomie, philosophie, & other parts of profound or cunning art. Wherein few of their time were more exactly learned. It is not sufficient for poets, to be superficial humanists: but they must be exquisite artists & curious vniuersal schollers. (160–1)

By the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries Chaucer's reputation for general wisdom accorded him the status of master of occult sciences. In his extensive response to Thomas Speght's 1598 edition of Chaucer, Francis Thynne corrected Speght's error in spelling the term *resalgor*, an alchemical term which Speght rendered *resagor*. Thynne objected to Speght's mistake first because of the error itself, and second because Speght had not properly or fully understood that Chaucer was a man of extensive learning: "This worde sholde rather be "resalgar": wherefore I will shew you what Resalgar ys in that abstruce scyence which Chawcer knewe full well, althoughe he enveye against the sophisticall abuse thereof in the chanons yeomans tale."² Elias Ashmole's 1652 encyclopedia of alchemy, *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, describes Chaucer, author of the Canon's Yeoman's Tale, as 'ranked amongst the *Hermetick Philosophers*' with Gower, his master; those who read the latter part of the tale, Ashmole asserts, 'wil easly perceiue him to be a *Iudicious Philosopher*, and one that fully knew the *Mistery*' (Spurgeon 1925: i, 227). Robert Schuler has documented the extensive, if apocryphal, body of prophetic and alchemical works attributed to Chaucer, concluding that Chaucer was revered as magus as much as poet: 'if the Renaissance Chaucer was the "English Homer", he was being treated just as Homer had been by scholars and teachers in the fifth and sixth centuries B.C.: not primarily as a great poet, but as an encyclopedia of military strategy, history, geography, economy, and eloquence' (Schuler 1984: 316–17).

The Nineteenth-century Chaucer

After a period of comparative neglect in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Chaucer's reputation flowered once more in the nineteenth century. Like the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the nineteenth century was comparatively uninterested in discussing the intricacies of Chaucer's texts, more concerned with Chaucer the man and the time in which he lived. Matthew Arnold's 1880 criticism of Chaucer shows this bias quite clearly as it side-steps consideration of the dynamics of the text in favour of inferences about the mind that created it: 'If we ask ourselves wherein consists the immense superiority of Chaucer's poetry . . . we shall find that his superiority is both in the substance of his poetry and in the style of his poetry. His superiority in substance is given by his large, free, simple, clear yet kindly view of human life' (Brewer 1978: ii, 216–17).

The production of multiple popular editions of Chaucer's works, designed for the expanding and increasingly educated reading public, made Chaucer's name a

familiar one among the educated classes in the nineteenth century. Chaucer became the father of English literature, the poet of the fresh green youth of England's greatness, and the poet of a time whose values and whose spirit held wisdom the modern world needed. Paradoxically, this sense of his ancient knowledge was bolstered by an awareness of Chaucer's freshness and rawness, his humour and coarseness, all traits deemed characteristic of the age in which he lived. He became thus a dual figure: a wise father leading the way in language and art, as well as a figure of English energy and power.

Brewer and Spurgeon's nineteenth-century allusions to Chaucer focus on his reception by major writers of the period and key figures of what would become the tradition of Chaucer criticism. Their work shows the Chaucer familiar to all of us – the somewhat coarse humorist (Brewer 1978: ii, 72, 125, 223, 280), the childlike, gay poet writing at the dawn of English literature (226) – as well as Chaucer the prototype of the nineteenth-century gentleman (88–9, 108). But the nineteenth century also produced an extensive range of parallel Chaucer criticism in the magazines and monthly periodicals that flourished from 1830 to 1880. In the pages of these journals we see shaped and reflected a popular conception of Chaucer that complements the more familiar one of the kindly poet of what Arnold called 'joy and strength'. This Chaucer, a wise poet, came from a culture that understood how to integrate art and science, poetry and life. Studying him might show the way to creating a modern equivalent of his achievement.

Many of these articles on the subject of Chaucer are reviews of recent editions, but virtually every one begins with Chaucer the man, moves on to consider the culture of his time, and eventually draws some contrast between his age and the Victorian age. For example, the Edinburgh *North British Review* for February 1849 begins its account of several editions by evoking both Chaucer's distance from and his relevance to contemporary issues: 'The name of Geoffrey or Geffray Chaucer, has a grateful sound to English ears, and the image which it conjures up, purified by time from every taint of ignoble association, looms large to us through the mists of the five centuries which intervene' (293). According to this reviewer, Chaucer felt none of the *Angst* typical of the poet in the nineteenth century: 'He was the "clear and conscious" man of his time. In his opinions there was nothing which others did not feel, but what they felt unconsciously he thought and expressed . . . There was no antagonism between him and his age' (314–15). A *London Review* article of 1859 assures us that Chaucer was 'well versed in philosophy and divinity and the scholastic learning, and displays an intimate acquaintance with most of the sciences, as then cultivated, especially astronomy' (285). More important, he was the poet of an age that revered and read poetry (292), an age very different from the writer's own:

our forefathers, with a tythe of our knowledge and experience, effected in art what lies beyond our power. The preceding observations will have thrown some light upon what the age of Chaucer possessed which we have lost, viz., a common poetical atmosphere, a common love of poetry, and desire to be instructed in a true way, that is, to be told

of things by poets, and a common consent in the sort of thing that was to be looked for at their hands. (295)

Moreover, the author says, Chaucer's age was superior in the very area of logic and reason on which the nineteenth century prided itself (296). The article concludes with a sense of Chaucer's surpassing greatness and essential distance:

Here we leave Chaucer. We have seen his majestic countenance, full of brooding light; his long life and ceaseless energy. His influence for centuries was unbounded, and probably wider than even that of Shakespeare. He created a language and a method of versification, which was followed by the poets both of England and Scotland. We have seen how exhaustless was his genius; how just his love and fixed his faith in human nature; how firm and true, and fearless his dealing with all things. We have seen how much of this was owing to the age which nurtured and understood the poet. Also, we have not failed to see how different, strangely different, the condition of poetry in an essentially scientific age has become. (303)

In yet another example of Chaucer criticism sprung from Victorian anxiety, the London *National Review* published in June 1862 ascribes Chaucer's genius to his ability to combine the imaginary and the real:

The prominent qualities which modern critics have ascribed to Chaucer are, fancy, imagination, grace, delicacy, tenderness; and undoubtedly he possessed these and other cognate qualities in a great degree. But the essential characteristic of his genius seems to us to be a strong sense of the real. In the highest flights of his genius the actual is ever present to him, as if the *purely* imaginative was something alien to his nature. (12)

Not long after this was written, F. J. Furnivall founded the Early English Text Society (1864) and the Chaucer Society (1868), and attention shifted from Chaucer's character and age to Chaucer's actual works. But even Furnivall, romantic, inveterate and energetic editor that he was, located the centre of Chaucer's meaning in Chaucer the man. In a typically wide-ranging article for the London *Macmillans Magazine* (volume 27, 1872–3), Furnivall railed at the fact that only sixty men out of the millions of inhabitants of Great Britain were willing to support the Society with donations, and that the average person would say of Chaucer's works, 'How can one find time to read a man who makes "poore" two syllables? Life is not long enough for that' (383). Even as he discusses editions, manuscripts and the importance of chronology in understanding Chaucer, Furnivall asserts that the reader who wishes to understand Chaucer's poetry must know the man, 'must start with him in his sorrow, walk with him through it into the fresh sunshine of his later life, and then down to the chill and poverty of his old age' (388).

Ironically, Furnivall's efforts and energy helped move Chaucer for ever out of the realm of such romantic interpretation, as well as out of the realm of the average reader.

At the end of the nineteenth century the familiar features of Chaucer the man began to fade, just as the familiar father of fifteenth-century English had faded in the sixteenth. In the earlier instance he remained a respected figure associated with learning and philosophy. In the latter he disappeared into the academy to become the subject of professional study. What now dominated was an academic interest in studying Chaucer's works and texts systematically and according to fixed principles, an interest manifest in increasing pressure to publish a definitive edition of his works which, based on the best manuscripts available and the best modern principles of editorial decision, would prove worthy of the father of English poetry. W. W. Skeat's six-volume (ultimately seven-volume) edition of 1894–7 provided such a text. Heir to nineteenth-century popular interest in Chaucer (it was also available in a 'student's edition' presumably designed for the average educated reader), it proved to be a text for scholars, not for the educated public. The publication of Skeat's edition, coupled with the founding of the Chaucer Society to edit and propagate his works, had an unintended consequence: increasingly Chaucer and his writing became the province of scholars whose interest lay with text and manuscript.

Chaucer's Modern Reputation

The twentieth century produced an extensive scholarship of Chaucer's work, and a comparatively diminished interest in Chaucer the man. More than any other period after the fifteenth century, the twentieth century saw Chaucer's reputation tied to the critical assessment of his art. A series of editors has shaped the text of Chaucer's work to make it available to thousands of students who have in turn analysed, interpreted, constructed and deconstructed his meanings. Beginning with G. L. Kittredge and his assertion of the dramatic principle at the heart of the tales, twentieth-century Chaucer criticism was dominated by the *Canterbury Tales* and by successive fashions in twentieth-century academic literary criticism. A trend, first identifiable in the eighteenth century, towards reading Chaucer's works in light of the genre of the novel flowered in the middle third of the century, reaching its apogee in criticism of *Troilus and Criseyde*, often termed the first novel in English. The development and popularization of theories of human psychology in the twentieth century also focused critical attention on the characters of Chaucer's work, on the pilgrims and particularly on Criseyde, as Alice Kaminsky (1980) has shown. New criticism, with its emphasis on the text and its propensity to see irony lurking under every couplet, contributed to a sense that it is hopeless to try to know the man Chaucer, that his surrogate the pilgrim–narrator is all we can know, and that the latter is enigmatic and elvish, as E. Talbot Donaldson argued so persuasively in 1954.

In the most radical critical departure of the century, *A Preface to Chaucer* (1962), D. W. Robertson Jr attempted to redirect the focus of criticism from the dynamics of the text towards historicizing the text, albeit in one narrow channel. Ultimately, this served to diminish the idea of Chaucer the author; for his work, it could now be

shown, was less a matter of unique inspiration and genius than a site in which cultural conventions and traditions were played out. Indeed, the criticism of the last thirty years of the twentieth century strove to defeat the idea of Chaucer as a unique individual and instead reinvented him as a conduit of the social *Angst* of his world, a writer bound by the misogyny of his period and mediated through his scribes. By the end of the twentieth century he no longer seemed to possess secret knowledge, or to show the way to a deeper understanding of what English is capable of. Rather, he seemed all too caught up in the pettinesses and intrigues of a dangerous, unstable court, itself a part of a destabilizing world founded on and yet anxious about the codes of chivalry, love and duty it expressed in its literature.

Chaucer's Retraction (ParsT 1081–92)

In his own work Chaucer seems to have demonstrated a remarkable prescience about many of the issues that would arise in response to his writing. In the Retraction at the end of the *Canterbury Tales*, in the *House of Fame* and in the lyric addressed to Adam Sciveyn, he identifies three topics that seem to cause him anxiety: concern with the tone and subject of his work, concern for the mutability of fame and the status of the great author, and concern about the faithful transmission of his text. In each instance, the history of Chaucer criticism has proven him right in his concern.

In the Retraction that follows the Parson's Tale Chaucer expresses anxiety about the reception of his work and apologizes for and 'withdraws' the great bulk of his literary production, terming it 'worldly vanitees'. Over the centuries Chaucer's earthy humour and 'broad' speaking have indeed occasioned frequent criticism. We see hints of this in the Renaissance comments on the rudeness and antique flavour of Chaucer's language: Beaumont addresses 'the inciulitie *Chaucer* is charged withall' by responding, 'What Romane Poet hath lesse offended this way then hee?' (Brewer 1978: i, 137). Such criticism flowers in the early nineteenth century in statements like this one by Byron: 'Chaucer, notwithstanding the praises bestowed on him, I think obscene and contemptible' (Brewer 1978: i, 249). Leigh Hunt blames a change of manners for what might once have pleased the court and *gentils* but was, in the mid-nineteenth century, 'sometimes not only indecorous but revolting' (Brewer 1978: ii, 71). Matthew Arnold's charge that Chaucer lacked 'high seriousness' seems an uncanny echo, after nearly five hundred years, of Chaucer's own fears.

Imagining Fame (*HF* 1356–1519)

Chaucer represents the capricious nature of reputation and of fame throughout the *House of Fame*, focusing on literary reputation in lines 1356–1519. He images the 'godesse' Fame as a creature of multiple ears and tongues, swelling and shrinking. Her throne room is lined with 'many a peler' on which stand figures of such great

writers as Josephus, Statius, Homer, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Virgil and Ovid, whose own fame was so great that it altered the size of the hall which ‘Was woxen on highte, length, and brede, / Wel more be a thousand del / Than hyt was erst’ (1494–6). In these lines, Chaucer imagines fame as the property of the author as individual, rather than an attribute of his work. We know that he desired such fame from the end of *Troilus*, where he presents his book to the tradition of such great writers, claiming the story of Troy as part of England’s literary heritage, and positioning himself as a novice reverently following in the steps of the great writers of antiquity.

Chaucer did attain the kind of lasting fame he attributes to these great writers. From one generation to the next Chaucer has been likened to the predecessors he so clearly admired. As early as Hoccleve’s praises, Chaucer was being constructed as an English equivalent of the great *auctores*: ‘for vnto Tullius / Was neuer man so lyk amonges vs / Also who was hier in philosophie / To Aristotle / in our tonge but thow / The steppes of virgile in poesie / Thow filwedist’ (Brewer 1978: i, 63). In the sixteenth century, Roger Ascham terms him the ‘Englishe Homer’, and Francis Beaumont asserts that Chaucer is a philosophical writer of the highest order, as *Troilus* shows, imitating Virgil and Homer in the ‘pith and sinewes of eloquence’ (Brewer 1978: i, 100, 138). Dryden compares Chaucer to Ovid, one the last poet of the ‘Golden Age of the Roman Tongue’, the other the beginner of English poetry. Perhaps the highest praise of Chaucer is that offered by William Godwin in his 1803 biography, that Chaucer was the father of ‘our language’, the man who restored English to the Muses: ‘No one man in the history of human intellect ever did more, than was effected by the single mind of Chaucer’ (Brewer 1978: i, 238). Thus, although his reputation, like the form of the goddess of Fame, has grown and shrunk, Chaucer has laid claim to be one of the ‘folk of digne reverence’ in the *House of Fame*.

‘Chaucer’s wordes unto Adam, his owne scriveyn’

Perhaps the most intriguing instance of apparent Chaucerian prescience comes in the little lyric in which he excoriates his scribe Adam for mistakes arising from haste and inattention, charging him:

... after my makyng thow wryte more trewe;
 So ofte adaye I mot thy werk renewe,
 It to correcte and eke to rubbe and scrape,
 And al is thorough thy negligence and rape.
 (4–7)

Given the history of Chaucer editions recounted by Ruggiers (1984), and more recently by Dane (1998), he was right to be concerned. The lyric to Adam (which itself is now accepted into the Chaucer canon, but on slender manuscript evidence) shows that Chaucer realized how difficult it was for an author to retain control of texts

once they left the author's possession. Windeatt (1979) shows how generally an author's material was emended or altered in a culture in which reading a text commonly involved some sort of appropriation, often manifested as alteration. As early as Caxton's first printed edition of the *Tales* in 1478 the *mouvance* of Chaucer's text bedevilled his editor. Caxton struggled to produce an accurate text: in the Proheme, he tells of deferring to a gentleman who brought him a 'better' text, one closer to Chaucer's original. Caxton says, 'I fynde many of the sayd bookes / whyche wryters haue abrydgyd it and many thynges left out / And in somme place haue sette certayn versys / that he neuer made ne sette in hys booke' (Brewer 1978: i, 76). Walter Stevens, a sixteenth-century editor of a manuscript of Chaucer's *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, 'fownde the same corrupte and false in so many and sondrie places, that I dowbtede whether the rudenes of the worke weare not a gretter sclaunder to the authour, than trowble and offence to the readers' (Brewer 1978: i, 105). Speght writes that he undertook his edition at the request of gentlemen who wished to do 'some reparations on his [Chaucer's] works, which they iudged to be much decaied by iniurie of time, ignorance of writers, and negligence of Printers' (Brewer 1978: i, 141).

The history of modern Chaucer editions also suggests he was correct to worry, for here too the idea of the 'best text' has been central but elusive. A good deal of work in the past hundred years has been devoted to establishing the canon of Chaucer's work, and to establishing a central manuscript, the Ellesmere Manuscript, as an authoritative text. Thomas Tyrwhitt (1775) was the first editor really to look at Chaucer as an author whose work might have characteristic traits; he determined that a canon might therefore be determined on that basis, rather than historical tradition, and excised a lot of apocryphal material. Skeat continued the winnowing process Tyrwhitt began; as Edwards says, 'Skeat's final enduring achievement is a negative one. It consists in what he did *not* include in the Clarendon Chaucer. With Skeat's edition we approach very close to the final stabilization of the Chaucer canon, to the achievement of a complete works purged of the accretions of insubstantial attributions of earlier editors' (Ruggiers 1984: 188).

But the problem of establishing Chaucer's text continued throughout the twentieth century. The text produced by J. M. Manly and Margaret Rickert, which sought to provide definitive readings based on objective principles of manuscript collation and analysis, proved to be, in the words of George Kane, 'the product of an immensely complex system of contingent hypotheses which seldom account for all the data and are sustainable only by the constant exercise of that editorial judgment which the editors set out to exclude' (Ruggiers 1984: 210). Even the Robinson edition, arguably the most influential Chaucer edition ever printed, because of its wide dissemination and popularity, was, according to Reinecke, a monument to Ellesmere and to Robinson's desire to print a 'regularly scanned, craftsmanlike, artistically significant . . . [text] conforming to his already determined opinions about Chaucer's grammar and meter' (Ruggiers 1984: 250). Most recently, the Variorum Chaucer project has preferred the Hengwrt manuscript over the 'highly edited' Ellesmere because of its early date (1400–10), its unedited state and its similarity to the Manly–Rickert

reconstruction. In his preface to the variorum edition of Hengwrt, Donald C. Baker describes the editors' intent to publish a text 'which is as near as it is possible to get to what Chaucer must have written' and concludes that for 'most of the Canterbury Tales' that text is the Hengwrt manuscript.³ While there is no doubt that certain manuscripts, Ellesmere and Hengwrt most famously, are thought to be more reliable than others, the fact remains that we do not have any holograph texts of Chaucer's poetry. One could make the case that the state of Chaucer's texts is analogous to the state of his reputation: both have been highly subject to interpretation. In the case of the texts, we have a series of manuscripts, each of which acts like a unique set of binoculars, adjusted to somebody else's eyesight.

Each set is focused differently in the fine detail of its account of the text. For the editor the medieval poem is accordingly something of an aspiration, a hardest idea, somewhere between, behind, or above the network of available scribal variations in any given line. Chaucer's poems survive for each line somewhere mid-way in a band of possible scribal variation on either side. (Windeatt 1979: 139)

See also AUTHORITY; CRISIS AND DISSENT; GEOGRAPHY AND TRAVEL; LANGUAGE; LIFE HISTORIES; LONDON; NARRATIVES; SCIENCE; TEXTS.

NOTES

- 1 *Gabriel Harvey's Marginalia* [c.1600], ed. G. C. Moore Smith (Stratford-upon-Avon: Shakespeare Head Press, 1913), 159.
- 2 *Chaucer: Animadversions . . . 1598 sett downe by Francis Thynne*, ed. G. H. Kingsley, Early English Text Society, original series 9 (1865), 36.
- 3 *The Canterbury Tales: A Facsimile and Transcription of the Hengwrt Manuscript with Variants from the Ellesmere Manuscript*, ed. Paul G. Ruggiers (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), pp. xvii–xviii.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Brewer, Derek S. (1966) 'Images of Chaucer 1386–1900', in *Chaucer and Chaucerians: Critical Studies in Middle English Literature*, ed. Derek S. Brewer (University, Ala.: University of Alabama Press; London: Nelson), 240–70. A succinct and elegant overview of the history of Chaucer's reputation.
- (1997) 'Modernising the medieval eighteenth-century translations of Chaucer', in *The Middle Ages after the Middle Ages in the English-Speaking World*, ed. Marie-Françoise Alamichel and Derek Brewer (Cambridge: Brewer), 103–20. Brewer focuses on the eighteenth-century reception of a series of translations appearing after Dryden in an age which he describes as the beginning of modern criticism and textual scholarship of Chaucer.
- , ed. (1978) *Chaucer: The Critical Heritage, 1385–1933*, 2 vols (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul). Brewer confines this collection to the heritage of Chaucer criticism. It overlaps in the early period with Spurgeon's, but contains a much fuller record of nineteenth-century and twentieth-century criticism.
- Cannon, Christopher (1998) *The Making of Chaucer's English: A Study of Words*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 39 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press).