MANN, JILL: *Geoffrey Chaucer.* Atlantic Highlands, N. J. Humanities Press International, Inc., 1991. xv+222 pp.

Professor Mann's absorbing and suggestive study of Chaucer forms part of the series of *Feminist Readings* currently being published by Humanities Press International, in which, according to an anonymous preliminary note, each contributor

> "… takes on the challenge of reassessing the problems inherent in confronting a 'phallocentric' literary canon, by investigating the processes involved in the translation of gender difference into the themes and structures of the literary text". (p. vii)

It is the aim of the series, we are likewise informed, to assess the applicability of various theories of gender difference 'to the writing of the more influential male writers of the literary tradition' (p. viii), among whom figure, for example, Shakespeare, Joyce, Hawthorne, Lawrence, Milton, etc. Chaucer, an influential writer if ever there was one, is, so far, the only mediaeval author to be included in these monographs written by women scholars, and it would be difficult to think of anyone more eminently suitable for this particular critical task than Professor Mann, to whom we are already indebted for a series of scholarly and insightful studies on Chaucer, and on the mediaeval period in general

Her *Geoffrey Chaucer* contains a brief Preface and Introduction, five chapters on, respectively, *Women and Betrayal, Anti-Feminism, The Surrender of 'Maistrye', Suffering Woman, Suffering God* and *The Feminised Hero,* and a brief *Conclusion.* There is a useful Bibliography, the Primary Sources included therein revealing once

again, as in Professor Mann's earlier writings, the impressive scope of her knowledge of the cultural background of the period.

Given the series to which this study belongs, the author's declarations, in her Preface, concerning the aims and perspectives of her book are particularly useful, and deserve quoting in full:

> "As for the kind of 'feminist reading' that this book represents, I should make it clear that it is not tied to any particular school of feminist criticism, though I have formed many of my arguments in mental dialogue with their imagined representatives". (p. xii)

and further down:

> "I have tried to describe Chaucer's 'feminism' in his own terms rather than ours, not with the narrow historicist aim of keeping him bounded in the past, but rather to avoid bounding him in the orthodoxies of the present. Rather than patronisingly awarding him praise to the extent that he managed to anticipate modern views or demands, I want to allow his text to speak in ways that can tell us something new as well as confirm what we already believe". (p. xii)

Her hope is that contemporary consciousness of feminism and feminist issues will make the modern reader more sensitive to what he sees as "the significance and the importance of the rôle that Chaucer gives to women" (p. 4), for, through the different chapters of her study, Professor Mann makes what she admits to be "the large claim" that woman in his work

> "… is at the centre instead of at the periphery, where she becomes the norm against which all human behaviour is to be measured". (p. 4)

reminding us, for example, that

> "Male heroes are, … few and far between in Chaucer. In the *Canterbury Tales,* the moral high ground is occupied by Constance, Griselda, Cecilia, Prudence, and no man is accorded the central and dominating position in the narrative that they enjoy". (p. 165)

Sir Thopas is "unceremoniously blunded out of the way" in favour of Prudence! The exceptions, as she demonstrates in Chapter Five, will be the *feminised* (my italics) heroes, Troilus, Theseus and less significantly the Man in Black.

The first chapter deals with the polarities of "woman betrayed" and "woman betraying", with reference to the important influences of Ovid and *Le Roman de la Rose,* and the implication in such works that "Male betrayal and female deceit are set in a causal relationship" (p. 6), and goes on to make the telling point that Chaucer is obviously identifying more with the Ovidian Dido in her *House of Fame* than with Aeneas and his destiny, conceiving of her, therefore, "as an exemplary victim of male deceitfulness" (p. 11) who occupies in his version of the story the centre of the *Aeneid,* and proving at the same time that he was aware of "the writer's responsibilities towards women as literary subjects" (p. 12). For a "feminist reading", Chaucer's approach to Dido is important since he exploits a well-established story of male heroism in order to offer his readers a woman's point of view.

This commentary on Chaucer's presentation of woman betrayed is followed by a masterly analysis of his handling of the classic example of woman betraying, Criseyde. After some comment on Chaucer's choice of this apparently anti-feminist subject, the author analyses with great perceptiveness how the poet, in fact, "rescues the betrayal"

from such an interpretation, by underlining the importance for Chaucer of the human capacity for change.

Viewed from this perspective, *Troilus and Criseyde,* she says, is his "most extended and most profound exploration of human changeability" (pp. 22-23), and she goes on to investigate the poem from this point of view, convincing us, for example, that "Criseyde's yielding to Diomede … ironically repeats and mirrors her yielding to Troilus" (p. 29). Human changeability, she asserts, is reflected positively in Criseyde's "pite" for Troilus, and negatively in the "slydynge of corage" which leads to her betrayal of him.

The chapter closes with a detailed analysis of the *Legend of Good Women,* a work that Professor Mann sees as more serious than is generally believed, and one which, for her, constitutes a "riposte to misogyny … adopting a sigle-mindedness and refusal of compromise which mirrors its own intransigence" (p. 32). The importance of the word "pite" is again invoked: "The word 'pite', together with its cognates and synonyms, is a leitmotiv in the *legend"* (p. 39), and there follows a suggestive discussion of the values of "pite" in this text. It is, for example, an emotion alien to the aggressive menfolk in these tales who are responsible for the two rapes and the three suicides which for Professor Mann are "indicative of Chaucer's wish to give emotional seriousness to his work by representing female suffering in its most extreme forms". (p. 44)

In her second chapter, the author focuses on the *Merchant's Tale* and the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* for her discussion of anti-feminism in Chaucer, not, however, before examining in some detail the most outstanding sources of the medieval tradition of anti-feminist literature: St. Jerome's *Against Jovinian,* Theophrastus's *Dissuasio,* Maltheolus's *Lamentations,* Deschamps's *Miroir de Mariage* and, especially interesting in the context of a "feminist reading", Heloise's dissuasion

against marriage as reported by Peter Abelard in his *Historia Calamitatum* (the fruit, however, of a very special set of circumstances), with all of which Chaucer would have been familiar. Thus Professor Mann sees the *Merchant's Tale* as a dramatised version of Theophrastus, although, of course, January has no real intention of being dissuaded from marriage. There is an illuminating discussion of the workings of the ironic mode in this tale, by means of which a double vision of marriage is displayed, and the quandary of the selfish male caught between "two stereotypes of woman -as purveyor of 'paradys terrestre' or purgatorial shrew' (p. 64) is amusingly evoked. The importance of the rôle played by Pluto and Proserpina in this tale is emphasised, Pluto, as Professor Mann delightfully puts it, being "probably the only example in literature of a hen-pecked rapist"! (p. 66), and this is followed by a convincing analysis of May's true character, she, like Proserpina, testifying "to the ability of women to look after themselves". (p. 69) When it comes to manipulating men, May is as resourceful as the Wife of Bath whose Prologue, it is suggested, was never intended to be an attempt on Chaucer's part to represent how women feel, but rather "the most extensive and unadulterated body of traditional anti-feminist commonplace in the whole of the *Canterbury Tales"* (p. 70), a contention which is then supported by confronting a series of the Wife's passages with their anti-feminist sources, the discussion concluding with the affirmation that the Wife of Bath uses "anti-feminist satire as a blunt instrument with which to beat her husbands into submission". (p. 78) The double structure of her tirade is underlined: "Within the speech of the Wife bullying her husbands, we can hear the speeches of countless husbands bullying their wives", (p. 79) and there is an illuminating analysis of the Jankin episode, ending with his surrendering of "maistrye", a topic which constitutes the subject of the following chapter, and, of course, which brings the Wife's tale to a conciliatory close.

The following chapter begins, precisely, with a detailed analysis of the Wife of Bath's tale, obviously a major exponent of the theme of the surrender of "maistrye" and a tale which Professor Mann gives reasons for believing can only be told as a fairy tale. There follows an interesting discussion of the ending of the tale which she interprets "as a visionary glimpse of mutuality in male-female relationships" (p. 92). This discussion leads naturally to an analysis of the same theme as it is developed in *Troilus* and in the *Franklin's Tale,* but not before the presentation of an insightful exploration of the theme of courtship, involving allusions to and exemplification from Dante, Andreas Capellanus and the *Pamphilus.* The question of who has the "maistrye" in *Troilus and Criseyde* is then examined in detail, and the conclusion is drawn that "love has dissolved everyday power structures and replaced them with his own", (p. 102) both lovers surrendering the "maistrye" by mutual accord.

This discussion likewise has illuminating things to say about the rôle played by Pandarus in the love-affair, and this latter is then explored within the context of marriage, as exemplified by the *Franklin's Tale* which reflects the same attitude of mutual respect and patience, "the male surrender of 'maistrye' is reciprocated by female fidelity and humility: Dorigen promises to be his 'humble trewe wyf' (p. 111), with, obviously, as Professor Mann points out, Chaucer's complete approval.

Patience is a key word in this chapter and its interpretation and scope are interestingly explored, not only with reference to the *Franklin's Tale,* but also to Chaucer's tale of Melibee, a tale which rarely receives such close critical attention. Translation though it may be, Professor Mann sees the tale as having "special authority by being told by Chaucer himself" (p. 121). Melibee, like the Arthurian knight and Arveragus, surrenders the "maistrye" to Prudence and harmony is

likewise achieved. The chapter closes with a suggestive evocation of Chaucer renouncing "authority over his literary creation":

> At the heart of his master-work he places a dramatised enactment of his own surrender of 'maistrye', both masculine and poetic. (p. 126)

The reference is to the Sir Thopas episode.

The fourth chapter focuses on the situation of the suffering woman as exemplified by Constance, Virginia and Griselda, and an interesting parallelism is established between women's submission to cruel, arbitrary men, and that of man's "thraldom" to God. There follow a profound exploration of the meaning of power at human or divine level, and a series of insightful comments on the aforementioned tales, involving, again, definitions within the Chaucerian texts of such abstractions as *suffering, power, pity* and *patience,* and, in the case of the *Clerk's Tale,* as investigation of the values of the word "ynogh", fruit of Professor Mann's earlier article on "Satisfaction and Payment in Middle English Literature', (1983).

In accordance with the importance conceded to reciprocity and mutual understanding between the sexes in Chapter Three, the final chapter of this book concentrates on Chaucer's conception of *men,* and, in particular, of those male characters she sees as "feminised heroes" because they possess the same qualities as the Chaucerian heroine: pity, self-control, adaptability, receptiveness, etc. A good example for her thesis is Troilus (skilfully contrasted with Pandarus's aggressive, assertive masculinity) who, of course, like so many mediaeval *heroines* is the victim of betrayal, and a case is made for a similar feminisation (though in different circumstances) of Mars *(Complaint)* and the Man in Black in *The Book of the Duchess*. The fullest development of "an ideal of feminised masculinity" (p. 171),

however, for Professor Mann, is Theseus in the *Knight's Tale* whose conquest of an Amazon queen "culminates not in enslavement but in a marriage" which "symbolises the union of masculinity and femininity in each partner". (p. 171) The author analyses again in detail the workings of pity and piteousness in the Duke, pointing out, for example, similarities with Dante's interpretation of *pietà* in the *Convivio,* and concluding that:

> 'Womanly pitee' does not mark a division between female and male; it is the highest virtue of the male hero. (p. 177)

The brief and objective Conclusion presents us with some examples (mainly in fabliau-tales) of traditional gender rôles being played in the *Canterbury Tales* -the miller in the *Reeve's Tale,* Chantecleer and Pertelote, the couple in the *Shipman's Tale,* but the purpose of this book is essentially to stress Chaucer's originality in "creating models of both female and male behaviour that erase traditional gender boundaries and dissolve the power-structures on which they rest" (p. 180). For this author, therefore, "A feminist reading of Chaucer needs … to recuperate Chaucer's careful integration of activity and passivity into a fully human ideal that erases male/female role divisions". (p. 185)

In a wry aside to her suggestive discussion of the relative values of activity and passivity, Professor Mann points out that "commitment to activity is … implicit in criticism itself", since critics tend to conceive of their task as that of "pinpointing … where and why things go wrong", (p. 184) but it would be difficult, I think, to adopt this approach to her convincing assessment of this "major subject of a major poet". This reader, at least, found herself actively *concurring* with the arguments and analyses set forth in this wise and objective study and constantly admiring the scholarship and the literary insight which

has gone into its making. One is only too sorry that the limits of the book (imposed, presumably, by the series it belongs to) did not permit discussion, as the author herself points out, of the Prioress and her tale, the *Book of the Duchess* and the *Parliament of Fowls,* and we can but hope that these "casualties" will be attended to by Professor Mann in the near future.

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GODDEN, MALCOLM & LAPIDGE, MICHAEL eds: *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991. 298 pp.

This book is an excellent guide which serves as an introduction to Anglo-Saxon literature for students and also for the specialist; and the reader will find suggestive ideas that will make him reflect about the literary facts of the Old English period, from the eighth century to the Norman Conquest.

It is known that Old English literature is made up of a body of texts written between approximately the eighth and eleventh centuries, but also it is necessary to see it as the "meeting point of two major cultural traditions". This idea has been perfectly captured by the editors of this book; consequently there is a series of chapters dedicated to Anglo-Saxon culture and language that serves as an introduction and epilogue, the rest of the studies centering on the analysis of the litera-

ture from these two perspectives: the Germanic-pagan tradition with its legends, its poetic technique, its beliefs and its conception of epic-heroic of life; and the Christian world with its Latin culture, its history, and its monotheistic and theocentric religion.

The readers of this book will not find a traditional history of Old English literature, like that of C. L. Wrenn, *A Study of Old English Literature,* (London, 1967) nor a critical history like that of S. B. Greenfield and D. G. Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature,* (New York and London, 1986), nor does it deal with a series of studies based on history, rhetoric, genre or other perspectives like that of K. Sisam, *Studies in the History of Old English Literature,* (Oxford, 1953)

This *History of Old English Literature* is a volume of fifteen works of eminent professors of Old English language and literature from the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, Canada, and Italy, in which the literature *offers us not only a mode of poetic expression, but a window into a different world of beliefs, myths, anxieties, and perspectives.* The work is divided in four parts: History, Language, Germanic themes, and Christian themes.

The Anglo-Saxon history forms two chapters, one on the society, the other about the culture; P. Wormald offers us a vision of Anglo-Saxon society and its relationship with the literature, in his work *Anglo-Saxon Society and its Literature;* and P. Landinara shows in her essay *The World of Anglo-Saxon Learning* the cultural world that develops in England after the arrival of the missionaries guided by Augustine of Canterbury, and the influence of the Christian culture which took place in the following centuries

There are three chapters that deal with the Anglo-Saxon language in its broadest meaning. H. Gneuss centers his work on the presentation of a brief, but precise grammar, to introduce students into the

complicated study of a synthetic language with emphasis on those characteristics that distinguish this older stage of the language from Modern English. As Gneuss points out, a knowledge of this language is convenient in order to understand and appreciate the literature of the Anglo-Saxon period. Donald G. Scragg studies the nature of the verse, its structure, and the rhetorical language that appears in Anglo-Saxon poetry. Janet Bately, in her work, *The Nature of Old English Prose,* analyses the nature of Anglo-Saxon prose and its dependency on the Latin models, on which it is based, in order to develop its topics and structures; at the same time she studies the didactic and moral perspective of the primitive English prose that has as its first writers King Alfred, Ælfric, and Wulfstan.

The literature, as a reflection of the Germanic society, is represented in the first place by R. Frank, *Germanic Legend in Old English Literature.* This essay shows how the Anglo-Saxons looked for their Germanic identity although it only appears reflected in brief fragments like *The Finnsburh fragment*, *Waldere, Widsith, Deor,* and *Beowulf*. But even though we only have a very small part of epic-verse, especially if we compare it with the religious poetry, these lines are sufficient to show that, *poets of Germanic legend conjured up for their contemporaries a magnificent, aristocratic descent, a proud history embodying current hopes and fears, a pleasant dream transmitting the desert of daily existence into a landscape rare and strange.* K. O'Brien O'Keeffe in his work, *Heroic Values and Christian Ethics,* studies the heroic values of the Germanic character and the Christian ethic centering this topic especially in *The Battle of Maldon*, and analyzes the ambiguity of the term, *ofermode,* that can be interpreted with a religious meaning of "pride" or with a heroic significance of "excessive courage", and he ends with this reflection: *The heroic idiom of the Battle of Maldon is anything but naive. Its use suggests at once admiration, nostalgia and*

regret - admiration for the greatness of a secular magnate, nostalgia for the heroism of a brighter day, and regret that such heroism makes death its companion.

John D. Niles centers his study on primitive popular beliefs, *Pagan Survivals and Popular Belief,* and in a brief form but with precision makes manifest the Germanic-pagan identity of certain texts such as *Beowulf* or *The Rune Poem,* and invites us to consider that *Rather than dismissing the pagan English as superstitious, we might consider them as possessed of animistic beliefs that in their essential features are well known among early and so-called primitive peoples of the world. The essence of animism is the belief that the world is alive in all its parts.*

The last work of this Germanic part is *Beowulf,* a study that the editors, with wise judgement, entrusted to Professor Fred C. Robinson, a great expert in the language and the literary style of this epic poem. The complexity of this piece is resolved with great mastery and clarity as Robinson is conscious that the work is for students, this, however, does not prevent him from showing us, once again, his erudition and precision in the analysis of an Anglo-Saxon text, and from pointing out how to read a Germanic, barbaric epic as *All in the poem is measured and carefully weighed, from the grandest speech or action to the smallest syllable.*

The last part of this book shows the importance of the great transience that the Christian religion had in the culture and in the Anglo-Saxon literature. J. B. Trachern, in his study, *Fatalism and the Millenium,* shows us the great preoccupation of the Anglo-Saxon society towards the end of the millenium. The *"wyrd",* pagan destiny, and the *"metod",* Christian destiny, play an important role in all of the Anglo-Saxon literature as is shown here and that consequently will be reflected in the Old English texts. C. Fell analyses in *Perceptions of*

Transience, the Anglo-Saxon elegies. The author points out that the elegies combine the Germanic and the Christian traditions, but puts special emphasis on the tradition of Christian Latin writers and in the influence of these in the texts of elegies. M. Mcgatch, continuing with his traditional topic of religious influence in Anglo-Saxon literature, shows us in his work that the Anglo-Saxons considered this life as a transit to eternity. In *Perception of Eternity,* Gatch analyses *The Judgement Day* and makes various allusions to

> The Dream of the Rood and The Phoenix in order to show his thesis: for many Anglo-Saxons there was light and clarity about the future. They could describe in vivid detail and after life in which the soul was separated from the body and journeyed to rest or torment. And beyond that they could depict the eventual return of Christ, the resurrection of all the bodies to be reunited with their souls and the last judgement, inaugurating the eternal reign of God with the saints.

M. Godden begins his chapter with this sentence: *The Old Testament ... captured the Anglo-Saxon imagination in some unexpected ways ...* and this is what he proposes to show throughout his work. According to Godden, the biblical poems are a sample of the interest that existed among the Anglo-Saxons for this type of literature, but also the author reminds us of the allegorical value of all these works, *for the Anglo-Saxons the Old Testament was a veiled way of talking about their own situation ... often the Old Testament offered them a means of considering and articulating the ways in which kingship, politics and warfare related to the rule of God.*

B. Roux studies the influence of the *New Testament* in some poems of Cynewulf and his school in Christ I, II and III as well as in *The*

Dream of the Rood, and concludes by saying *They are not stories about Christ's life, but meditations on salvation history, designed to show the significance of the gospel events for those who read or hear them.*

The work of M. Lapidge *The Saintly life in Anglo-Saxon England* shows us the philosophy of the concept of the saint in the Anglo-Saxon world. The allusion that Lapidge makes to the process of the sanctification of St. Swithun and St. Æthelwold teaches us a relevant aspect for the understanding of Anglo-Saxon hagiography as a literary genre, its importance and diffusion. The broad Anglo-Latin erudition of Lapidge is a guarantee for this study where he puts emphasis on the fact that

> Saints were therefore a much more prominent aspect of Anglo-Saxon spirituality than they could conceivably be in a modern, mechanized society. The cumbersome apparatus for knowing them and appealing to them … was an urgent necessity in an age when other kinds of spiritual comfort were few. If we would understand the spiritual universe of the Anglo-Saxons, therefore, we must learn to understand that apparatus.

In conclusion, few books of Anglo-Saxon literature unite a number of such relevant professors and essays as in this work, whose purpose is expressed in the prologue: *The collection aims to provide. orientation and guidance for those approaching the study of all Old English literature for the first time.* But in these studies there are also new ideas that open new roads to other interpretations, and in any case, this book will enrich our knowledge of a literature distant only in time.

Certainly this book does not need to be recommended, the prestige as professors and scholars of its editors, M. Godden and M. Lapidge,

as of all the contributors to this book is a total guarantee of the value. Without any doubt, we have before us one of the best books about Anglo-Saxon Literature that has been written from a didactic perspective.

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PATTERSON, LEE: *Chaucer and the Subject of History*. London, Routledge, 1991. xiv+489 pp.

Professor Lee Patterson offers a challenging reading of Chaucer. It appears to be distilled from the historical scholarship condensed over the last two centuries, as well as the author's own work on the subject at least since 1976, the date of the earliest of his articles now collected. The book is also rooted in the latest developments in medieval literary historicism, to which the author has also contributed his *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1987), and, as he declares in the introduction, it belongs to the decade in which Margaret Thatcher said that "there is no such thing as society, only individuals exist". A recent title like *The Disenchanted Self: Representing the Subject in the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1990), by H. Marshall Leicester Jr, also comes to mind.

There is, of course, no novelty in exploring the historicity of Chaucer's works. A. J. P. Taylor wrote that "True history began with Sir Walter Scott", even though *Ivanhoe,* he added, "is simply lay figure in fancy dress", rather than a convincing picture of the Middle Ages. In turn, G. M. Trevelyan's *English Social History: A Survey of Six Centuries from Chaucer to Queen Victoria* suggests that English social history actually began with Chaucer. The opinion of both historians, widespread among many others, echoes the one expressed by *The Retrospective Review*, whose editor Henry Southern (possibly the author of this anonymous essay) was a Chaucerian enthusiast, in 1823:

> indeed, works of imagination, when its higher attributes are employed upon local scenes and contemporary subjects, are frequently more instructive than the most elaborate pages of history.

Yet Chaucer obviously did more than reflect contemporary scenes, as Patterson shows. The tenth anniversary issue of the journal *Literature and History*, created in 1975 with the intent of providing a forum for the discussion of such a linkage, includes an article about "The Uses of Literature in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Historiography", whose conclusion is that "Historians are unable to come to grips with the past as it is embodied in the texture -that is, in the language and structure- of a piece of literature as a whole." To a writer who is acutely aware of the relevance of the speaking subject and his language to the content of his narrative, local colour and historical realism are relatively insignificant. By analysing not only the historical background, but also the "texture" of Chaucer's key works, Patterson is able to demonstrate precisely this: that rather than merely recording historical detail Chaucer presents history working. In other words, he shows how history was written and spoken in his own time,

along with what Patterson calls "the irreductible selfhood that constitutes the essence of human life."

In fact, Patterson's argument is twofold. It seems that he chose a deliberately ambiguous title for his book, since it is both about *the subject in history*, i. e., the ways in which Chaucer presents the individual in the process of constructing a self-defined historical identity, and about *history as a subject,* i. e., Chaucer's own view of history. Something more fortuitous, I dare point out, is an accidental but happy resemblance between Patterson's book as it stands and the *Canterbury Tales,* for the collection of articles was also made of separate pieces which were progressively assembled into a unified work. Probably some of the earliest articles were written before the idea of the book had taken shape (in fact the earliest dated article provides the basis for the last chapter), and then, when it did, they were adapted to fit the pattern of those which were more consciously written to be collected. However noticeable may still be the fragmentary origin of the book in minor details, the final effect is one of completeness. Even if "Chaucer's plenty" is, of course, not analysed in all its aspects with the same attention, just as not all the fourteenth-century social types are represented in the *Tales,* Patterson's choice is representative enough.

As the American scholar says to justify why his final chapter should deal with the Pardoner, his selection of Chaucer's works for analysis is "at once arbitrary and inevitable." Five out of the eight chapters of the book focus on the *Canterbury Tales,* and particularly on those tales in which the ideology or the subjectivity of the teller are most dramatically projected, because it is in them that the object of study, "the mutual construction of history and subjectivity", becomes most evident. The first two chapters, which are mainly centred on *Anelida and Arcite* (a bold attempt to give proper assessment to a work generally neglected) and *Troilus and Criseyde* but also refer to

the rest of Chaucer's earlier works, lead directly to the interpretation, in Chapter 3, of *The Knight's Tale*. Thus the first of the *Tales* is approached mainly in terms of the recurrent pattern of Theban history as explained in the previous chapters, a violent pattern which the Knight, as an ideal member of the fourteenth-century aristocracy, tries to conceal behind a shield of heraldry but actually exposes. What Patterson calls "Thebanness", a destructive recursiveness of fraticidal rivalry, is seen as a recurrent topos underlying Chaucer's sense of history throughout his works, and it gives unity and a remarkable cogency to his study. Chapter 4, which is the briefest and the weakest one, presents the *Legend of Good Women* as Chaucer's conclusive reaction against courtly values. Hence it is merely functional as a bridge to the general idea behind the *Tales*, and consistent with the poet's probable chronology of composition. Finally, the remaining four chapters look into the key parts of Chaucer's masterpiece: *The Miller's Tale*, *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*, the *Merchant's* and *Shipman's* tales, and *The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale*. The intertextuality of the last one with some medieval interpretations of the Judas, Cain and Oedipus legends recalls once again the repressed temporal recursion that Theban history was seen to symbolize, bringing the argument of the book full circle.

The treatment of the Miller and the function of his tale suggests that the ideology of the 1381 Rising was possibly much closer to Chaucer's concern than is indicated in his purely passing allusion to the shrill shouting of "Jakke Straw and his meyne" in *The Nun's Priest's Tale* (incidentally, one of Chaucer's major works in which Patterson finds no use at all, for he does not mention it even once). In principle I find it hard to see the Miller actually staging "a political program that turns against the governing classes (…) its own instruments of ideological control", or that a miller could be regarded as a member of the peasant class (Patterson himself doubts it), but the

amount of evidence that this chapter provides about the involvement of millers in the Rising and their contemporary representations as leaders of the peasantry makes Patterson's political interpretation very stimulating. Moreover, this view is supported by the work of M. M. Postan, Georges Duby and many other modern historians who have proved that the class that really threatened the aristocracy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was not the bourgeoisie, as both Whig historians and those Patterson calls "neo-Smithian Marxists" assumed for over a century, but the prosperous peasantry.

Patterson, therefore, deploys compellingly the vast width of literary and historical information that a task like his demands. Other notable examples are his digressions in the third chapter about the importance of heraldry and astrology for the self-representation of the aristocracy, who depended for their very existence on symbols more than any other class, or that about confessional literature in the last chapter. In each case, as happens with the prologues of some of Chaucer's tales, what seemed an excursus on the part of the author is eventually revealed as central to the ultimate target of study, that is, "Chaucer's constitution as a poet" and "as a man at once in and out of history." Thus the argument of *Chaucer and the Subject of History* is constructed forcefully, positing a plausible interpretation of the evolution of Chaucer's attitude to his society through the subject living in it, and dutifully reminding us that the poet's position between his service at noble households, the squirearchy and the middle classes, fitted him for a privileged understanding of social representations.

The greatest strength of the book probably lies in the close connections it makes between history, social class and the language that produces it. These are, as stated above, the connections historians disregard when they use the *Tales*. The assumption that the Miller has a political mind to destroy the official view of secular history championed by the Knight helps Patterson to explain "the triumph of the sub-

ject" in Chaucer's collection. However, the Miller does not really try to establish a new social order (hence Patterson's assertion that he has a "political program" goes too far; in fact, perhaps as far as it would go to say that the 1381 Rising had one), he just opens up the repressive control of aristocratic history so that the flaunting subjectivity of the Wife of Bath, here seen as socially indetermined, may be released, together with that of the bourgeois Merchant, whose "instability of social identity" (since, unlike the Church and the Court, the bourgeoisie lacked an institutionalized form of discourse) also precipitates "an ideology of the subject." While the Wife of Bath and the Merchant have to borrow their discourse from other classes, or use the inelegant idiom of the market-place, the Pardoner possesses the sophisticated language of the Church. Yet even this does not prevent him from falling into the despair inherent in "the gap between self-representation and self-presence", for, as Patterson insists, the confession always fails to fulfil its promise of restoring the penitent to the original wholeness that man lost through sin.

The Pardoner is not just a hypocritical, impenitent sinner; more importantly, he is regarded as an allegory of the human condition, suffering from the same "Oedipal privations" as the Old Man in his tale, who knocks Mother Earth in vain with his (phallic) stick for admission, while the murderous revellers stage once again the pattern of Theban history. This Freudian interpretation, as it was made relevant to language by Jacques Lacan, and then to history by deconstruction, fits Patterson's historicist analysis admirably. Thus the Pardoner is seen as using "alienated language" of "the fallen world of history", in which meanings are forever deferred, and so unstable that "collions" and "relikes" can be synonyms for all he may care for, in his castrating despair. The original meaning, the purity of historical origins, is never reached, just as, one is tempted to add, the pilgrims never reach Canterbury in Chaucer's world of mutable history. In short, Patterson

puts to work Lacanian and Derridean theories to prove the effect of "the Chaucerian fascination with origins, and especially with origins imagined in terms of the Theban legend." The Theban hermeneutics of betrayal and destruction leading only to endless repetition is also a symbol of the limitations of language, which never reaches a transcendental signified. However, it is precisely "in and through language" -in the words of Benveniste that Patterson quotes- "that the subject constitutes itself", that is, as historicists old and new would agree, his history.

Hopefully a lame summary like the one preceding will suffice to account for the nature of Patterson's achievement. All Chaucerians will profit from his study, and so will all students of fourteenth-century culture. The book, being abreast with modern literary criticism and medieval historiography, performs a major stage in the extension of the New Historicism from Renaissance to Medieval Studies, a trend already witnessed in his own edition of *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain 1380-1530* (Berkeley: California Univ. Press, 1990). It is both sophisticated and clear in the points it makes. It will, I believe, bequeath to Medieval English Studies at least the memorable concept of "Thebanness", and a powerful notion of the Chaucerian subject and its relation to the historicized speech that makes it up. As the author on the basis of his historicist principles modestly recognises, this is "very much a book of the 1980s." Yet it is one that leaves a definitive impression. Whatever we make of Chaucer's view of history in the 1990s, it will be an expansion of this book and the scholarship in which it is rooted.

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BURNLEY, DAVID: *The History of the English Language. A Source Book*. London, Longman, 1992. xvii+373 pp. (Paper £ 11.99).

This publication is a new tool for the student who is supposed to follow an introductory course in the history of English. Very little else has appeared in this special field of English applied historical linguistics since T. Pyles and J. Algeo published their *Origins and Development of the English Language* (1964). But for such an introductory course I assume that we are to conceive the use of this work in conjunction with a series of more detailed textbooks as Dr. Burnley's *The History of the English Language* is really what it declares itself to be: a *Source Book* .

The book is divided in five sections which correspond to five conceptual and chronological periods in the history of the English Language: Old English (700-1100), Early Middle English (1100-1300), Later Middle English (1300-1500), Early Modern English (1500-1800) and Modern English (1800-1920). Each section is devoted to a different span of time: the first section covers four hundred years, sections two and three two hundred years each; section four, four hundred years and section five just one hundred and twenty years. Each section includes an introduction of similar extension summarizing the main characteristics of the period but all the sections contain a different number of texts, as we are to find seven Old English ones, eight Early and eight Later Middle English, sixteen Early Modern English, and ten Modern English texts. If we are to consider both Early and Later Middle English within the more extensive name of Middle English, then it is obvious that this book is concerned primarily with Middle and Early Modern English. Every section presents the

same arrangement: a brief prologue to the texts selected, then the texts themselves and finally they are followed by explanatory notes.

The short introduction to each of the periods surveyed in *The History of the English Language* comprehends short explanations about graphemics, phonology, morphology and lexicology. Syntax is treated only occasionally, however we can see that some texts are especially devoted to it: text 5, Ælfric's *De Temporibus Anni* is just one good example. As an instance of the topics covered in the first introductory sections, we may mention several in the Old English part: thus the odd letters are listed (thorn, eth, yoght, ash, wynn), then we find some notes on the differences between the strong and weak conjugations, the strong and weak declensions of nouns, definite and indefinite declension of adjectives, and finally the main features of composition and derivation of the Old English lexicon.

But there is more to be added: one of the best points of *The History of the English Language* is that its author combines in his commentaries and notes historical, palaeographic, literary, social and other commentaries, and therefore the book is extremely rich in the possibilities that it offers to its readers. This is uncommon in source books of any nature, and it is a remarkable achievement of Dr. Burnley's that he has paid special attention to poetic language, verse characteristics and poetic diction, as in texts 6 and 7 (Brunanburh and Maldon), to authorial and rhetorical procedures in text 9 (Ormulum), or to morphonological variation and legal style in text 13 (the 1258 Proclamation of Henry III).

We can note as well that the texts selected and commented in the book seem to follow a chronological order in every section of the volume. They also follow the principle of representing regional and social variation whenever possible.

Section 1 in the book deals with Old English. It defines an ample concept. And actually it also incorporates some definitive opinions such as the following one (p. 1):

> Apart from the runic alphabet, which had been used in earlier Germanic society for inscriptions on all kinds of objects, from weapons to standing stones, the earliest speakers of English, despite artistic skills evident in archeological discoveries like those at Sutton Hoo and from Kentish cemeteries, were both pagan and illiterate.

Though one may share Dr. Burnley's appreciations, it might be slightly preposterous to consider whether being unlettered might have been an acceptable term to describe the earliest speakers of English during the historical period covered in the discussion (Old English: 700-1100), as what we can precisely conclude from archaeological evidence is that the Anglo-Saxons were not illiterate: inscriptions are what remains, but an awful lot has surely been lost. On the other hand being pagan was no doubt something highly undesirable for Christian writers during the Anglo-Saxon era, but I wonder whether it would be so any longer. In any case the pagans alluded to by Dr. Burnley have very little to do with the educated classical pagans from whom all Western education ultimately derives. This reversal of values is worth some consideration, as illiterate people still constitute a significant majority of the world's population today, whereas true pagans are significantly scarce in our times.

We may note some minor errata in the book. For instance, on p. 3 the Neuter *'pæm feorran lande'* may be *'pæµm feorran lande'* a macron on *pæµm-* (Campbell § 708); on p. 4: Neuter *an* forms are also printed without the macron: *aµn* (Campbell §§ 682-683). Andwe can also point out that throughout the book we find typographical

problems: some letters in the Times Roman and Times Italic fonts lead to confusion, as, for instance, 'æ' appears to look like *œ,* whereas in other occasions it is printed as *æ*.

The first part of the Old English section opens with a set of dialectal samples (Vespasian Psalter and Lindisfarne Gospel glosses) which though they are the earliest examples of Old English in the book, might have been placed at the end of the section on account of their difficulty. That sequence may allow much freedom to the user of the book as it is not compulsory to read through the texts in their actual order, but one has to assume that the numbering of the texts constitutes a guide to the reading procedure. It is also surprising that in text 3 'Cædmon' -really Bede on Cædmon- the author has not placed the different extant versions of the hymn and further dialectal evidence in Old English.

Then follows text 2, an excerpt from the MS Hatton version of King Alfred's *Cura Pastoralis* including a facsimile of fol. 1v that the author uses for a very intelligent introduction to palaeographical problems, and a side-by-side translation of the same. This translation is missing in the case of the two texts under 1, and I wonder whether most contemporary students of English would be able either to read competently the original Latin version or to recognize the Biblical passages under consideration. A translation, just as those included for texts 2 to 17, should have been incorporated.

The disposition of the translations might be considered awkward: the original texts appear on the even pages of the book whereas translations are printed on the odd pages. Theoretically, as this is a source book of the history of the English language, it would not be unlikely to think that the emphasis should be placed first on the texts themselves rather than on their commentary. This is precisely the author's practice throughout the book, as in its discourse the disposition

of the textual evidence is preceded by a short introduction, and then the text itself is followed by notes printed in smaller type. There is also no evident justification for such translations to stop at text 17 (The Pearl), as for instance the commonly edited sample from Thomas Wilson's *The Arte of Retorique* (text 24) including the 'Inkhorne Letter', may call for a modern rendering as well.

In this same sense one may also ask why on pp. 20-21 the principle that modernizes *Ælfred kyning* to *King Alfred* has not been applied to *WæferÍ* (Weferth, even Waeferth?). In this text we also find that *Angelcynn* has been transformed into *England* without further commentary.

Section 2 starts on p. 63 with a review of sound and form changes from Old English to Middle English and with a series of reflections on Scandinavian and French influences together with an account of the problems and variety in the spelling. Changes that occurred before the Norman conquest are also discussed (p. 65). The texts selected span from the *Chronicle* entries for 1127 and (of course) 1137 (number 8) to *Kyng Alisaunder* (number 15). They include the *Ormulum, Vices and Virtues* -a work that would be worth editing anew as the EETS volumes edited by F. Holthausen in 1888 are incomplete and out of date-, *Ancrene Wisse,* a Kentish Sermon, a royal *Proclamation* by Henry III, and a Bodleian MS Laud 108 sample of *The South English Legendary.*

The third part of *A History of the English Language* deals with Later Middle English. The author discusses first the intensity and extent of the influence of Norman and Central French on the English lexicon, and then explores the effects of Chancery English and early printed texts -mainly Caxton's- in the creation of a standardized literary language. Chaucer, Lydgate and Skelton are presented as three consecutive pillars in the establishing of a model. Dr. Burnley also in-

corporates ideas on the consequences of the expansion of education for a social standard. However, one may wonder about the exact meaning to be derived from a statement like this (p. 135):

> During the century [15th c.] many grammar schools were founded, and although universities existed in Britain only in Oxford, Cambridge, St. Andrews and Glasgow, the proportion of young men who attended them was relatively high, so that proficiency in Latin was more widespread among the lay population than ever before.

particularly as the author continues his line of thought in the following way (p. 135):

> Familiarity with Latin among a potential audience contributed to the development of later fifteenth-century prose and poetry.

The texts in this section are very useful, and again, one must point out the wise combination of traditional samples: *Pearl*, Chaucer, Paston Letters, Malory, together with original ones: Robert Mannyng's *Chronicle,* Wycliffite writings, Skelton as a representative of aureate prose, and, chiefly, Bokenham's *Mappula Angliæ.*

Section 4 is the most considerable one in the book. The author introduces an account of the many 16th century controversies: purists and conservative speakers against those who borrow at will; chaucerisms, inkhorn terms and rhetoric patterns; also some linguistic landmarks such as Cawdrey's *Dictionary;* all are interspersed in the general issue of the reflection of grammarians on the English language and their different programs of standardization. The main Early Modern English grammatical points analysed are 3rd person pronouns, 3rd person verbal endings and the uses and abuses of auxiliary do. Two other recent publications may complete (and compete) with *A History of the English Language* in these aspetcs: the English translation of Manfred Görlach's *Einführung ins*

Frühneuenenglische (1991), and Gert Ronberg's *A Way with Words. The language of English Renaissance literature* (1992).

The texts illustrating Early Modern English comprise samples from Thomas Wilson's *Rhetorique* and Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie,* from the *Diary* of Henry Machyn, the correspondence between Elizabeth I and James I, between Lady Brilliana Harley and her relatives, and by Fanny Burney. To these we must add texts by more literary names: Lyly, Nashe, Shakespeare, Dekker, Donne, Milton, Pope, Defoe and Johnson. We may cast a critical eye on a couple of controversial points in this section. On p. 210 there is a note to line 19 in text 25, where we read:

> **my lord Russell ys sune** The genitive inflexion *-ys* [OE *-es]* has become a syntactical marker of possession which may be attached to groups. It is sometimes erroneously interpreted as the genitive third-person pronoun.

One may question a) whether the genitive inflexion is really *-ys* or just merely *-s.* And also b) whether we can dismiss as easily as Dr. Burnley does the possibility of interpreting *ys* in *lord Russell ys sune* and similar -and extremely abundant- expressions as that genitive third-person pronoun because, although infrequent, that genitive expression also appears headed by *her* and *their.* These 'dative' constructions are also normally repudiated by most 16th century grammarians, which may be further proof of their widespread use. We may also quote that Ben Jonson condemns it in his *Grammar,* though the title of *Sejanus* appeared in print as *Sejanus* ***His*** *Fall.*

Section 5, Modern English (1800-1920) finally presents a view of the rise and spread of English worldwide. The Industrial Revolution and its educational and social consequences seem to have triggered the establishing of a definitive social standard by means of the prescriptive tradition defended by Public Schools. RP and BBC English

are contrasted with the concepts of Non-standard and Sub-standard, and Dr. Burnley also provides a very illuminating description of former (historical) uses of words while he examines the *Oxford English Dictionary* and its evolution: this is especially well expanded by texts 44 and 45. English overseas, and specifically, American English, are treated sparingly. Texts in this section are assorted once more: Carlyle illustrates Modern Euphuism; Dickens, popular dialect; Emily Brontë and D. H. Lawrence, regional dialect; Darwin, scientific prose; Henry Sweet, the study of languages; some letters, colloquial English of different social registers. And at last, text 49 is a whole diachronic review of English by means of Biblical examples.

A section listing references and background reading finishes the book. This is possibly the weakest part of the book: I expected further information on available critical editions of the texts in the work, as that information does not appear in the introduction or notes to each of them. Such bibliographical sources are only testimonial here. I also expected to find at least one complete and comprehensive grammar handbook for each section, in the same way as A. Campbell's *Old English Grammar* is quoted for the Old English part. In the Middle English section we fin R. Jordan's *Handbook of Middle English Grammar: Phonology,* and T. Mustanoja's incomplete *Middle English Syntax,* but morphology and lexicology manuals are not represented. This is even more evident in the Early Modern English and Modern English sections. It is possible though that we are to understand that the references under the heading 'General' are to be considered as 'background reading' and then that the other sections are references quoted in the book or used by the author.

Many readers will have mixed feelings about *The History of English Language. A Source Book:* it could have been more ambitious, but we must also agree that its author has fully achieved the aim he declares (p. x):

> A source book does not try to usurp the role of a fully explanatory and discursive history of the language, nor replace the information and advice which can be offered to the student by a teacher. It seeks only to make conveniently available to students and teachers alike a resource which can be used to illustrate the development, and something of the variety, of the English language used in Britain through nearly thirteen centuries.

That he has achieved, and we can add indeed that 'soplice he lærde, swilce he anweald hæfde, and na swa swa hiera boceras and sundorhalgan.'

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BURRROW, JOHN & TURVILLE-PETRE, THORLAC: *A Book of Middle English.* Oxford, B. Blackwell, 1992. xii+303 pp. (Paper £ 12.95, Hardback £ 30.00).

A Book of Middle English, as its authors state in the Preface, has been designed as a companion to Bruce Mitchell and Fred Robinson's popular and widely used *A Guide to Old English,* whose 5th edition has also appeared this year (Blackwell, 1992). They also declare that their book is not to be thought of as a comprehensive introductory course to Middle English, as it should be read in conjunction with an edition of Chaucer. *A Book of Middle English* is really more a natural successor than a mere companion, and it is a most welcome volume because it provides not just a much needed handbook for beginners, but also an enjoyable textbook for teachers of Middle English.

The book seems to have been designed as an introductory and self-sufficient undergraduate course to provide a panorama of Middle English language and literature, and this, no doubt, it achieves remarkably well. However, one is tempted to point out that its prices are a cause for reflection. This is a most important setback for a volume that should become a set text: the paper edition is not notably inexpensive (£ 12.92), and the hardback edition is considerably overpriced (£30.00), as for instance one may buy at a cheaper cost the classic *Handbook of Middle English* by F. Mossé (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, £ 24.00). One may also assume that libraries and institutions might consider buying paper copies and then rebinding them in cloth: this is considerably less expensive than buying the original hardback from Blackwell's. From the student's and the institutional points of view the paper edition is especially interesting as its ten

gatherings are well sewn, and the book is not particularly prone to come to pieces easily.

Burrow and Turville-Petre have adopted a traditional division for their *Book of Middle English:* a grammatical introduction, the anthology of texts -including their notes-, and a glossary. In this they conform to the disposition of the series started by *A Guide to Old English.*

The first part of the book is then subdivided into an introduction to the concept, periods and varieties of Middle English (both temporal and regional varieties), followed by an explanation of Middle English sounds, lexicon, inflexions and syntax. Here the order is not so conventional, as many other handbooks tend to present their chapters on vocabulary after they have discussed the morphological points under consideration. We shall come back to this section below. There is also an excellent chapter reviewing Middle English metre (section 6, pp. 56-61). It is concise and to the point, and it will be very well received both by students and teachers of Mediæval English literature.

The volume also includes a most important section (chapter 7, pp. 62-64) discussing the edition of MSS Middle English Texts and editing these for students. This revealing discussion benefits from the extensive experience of the authors' past editorial work and from their formidable learning. They explain their transcription procedures, their 'fairly typical' editorial problems (p. 63), and illustrate the difficulties and responsibilities that editors are confronted with. They also conclude this chapter with a very honest proof of the most important intellectual predicaments that editors and authors of Old and Middle English have to undergo when preparing a joint effort: discussion and independence of opinion. This is especially rewarding for students who should be encouraged to discuss Middle English data or any other

following a similar and parallel methods. The challenging question of punctuation is their final commitment (p. 64):

> Since the two present editors do not agree on this matter, and since in any case issues would not have been as clear-cut for a medieval reader or listener, we have adopted in our text a light and non-committal punctuation.

It would have been an interesting idea to advance in the first introductory pages some of the reflexions presented and developed in section 7, as the correct comprehension of the authors' editorial principles and their discussion are extremely important and noteworthy.

A select bibliography (section 8, pp. 65-70) completes the initial matters. The bibliography, though, presents gaps that one has to attribute to the comprehensive and preparatory nature of the volume. However, everything that a beginner may need for further study is recorded and commented with great care.

Part Two: Prose and Verse Texts presents 14 texts representing an ample perspective and covering a wide span of periods and dialects that range from traditional ones such as the *Chronicle* entry for 1137 (pp. 73-78) -that one may also find in Hall (1920: 6-8), Dickins & Wilson (1951: 3-6), Mossé (1952: 133-135), or Bennet & Smithers (1961: 207-210)- or *The Owl and the Nightingale, Sir Gawain,* etc. to others of greater rarity whose interest is especially enhanced by this book, as they are texts not usually available in other handbooks and anthologies: such are for example the passages from *The Cloud of Unknowing* (pp. 130-138), Trevisa's *Dialogue between a Lord and a Clerk* (pp. 213-220) and The York Play of the Crucifixion (pp. 249-259). Editors always have to choose between their own likes and dislikes and what we may call set texts -i.e. those appearing in most selections. One may say that a remarkably even result has been

achieved by Burrow and Turville-Petre in their options, though absences are also evident: no chancery texts are offered, and the balance between prose and verse is much in favour of poetry.

Every Middle English anthology must have an end and its limits and purposes should be subject to a plan as careful and thorough as the one observed by the authors of *A Book of Middle English.* In this respect we must praise the authors' sensible placement of illustrative notes together with the text they refer to: this avoids the irritation of the reader who is otherwise forced to turn several pages on and then search for the appropriate notes at considerable loss of time and effort whenever a difficulty is found.

Careful textual notes and a comprehensive glossary that 'aims to include all words that might cause difficulty to the reader, but explanations in the notes are not repeated here' (p. 265), complete the volume. We have found that the glossary may also be used with other texts not included in *A Book of Middle English* which present a similar extension and difficulty, and this makes it even more valuable.

Several points might have been further discussed. For instance, the concept of Middle English that the authors introduce on page 3 is vague from the chronological point of view as they do not state clearly their *termina,* although they seem to favour 1100/1150 and 1450/1500. They appear to base their discussion on the tradition established by the 19th century German Philologists, but they list Bennet & Smithers *Early Middle English Verse and Prose,* and one would feel inclined to assume that then they would establish a difference between Early and Late Middle English, which they do not -at least in a straightforward way. There is also a significant omission in their discussion as the principles established by Bruce Dickins and R. M. Wilson in their *Early Middle English Texts* (1951: 136), seem to underlie the ideas found on pp. 3-4 of *A Book of Middle English* and

this source is not included in their 'Select Bibliography'. Although Burrow and Turville-Petre later expand their reasons and justification for the concept of Middle English (p. 6) which appears to be implied in this book, but is never made explicit, and they allude to the need of differentiating between Early and Late Middle English, they do not provide a definition of of these concepts. They even say that (p. 6):

> The texts represented in this book span a period of about 250 years, and even in the Middle Ages 250 years was a long time.

Actually, if text 1 would represent the state of English about 1137 and text 14 may represent a mid 15th century stage (cca 1450), the span covers more than 300 years, and though there is an implicit agreement with their *terminus a quo* (1450/1500), it seems irregular to devote a section to the varieties of Middle English which deals first with regional dialects and then with the chronological aspects, rather than determining first the span and scope of the corpus and then defining it as the authors happen to imply.

The presentation of the regional variation of their texts is much more convincing and their map (p. 7) is an excellent way of presenting them to the reader: it is actually much clearer than Mossé's lists (1952: 2-4). However, Section 2 in the first part (Pronouncing Middle English), is clearly inferior in detail to other Middle English handbooks. Burrow and Turville-Petre share with some other authors a primary description of 14th century English phonology rather than that of the whole Middle English period they have established (1100/1150-1450/1500). C. Jones' *A History of English Phonology* may prove a valuable complement in these aspects

Section 3 (Vocabulary) is much more accurate and thoroughly enjoyable. It will help to attract many students who would otherwise have thought that Middle English had little to do with their own lan-

guage. It is section 3 and sections 4 (Inflexions) and 5 (Syntax) that form the core of the grammatical introduction to Middle English and together with the introduction where we may find the best and most interesting work of the book. For instance, the explanation (p. 20) of what is an inflectional system is extraordinarily well illustrated, and even the most obtuse mind will be able to understand at once what inflexions are and what are their uses.

Various detailed paragraphs on some especial difficulties of Middle English such as Noun inflexions: Early Southern Texts (p. 22), the Indefinite Article (p. 28), etc. are particularly gratifying. The same could be said about their careful explanation of syntactic problems: the use of pou/pe (p. 41); the expression of indefiniteness (pp. 41-42); shall and will (p. 46); or word order (pp. 52-53).

On the whole *A Book of Middle English* is an excellent textbook that will be listed immediately in all bibliographies for students of Middle English. It is a useful and enjoyable book, and its authors, I think, should be proud to have contributed in the direction of the statement of the *Dominus* in Trevisa's *Dialogue* (p. 214) : 'Speche ys no¥t yknowe bote ¥if hyt be lurned.'

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