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London Literature, 1300–1380

English literary culture in the fourteenth century was vibrant and expanding. Its focus, however, was still strongly local, not national. This study examines in detail the literary production from the capital before, during, and after the time of the Black Death. In this major contribution to the field, Ralph Hanna charts the development and the generic and linguistic features particular to London writing. He uncovers the interactions between texts and authors across a range of languages and genres: not just Middle English, but also Anglo-Norman and Latin; not just romance, but also law, history, and biblical commentary. Hanna emphasises the uneasy boundaries legal thought and discourse shared with historical and 'romance' thinking, and shows how the technique of romance, Latin writing associated with administrative culture, and biblical interests underwrote the great pre-Chaucerian London poem, William Langland's *Piers Plowman*.

RALPH HANNA is Professor of Palaeography at the University of Oxford and Tutorial Fellow in English at Keble College, Oxford.

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For the old people
Rosa Hirshfeld-Fries
and
R. N. Hanau

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Abbreviations

- Age*: *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200–1400*, ed. Jonathan Alexander and Paul Binski. London: Royal Academy, 1987.
- Apoc*: *An English Fourteenth Century Apocalypse Version*, ed. Elis Fridner, Lund Studies in English 29. Lund: Gleerup, 1961.
- Beves*: *The Romance of Sir Beves of Hamtoun*, ed. Eugen Kölbing, EETS es 46, 48, 65 (1885–94).
- BRUO: Emden, A. B. *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford*, 3 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957–9.
- Cavanaugh: Cavanaugh, Susan H. 'A Study of Books Privately Owned in England: 1300–1450', 2 vols. Unpub. University of Pennsylvania Ph.D. diss., 1980.
- Comp*: *The Middle English Complaint of Our Lady and Gospel of Nicodemus*, ed. C. William Marx and Jeanne F. Drennan, Middle English Texts 19. Heidelberg: Winter, 1987.
- Digby 86: *Facsimile of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 86*, ed. Judith Tschann and M. B. Parkes, EETS ss 16 (1996).
- GEC: C[ockayne], G[eorge] E., rev. Vicary Gibbs. *The Complete Peerage*, 12 vols. in 13. London: St Catherine's, 1910–59.
- Glanvill: *The treatise on the laws and customs of the realm of England commonly called Glanvill*, ed. G. D. G. Hall. London: Nelson, 1965.
- Guy*: *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, ed. Julius Zupitza, EETS es 42, 49, 59 (1883–91).

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- IMEV: Brown, Carleton, and Rossell H. Robbins (eds.). *The Index of Middle English Verse*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1943. With Robbins and John L. Cutler (eds.). *Supplement to IMEV*. Lexington KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1965.
- IPMEP: Lewis, R. E., N. F. Blake, and A. S. G. Edwards (eds.). *Index of Printed Middle English Prose*. New York: Garland, 1985.
- Ker, MLGB: Ker, N. R. *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain: A List of Surviving Books*, RHS Guides and Handbooks 3, 2nd edn. London: Royal Historical Society, 1964. With Andrew G. Watson. *MLGB: Supplement to the Second Edition*, RHS Guides and Handbooks 15. London: Royal Historical Society, 1987.
- Ker, MMBL: — (volume 4 with A. J. Piper; volume 5, indexes, by I. C. Cunningham and A. G. Watson). *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, 5 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969–2002.
- LALME: Angus McIntosh, M. L. Samuels, et al. *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*, 4 vols. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986.
- Letter-books: *Calendar of Letter-Books . . . of the City of London*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe, 11 vols. London: Guildhall, 1899–1912.
- Milemete: *The Treatise of Walter de Milemete De nobilitatibus sapientiis et prudentiis regum*, ed. M. R. James, Roxburghe Club. Oxford: Horace Hart, 1913.
- Minot: *The Poems of Laurence Minot*, ed. Joseph Hall. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1887, 1897, 1914.
- Mirror*: the Middle English translation of Robert of Gretham's *Mirur*, Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS Pepys 2498, pp. 45^a–212^b, partly ed., *The Middle English Mirror: Sermons from Advent to Sexagesima . . .*, ed. Thomas G. Duncan and Margaret Connolly, Middle English Texts 34. Heidelberg: Winter, 2003.
- PAL: Schmitt, Charles B., and Dilwyn Knox. *Pseudo-Aristoteles Latinus: A Guide to Latin Works Falsely*

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Attributed to Aristotle before 1500, Warburg Institute
Surveys and Texts. London: Warburg Institute, 1985.

Paues Version: *A Fourteenth Century English Biblical Version*, ed. Anna
C. Paues. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
1904.

Richard: *Der Mittelenglische Versroman über Richard Löwenherz*,
ed. Karl Brunner. Vienna: Braunmüller, 1913.

STC: A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, rev. Katherine F.
Panzer, *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed 1475–
1640*, 2nd edn, 3 vols. London: Bibliographical Society,
1976–91.

In Thrall

Stories are all the human race has got. You just got to find the one you like and stay with it.

Belmont Pugh to Dave Robicheaux, as reported by James Lee Burke

The team, the buckboard, went on in the thick dust of the spent summer. Now he could see the village proper – the store, the blacksmith shop, the metal roof of the gin with a thin rapid shimmer of exhaust above the stack. It was now the third week in September; the dry, dust-laden air vibrated steadily to the rapid beat of the engine, though so close were the steam and the air in temperature that no exhaust was visible but merely a thin feverish shimmer of mirage. The very hot, vivid air, which seemed to be filled with the slow laborious plaint of laden wagons, smelled of lint; wisps of it clung among the dust-stiffened roadside weeds and small gouts of cotton lay imprinted by hoof- and wheel-marks into the trodden dust. He could see the wagons too, the long motionless line of them behind the patient, droop-headed mules, waiting to advance a wagon-length at a time, onto the scales and then beneath the suction pipe.

William Faulkner, *The Hamlet*, in *Novels 1936–1940*
 (New York: The Library of America, 1990), p. 878

Faulkner smells the lint, but he misses out another smell, the detail I remember about ginning, always associated with late August drives up old US highway 79 into East Texas. These, necessarily, went straight through Thrall, with its gin beside the highway. The same heat, the same brightness suffused with dust from the unpaved gravel that led to the highway, seen through squinted eyes. But I remember most the smell of the gin, a second heat in the day. Perhaps they did not in Mississippi c. 1900 have an idea what to do with gin waste, the seed and stubs the machinery removes to leave the fibre you can spin.

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In my day, like provident ants, ginners profited even from the waste; they used it for cattle feed. To do that, they cooked it. By the gin was a huge open-walled circular oast, its floor glowing red with smouldering cotton seed, and from it emanating the smell I always think of – more heat, and something strangely disgusting and inviting, all at once. The oil burns out of the cotton stubs, at once acrid and sweet, and, when they gin, it permeates everything. Whole towns, in the heat of summer's end, smell of it for weeks. What the oast leaves behind, once the odour has at last dissipated, stamped into large pellets, cottonseed-cake, can be tossed into the lots to keep the cattle going through the winter when the grass is gone.

I am telling you this because it is an experience you (or most of you) will not share. It will be alien because it is a product of being of a time and, most importantly, of a place. It was eight hundred miles up that same road through East Texas to the nearest professional baseball team then; we'd only had a teevee for three years, and usually still got our news off the radio. But we weren't conscious of cultural blight; we shared those unspoken commonalities, the things that construct culture – among them, that sometime the last two weeks of August, the man would start ginning, and they would fire up the oast, and we would be suffused with that smell, at once bitter and saccharine. Indeed, our very alienation, that we were who we were because of where we were, made of us a community, in Thrall and places like it – Kyle and Blanco and Manshack.

The voice in what I have just written is of course, that of unvarnished nostalgia. But one must be aware that not all local knowledges are responsible, or recuperable through the dusty haze of the late August in which they were first experienced. However enthralling the cotton gin may be in memory, one knew that it was only the visible (and smellable) manifestation of something larger – and if not then guilt-inducing, at least embarrassing.

The trucks that drove to the gin were steered by white hands. They had earlier been filled, first by the stoop labour, and the scarred hands (cotton isn't docile, and the stiff leafy edges of the bolls rip and tear), of black men and women, then by the hard work of black people emptying the sacks into truck beds. The bossman (or his white foreman) drove the truck, and he took the money for the usable fibre; the black labour that produced his profit got paid at piecework wages. Memory holds

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voices (both the following citations excerpted from the *dicta* of southern belles who ended up with college degrees) that are equally part of the experience of ginning:

Daddy always says to hire n-rs because the Mexicans will rob you blind

*

Of course when you hire n-rs you know you are getting the culls; all the ones with any gumption got up and left here

Faulkner comments at the end of his introductory description of Frenchman's Bend, 'There was not one negro landowner in the entire section. Strange negroes would absolutely refuse to pass through it after dark' (733).

Experiences are complex and fractured, and include resistances, as well as joys. It is possible to sentimentalise ginning, just like you can railroad whistles at grade crossings or sitting under the live oaks in the back at Scholtz's (the opening scene in the best literary evocation of the site, Billy Lee Brammer's *The Gay Place*). You can possibly – a la Nashville – have a nostalgia for rednecks and bubbas ('Hank Williams, you wrote my life'). But it takes a voluntary act of forgetting to do so, or do so without some deep qualifications. Ultimately, just as I will argue in chapter 1 of so small a detail as fourteenth-century London English, being in Thrall resists any totalising narrative.

I emphasise this resistance because postmodern medievalism, for example that enunciated in both David Wallace's *Chaucerian Polity* and Richard F. Green's *A Crisis of Truth*, often seems to me so keen to submerge it. Both writers pursue master-narratives and an emphasis upon the *longue duree*. Yet in so doing, they often fail to respond to, to render comprehensible and narratable, a history I would take as responsive to something like lived experience and practice. This would actually occur somewhere, in a fragmented locality. (Contrast with their treatments the local knowledge of Steven Justice's agrarian communities, presented in *Writing and Rebellion* as unified by the threat of dearth.)

Since law will flicker in and out of my argument, I restrict detailed comments to Green's work (although *mutatis mutandis*, much the same critique would address Wallace's return to Burckhardt). *Crisis of Truth* works through Green's postulating an oral *Volksrecht* beginning deep in

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the pre-Conquest past. In his argument, this reflects a local community immune to writing and dependent on face-to-face personal integrity, a community of interest lost before a royal incursion associated with the advent of written law. But this centralisation might be perceived as having occurred long before Green's postulated fourteenth-century moment of disaster:

After many nations received the faith of Christ and the religion spread, many synods gathered throughout the world . . . and in these gatherings, they established compensation for many misdeeds, and they wrote them, whatever their source (or content?), as chapters in many synod-books. Then I, X the king, gathered them together and commanded that they be written down . . .

Postquam contigit quod plures nationes Christi fidem susceperunt, religione crescente, plures synodus circumque conuenerunt . . . Et in multis synodis suis multorum forisfactorum emendationes aptauerunt et ex multis synodalibus libris undecumque capitula conscripserunt. Ego tunc X rex hec collegi simul et scribi precepi . . .

One might think this a statement about canon law, and a regal gesture, perhaps precocious, of the Central Middle Ages. But, of course, it is not – and indeed might be perceived as a beneficent royal gesture designed to protect the populace in dispersed localities from predations of local lords. Both my Latin and my 'X' perhaps unfairly anonymise the passage; the latter should be replaced by 'Ælfredus', Alfred the Great (reigned 871–900); the former, a twelfth-century translation into Latin, by a surviving Anglo-Saxon version. The king continues:

Then I, King Alfred, gathered together many of those judgements my ancestors had made and commanded that they be written down, at least those that pleased me But I gathered here those that appeared most just to me and that I found from the days of my kinsman Ine, or of King Offa of Mercia, or of Ethelbert, first to be baptised among the English, and I put the remainder aside.

Ego tunc Ælfredus rex hec collegi simul et scribi precepi, multa eorum que predecessores nostri tenuerunt et mihi placuerunt . . . [Q]ue repperi de diebus Inae regis, cognoti mei, uel Offa Mircenorum regis uel Æþelbrihtes, qui primus in Anglorum gente baptizatus est, que michi iustiora uisa sunt hic collegi, ceteraque dimisi (*Gesetze* 1, 45, 47, the Anglo-Saxon on the facing pages).

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From Alfred at least, one must see Law as a written pronouncement centrally imposed and, in localities, deriving its sense of procedure and penalty from such promulgations. Impressive recent study (Patrick Wormald 1999) shows clearly the extent to which Green's local community was centrally directed and restrained from its own factionalism through received, textually inscribed behaviours subject to learned editing and emendation and to a royal power of promulgation. Late fourteenth-century audiences know that of Alfred as well, and both John Trevisa and at least one Lollard author take his vernacular assays seriously, as model textual promulgations – Alfred 'turnede þe best lawes into his moder tunge and þe Sawter also' ('A Lollard tract' 149–50, cf. Trevisa's 'Dialogue' 135–8).

Moreover, Wormald's masterful demonstration – the projective force of 'ancient' Anglo-Saxon law, its flowing into the twelfth-century 'birth of Common Law' – is only half the story. For Alfred's preface to the *Laws* scarcely shows itself as an originary document. The king could accession, and (as he says) preserve where it suited him ('ancient custom' is always already malleable), what must be the originary *written* English code, that of Æthelbeorht of Kent, the first baptised English monarch (s. vii in.).

But more to the point, Alfred's very conception of what creates and sanctifies law, what gives it its power to bind, is nothing less than writing itself. The *Laws* are not oral, and Alfred does not begin by reproducing those of Æthelbeorht. His very lengthy prologue focuses law as a royal imitation of God-given written practice: it is mainly (*Gesetze* I, 26–45) quotation – of Exodus 20–3 and Acts 15:23–9. While one may be immensely sympathetic to Green's sense that something dire occurred in the later fourteenth century, the loss of organic local community (something that must have happened long since, that Law had been created to adjudicate) neither discovers what preceded that date nor defines the nature of the subsequent disaster.

The book that follows will be primarily concerned with what gets repressed, as literary history, in accounts like these of a *longue duree*. For implicitly, critics like Green and Wallace are writing about centralising procedures, canonical authors, and in the voice of traditional 'English Literary History'. This, as everyone knows, sanctions an origin – 'Chaucer the Father of English Poetry'. Silenced behind it,

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and the repressed that somehow must have contributed to and enabled it, is 'locality', the local literary culture of discrete places. With a certain irony, I choose here to offer London as an exhibit of the distinctive productive character of a locale. In conventional accounts (cf. Wallace's 'Absent City', *Chaucerian Polity* 156–81), London functions as 'dys-topic', not a place at all. Master narratives of national culture require that London reflect a universal metropolitanism, the very opposite of a resistant and fragmented locality. Absorptive, it simply overwhelms everything else, eradicating difference, its success its ability to submerge any perception of different procedures, whether biographically/personally or culturally.

This volume seeks a fragmentary restoration. I here return to a local (and thus pre-canonical) site in an effort to render intelligible what, in accounts like those I describe, now is only, to cite one prominent example, the trace of Auchinleck romances subsumed in the parody of 'Sir Thopas'. Most especially the book returns to the great repressed voice, which Chaucer found so strong he could only ignore (and parody), that of William Langland, a visible, and far from unique, connective between diverse versions of local community. So this will be a topical study. The word 'topic', after all, means primarily a place and a common-place – the representation (which is not the same as the existence) of a 'commune'.

I am particularly indebted to the models for such an inquiry provided by my colleagues and interlocutors, Thorlac Turville-Petre and Richard Beadle. Their writings have suggested ways of using localisable manuscript records to construct a polyvocal and topical cultural surround. Here I adopt methods they have developed to a different (and in many respects, less promising) locale. In addition to their scholarly tutelage, I remain grateful to both for many kindnesses (including meals and shelter) and stimulating conversations over the years.

Following such expert guidance, my argument will return to the manuscripts, the local instantiations of textual culture, forgotten behind the printed editions of canonical authors like Chaucer. I would insist, at the outset, what attentive readers of my past work will recognise, that these documents contain their own resistances to any fetishisation or nostalgia. Most typically, as I have often argued, it is their vicissitudes and misrepresentations that identify a locale in which one can begin some

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form of historical inquiry. One of my major indebtednesses remains to the present custodians of my central exhibits, most especially to Aude Fitzsimons at the Pepys Library and to the long-time facilitators of my work in Duke Humfrey's Library, William Hodges, Russell Edwards, Jean-Pierre Maillon, and Alan Carter.

To balance what may appear a heavy dose of manuscript bibliography, I have tried to keep reference so light as possible. In general, I note my indebtednesses parenthetically within the text, and simply group all my authorities in a list of references at the end. Readers will probably recognise a number of studies not here cited, although ostensibly relevant. Quite simply, I attempt to maintain bonhomie by not feeling compelled to cite, much less offer a critique of, works I have found generally unhelpful. All translations are my own, with the exception of biblical citations (from the Douay-Rheims version). I follow one convention throughout: unmarked references to *Piers Plowman* are always to the B Version, A and C only being explicitly marked.

Finally, I remain acutely aware of the partiality of my account. At various points, I have wished that I might provide a thicker description of my chosen locale, fourteenth-century London. I am conscious of having scanted a great deal I know I should have discussed, in particular further specific Anglo-Norman texts and manuscripts, as well as a deeper historical surround predicated on documents like the London Letter-Books and London Chronicles. But, although it goes against the grain to cite Chaucer here, 'The remenant of the tale is long ynough', and I hope not to 'letten eek noon of this route', scholar-pilgrims who may well have access to stronger plough-teams than I.

This book has a long gestation and has been through a large number of fits and changes since I first conceived it. If it has an only begetter, it was my late colleague Robert P. apRoberts, who in autumn 1981 invited me to read a Chaucer paper at the Philological Association of the Pacific Coast. In a rash moment, I discussed Chaucer's method as translator in his *Boece*. This resulted in a very long bout (and eventually a 350-page draft) on the status of formal prose translation in Middle English culture.

This study, some bits of which get recycled in chapter 4, depended upon the largesse of a patron, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. I am particularly indebted, not only to the Foundation

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for its support, but to those who helped draw its attention to that transmutation of my project: Steve Barney, Larry Benson, John Burrow, Tony Edwards, Del Kolve, and Traugott Lawler. Tony read one whole draft of that iteration, with his usual trenchant scepticism. Traugott and I have collaborated on four projects; he has been a ceaseless inspiration, both for his Latinity and his humanity.

The Guggenheim fragment never actually reached its projected subject, ‘Ricardian-Lancastrian prose translation’. In writing it, I became more fascinated by the cultural centrality of *Ancrene Riwele*, a fascination that forced me into the middle of Pepys 2498. A major turning point in the development of the project occurred in March 1998, when my friend Sally Mapstone commanded me come to a conference she had organised in Scotland; at that point, library tourism introduced me to the Hunter MS of the London sermon cycle called *The Mirror*, and I began to have an inkling how a dormant project might receive new purchase.

As will be obvious, like all those who deal with Middle English manuscripts, I owe immense debts to A. I. Doyle and Malcolm Parkes. As he does for all who approach him, Ian has constantly offered advice and information. I hope that he will accept my gratitude, although my hope is qualified by our very different responses to medieval Christianity. Malcolm, as he has done for many, has bailed me out of all sorts of tight spots, queried or verified what I thought of a number of scribal hands, and, through his engaging raconteurism, suggested to me a great many avenues of inquiry I should never otherwise have thought to take up.

Three people offered intense encouragement and support at various points of gestation. Rita Copeland and David Lawton read full drafts of what stood in 1991. Lynn Staley has been constantly and thoroughly supportive, and has read large blocks of the current draft. I am also grateful for advice on specific chapters to Helen Cooper and Helen Barr. While he forebore reading anything, most of what I know about medieval English religious writing has been shaped by long (and beery) communions with the field’s greatest expert, Vincent Gillespie, whose influence has always impinged on my writing.

I am particularly grateful to my current employers, Keble College and Oxford University. Their combined generosity enabled a year’s

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sabbatical in 2001–2; during this time, I managed to research and draft about 40 per cent of what ensues. My Warden, Averil Cameron, and the Keble Governing Body were especially generous in allowing me an unusual extra term without duties. I'm also conscious of the friendship of Tony Phelan and how much I have learned from my Keble colleagues, Michael Hawcroft and, a fount of London lore, Ian Archer, as well as from the monitory example of Daniel Butt.

Various pieces of the volume have been read in public fora, and a few bits published. All these occasions have placed me in the debt of those who thought I must have something to say (and of the sceptical audiences they assembled to hear me): John Alford, Kate Bennett, Linda Brownrigg, John Burrow (once again), Larry Clopper, Andrew Cole, Andy Galloway, David Ganz, Jill Havens (cf. Hanna 2003, portions reproduced in the conclusion), Nigel Palmer, Derek Pearsall (cf. Hanna 2000, some pieces recycled in chapter 3), Ad Putter, Pamela Robinson, Vance Smith, Jane Tolmie, and Thorlac Turville-Petre (again).

I owe particular gratitude to Cambridge University Press and its series *Studies in Medieval Literature* for the care and attention they have bestowed on my work. Alastair Minnis, the series editor, must deserve an award for long-suffering perseverance, finally cajoling a manuscript from me fifteen years after first asking. My two readers, Andy Galloway and John Burrow, were full of suggestions about the submitted version, from which it has invariably profited. At the press, Linda Bree has been a magnificently supportive editor, and my script has been ably seen through the production process by Maartje Scheltens and my copy-editor, Ann Lewis.

The dedication honours the two people who first and most strongly, from my childhood, inspired me. They, a woman of valour and a self-defrocked rebbe, are quite peculiarly my locality. Were I not compelled to remember them (and it), this volume would have to be for the two Annes, Middleton and Hudson. The first, my friend for more years than either of us will care to remember, has offered more than constant encouragement, something more like sheer inspiration, as I attempted to raise my scholarly game to a level of which she might approve. The second, a friend of a later, if still antique, vintage, convinced me (as she has everyone else) of the centrality of Wycliffism and has long been my model of scholarly industry and acumen. With both, I have enjoyed the

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exchange of drafts; both have read substantial chunks of the book in one shape or another and offered their customarily bracing commentary. Particularly, as I tried to respond to my readers, Anne M. has been a font of productive suggestions, many silently incorporated here. Like all those named above, they should be considered immune from critique for the errors of what follows, all of my own propagation.

Kait and McGee are simply immune from critique.