Language and the Declining World in Chaucer, Dante, and Jean de Meun

Medieval commentaries on the origin and history of language used biblical history, from Creation to the Tower of Babel, as their starting-point, and described the progressive impairment of an originally perfect language. Biblical and classical sources raised questions for both medieval poets and commentators about the nature of language, its participation in the Fall, and its possible redemption. John M. Fyler focuses on how three major poets – Chaucer, Dante, and Jean de Meun – participated in these debates about language. He offers new analyses of how the history of language is described and debated in the Divine Comedy, the Canterbury Tales and the Roman de la Rose. While Dante follows the Augustinian idea of the fall and subsequent redemption of language, Jean de Meun and Chaucer are skeptical about the possibilities for linguistic redemption and resign themselves, at least half-comically, to the linguistic implications of the Fall and the declining world.

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Language and the Declining World in Chaucer, Dante, and Jean de Meun

John M. Fyler
Language and the declining world in Chaucer, Dante, and Jean de Meun

John M. Fyler
For Julia, Amanda, and Lucy
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Acknowledgments

This book has been long in the making, and I am certain that I have inadvertently forgotten some debts that belong here: may their absence be attributed "to the defaute of myn unkonnynge and nat to my wyl."
The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation awarded me a fellowship at the beginning of this project; resident fellowships at the Camargo Foundation and Clare Hall, University of Cambridge helped me bring it to an end. I am also grateful to the Faculty Research Awards Committee at Tufts University for assistance at various points along the way. I owe more than I can say to my teachers, official and unofficial. Charles Muscatine, my dissertation director, whose powerful book on the French tradition inspired me as an undergraduate and graduate student, set me thinking anew with his later work on the French fabliaux. Sir Richard Southern, in his 1968 Berkeley seminar on the twelfth century, introduced me to medieval intellectual history, and offered an inspiring but daunting example of brilliance as a teacher and lecturer. He helped make it possible for me to spend a year in Oxford, where Malcolm Parkes generously allowed me to audit his extraordinary courses in palaeography. I first read Chaucer in Talbot Donaldson’s edition, and discovered years after the fact that he was the anonymous reader for my first published article on Chaucer; this was fitting, because he was always the audience I had in mind when writing, and like others, I have discovered uncomfortably often that something I had thought of as my own idea was in fact sketched out by one of his subordinate clauses. I owe a great deal to a number of fellow medievalists and friends: Elizabeth Archibald, C. David Benson, Larry Benson, Kenneth Bleeth, Rick Bogel, Clinton Bond and Shirin Davami, Susan Crane, Marilynn Desmond, Kevin Dunn, Robert Edwards, Janet...
Acknowledgments

Gezari, Warren Ginsberg, Robert Hanning, Marshall Leicester, Donald Maddox and Sara Sturin-Maddox, Jim Maddox, Charles Moseley, Lee Patterson, Sue Penney, James Simpson, and Susan and Oscar Wood. I am grateful for my students, at Tufts and at the Bread Loaf School of English. At the Cambridge University Press, I owe much to Alastair Minnis and Linda Bree for their encouragement, and to the anonymous readers for their careful attention. I have revised some earlier publications, and thank Mediaevalia, Sewanee Mediaeval Studies, and Medieval Institute Publications for permitting me to reuse this material. I have depended on the great libraries with the resources necessary for my work, especially the Cambridge University Library and the British Library. Above all, I am grateful to the dedicatees for their encouragement and forbearance: to Julia for a long-continuing conversation and timely editorial advice; to Amanda and Lucy whose development into speech and then eloquence coincided with this years-long investigative descent into babble.
Abbreviations

AHDLMA Archives d’Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge
CCCM Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis
CCSL Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CFMA Classiques Français du Moyen Âge
ChRev Chaucer Review
CNRS Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique
CSEL Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
DS Dante Studies
DVE Dante Alighieri, De Vulgari Eloquentia
EETS The Early English Text Society
JMRS Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies
LCL Loeb Classical Library
M&H Mediaevalia et Humanistica
MLQ Modern Language Quarterly
MLR Modern Language Review
MS Mediaeval Studies
PMLA Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
PQ Philological Quarterly
RA Recherches Augustiniennes
RS Rolls Series (Rerum Britannicarum Medii Abi Scriptores)
RTAM Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale
List of abbreviations

SAC  Studies in the Age of Chaucer
SATF  Société des Anciens Textes Français
SD  Studi Danteschi
SP  Studies in Philology
ST  Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae
UTQ  University of Toronto Quarterly
YFS  Yale French Studies