1
Chaucer traditions

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The works of Chaucer gave rise to a diversity of traditions of both creative response and critical commentary, to subsequent 'Chaucerian' authors, and to a body of comment about Chaucer's writings, one of the longest continuous critical traditions in vernacular European literature.[1] It was Chaucer who began it. For Chaucer was both the first English author to conceive of his writings as a whole oeuvre and the first so clearly to have thought of his works as having a posterity. In the two *Prologues* to the *Legend of Good Women* (F, 417ff., G, 405ff.), the Introduction to the *Man of Law's Tale* (II, 46–76), and in the *Retractions* at the close of the *Canterbury Tales* (X, 1081–92), Chaucer lists his writings – in recollecting, 'collects' them – as an assembled corpus of individual work. At the close of *Troilus and Criseyde* he envisages a future for his writing in relation to the past, when he bids his poem follow in the footsteps of the ancient poets, but also worries about textual transmission and future interpretation. This collection of essays on 'Chaucer traditions' is devoted to topics in the first three centuries of imitation and re-creation by subsequent authors, a period brought to a close by those verse translations or modernizations of Chaucer by Dryden in his *Fables Ancient and Modern* (1700), which register how understanding of Chaucer's language has changed, just as Dryden's Preface to the *Fables* marks a transition in critical interpretation of Chaucer.

Earliest responses to Chaucer's works by other writers date from the 1380s and 1390s and in themselves suggest the variousness of the stimulus offered by Chaucer's writings. The most important contemporary English author who shows an awareness of Chaucer is John Gower, and Richard Axton has written ('Gower – Chaucer's heir?') about the nature of the literary commerce which flowed between these two late fourteenth-century poets. Such early responses may offer valuable pointers to what aspects of Chaucer's works were then prized. The contemporary French poet Eustache Deschamps praises Chaucer in a poem (*c.* 1385) which opens with this stanza:

> O Socratès plains de philosophie,
> Seneque en meurs, Auglius en pratique,
> Ovides grans en ta poëterie,
> Briés en parler, saiges en rhetorique,
> Aigles treshaulz, qui par ta theorique
> Enlumines le regne d'Eneas,
> L'Isle aux Geans, ceuls de Bruth, et qu'i as
> Semé les fleurs et planté le rosier
> Aux ignorans de la langue Pandras,
> Grant translateur, noble Geoffrey Chaucier . . . [2]

and while a French poet will naturally attach significance to Chaucer's translation of the *Roman de la Rose* into English for those ignorant of the French language ('et planté le rosier . . .'), the English *Romaunt* was indeed an important part of early conceptions of Chaucer as a poet of the experience of love, as well as a poet 'full of philosophy', 'a Seneca in morality', and 'wise in rhetoric'.

Chaucer the learned, moral and philosophical poet is a continuous theme in comment by subsequent writers, and in Thomas Usk's prose *Testament of Love* (?1387) – heavily influenced by Chaucer's *Troilus* and *Boece* – the allegorical figure of Love recommends a reading of *Troilus* in terms which underline the contribution of Chaucer's translation of the *De Consolatione Philosophiae* of Boethius in forming this conception of him as a 'philosophical poet'. To the author's question as to how God's foreknowledge may be reconciled with free will, Love replies:

> Myne owne trewe servaunt, the noble philosophical poete in Englissh, whiche evermore him besieth and travayleth right sore my name to encrese (wherfore al that willen me good owe to do him worship and reverence bothe; trewly, his better ne his pere in scole of my rules coude I never fynde) – he (quod she), in a tretis that he made of my servant Troilus, hath this mater touched, and at the ful this question assoyled. Certaynly, his noble sayinges can I not amende; in goodnes of gentil manliche speche, without any maner of nycetè of storiers imaginacion, in witte and in good reson of sentence he passeth al other makers. In the boke of Troilus, the answere to thy question mayst thou lerne . . . [3]

That the claim made for Chaucer as both philosophical poet and poet of love may surprise some modern readers does not lessen the seriousness with which this contemporary claim for Chaucer is made, and made in terms which also acknowledge something special in Chaucer's language and in the comparison between his narratives and those of conventional tellers of stories. In so recognizing the example set by Chaucer's narrative technique, Usk anticipates how subsequent Chaucerian writers will draw on the narratorial models available in Chaucer's recasting of dream poem and romance forms,[4] just as Gower's tribute to Chaucer as the composer of love lyrics (see below, p. 29) is the earliest acknowledgement in a long tradition of much greater response to the short poems of Chaucer than they have more recently enjoyed.[5] In the *Moral Balade* of Henry Scogan (*c.* 1361–1407) esteem for Chaucer's short

poems, for his language, and for his achievement as a moral, philosophical poet come together. The Scogan to whom Chaucer addresses his *L'Envoy de Chaucer à Scogan* is presumably the courtier who was tutor to the sons of Henry IV and supposedly sent the princes a poem of 189 lines, which recommends virtue, refers to the discussion of *gentilesse* in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* and quotes within itself the whole of Chaucer's poem *Gentilesse*, in a way that is editing and anthologizing Chaucer as a source of morally instructive poetry while commending his language ('My mayster Chaucer ... That in his langage was so curious ...' 65–6).[6]

Scogan was a courtier while Usk was a minor London official (possibly known personally to Chaucer), and the nature of Chaucer's circle and early readers had consequences for the traditions of his poetry.[7] Of a younger generation but also a London official and apparently known to Chaucer, Thomas Hoccleve (*c.* 1368–1426) – about whom John Burrow writes in his 'Hoccleve and Chaucer' – was Clerk to the Privy Seal and, with Lydgate, one of the first important English successors to Chaucer. By far the most prolific of fifteenth-century English poets, it is John Lydgate (*c.* 1370 – *c.* 1451) whose own view of Chaucer is long influential on subsequent opinion, and Derek Pearsall contributes in his essay on 'Chaucer and Lydgate' an assessment of the relation between the poetry of Chaucer and that of a disciple who responded so voluminously to the range of Chaucer's poems, and whose name is soon included in what becomes a traditional view of Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate as the three figures who stand at the beginning of English poetry.[8]

Lydgate's praise of Chaucer is so frequent and so insistent, and Lydgate's own writings achieved such wide circulation, that it is he who establishes the terms of praise in the fifteenth century. His is already a retrospect. He is not Chaucer's pupil, never enjoyed Chaucer's personal acquaintance and instruction, and presents as oral tradition a reminiscence of Chaucer's kind dealing with those situations in which the poet is asked to comment on the works of others (see p. 57). Indeed, some of Lydgate's most ringing praise of Chaucer comes in the context of laments that Chaucer is removed by death:

> Chaucer is deed that had suche a name
> Of fayre makyng that [was] without wene
> > (*The Flower of Courtesy*, st. 34; *CH*, p. 45)

> And eke my maister Chauser is ygrave
> The noble Rethor, poete of Brytayne
> That worthy was the laurer to haue
> Of poetrye, and the palme atteyne
> That made firste, to distille and rayne
> The golde dewe dropes of speche and eloquence
> Into our tunge, thurgh his excellence

> And fonde the floures, firste of Retoryke
> Oure Rude speche, only to enlumyne
> That in our tunge was neuere noon hym like ...
> > (*The Life of Our Lady*, 1628–37; *CH*, p. 46)

> Noble Galfride, poete of Breteyne,
> Amonge oure englisch þat made first to reyne
> þe gold dewe-dropis of rethorik so fyne,
> Oure rude langage only tenlwmyne . . .
>
> (*Troy Book*, II, 4697–700; *CH*, p. 47)

From these and comparable passages a number of patterns emerge which are to prove influential in the evaluation of Chaucer.

First of all – for it still governs any popular conception of English literary history to this day – is the notion that Chaucer is the first. What Chaucer did he did first, and not only first but best: 'þer is no makyng to his equipolent', as Lydgate comments in the *Troy Book* (II, 4712), while casting himself as gleaning in Chaucer's works much as Chaucer had cast himself as gleaning in old books in the *Prologue* to the *Legend*. Lydgate's eulogies establish Chaucer's achievement as unique, and Lydgate's professions of modesty continue to insist that Chaucer is inimitable even as the poems containing such professions represent continual reinterpretation of Chaucer's subjects and idioms.

For Lydgate – as in the passages just quoted – the primacy of Chaucer is founded on what he sees Chaucer's poems achieving with the English language: it is Chaucer 'That made firste, to distille and rayne / The golde dewe dropes of speche and eloquence / Into our tunge . . .' This notion of Chaucer's 'golden' eloquence and rhetoric which 'gilds' the English language – the root of what has become known as the 'aureate style' in fifteenth-century poetic diction – also carries with it the assumption that before Chaucer wrote in it so transformingly 'our rude langage' had little worth:

> For he owre englishe gilt with his sawes
> Rude and boistous firste be olde dawes
> þat was ful fer from al perfeccioun
> And but of litel reputacioun
> Til þat he cam and þoruȝ his poetrie
> Gan oure tonge firste to magnifie
> And adourne it with his elloquence . . .
>
> (*Troy Book*, III, 4237–43; *CH*, p. 48)

> My maistir Chaucer dede his besynesse,
> And in his daies hath so weel hym born,
> Out off our tunge tauoiden al reudnesse,
> And to refourme it with coloure of suetnesse . . .
>
> (*Fall of Princes*, Prol. 275–8; *CH*, p. 53)

> And ffor memoyre off that poete,
> Wyth al hys rethorykes swete,
> That was the ffyrste in any age
> That amendede our langage . . .
>
> (*Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, 19773–6; *CH*, p. 51)

Such an evaluation of Chaucer represents his achievement as having a fundamental value for all who wrote after him in English. It is Chaucer who is

understood to have created the means and the medium for poetry in English and – in a way that has great implication for those who read and write after Chaucer – his achievements in English are represented as magnifying, adorning and sweetening English poetic diction. The subsequent influence of Lydgate's insistent praise of what he understood as Chaucer's achievement is shown by the way that Lydgate's description of Chaucer ('Off oure language he was the lodesterre', *Fall of Princes*, Prol. 252) is approvingly quoted in the introductory epistle by 'E.K.' (Edward Kirke) to *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1579) and in Beaumont's prefatory letter in Speght's edition of Chaucer (1598).

But there were other legacies too from Lydgate's way of representing Chaucer. If Chaucer's listings of his own works suggest that he thought of his writing as a corpus, the very comprehensiveness with which Lydgate attempted so many of his poems on Chaucerian models reinforced the idea of Chaucer's works as a canon, and one with a posterity both in itself and in its progeny. This is also so of Lydgate's readiness to list and refer to Chaucer's works, while in his copious praise there is room to pass on a sense of Chaucer's variety, not only 'ful pitous tragedies' but also 'his fresh comedies' (*Fall of Princes*, Prol. 246–8), for Lydgate shows some sense of the gaiety that there is in Chaucer, as does the anonymous author of the prologue to *The Tale of Beryn* (c. 1410) which imagines Chaucer's pilgrims arriving at Canterbury.[9] In the fifteenth-century manuscript anthologies which include selected *Canterbury Tales*, however, it is the moral and courtly pieces which are copied rather than the fabliaux.[10] The unfinished and open-ended framework of the *Canterbury Tales* pilgrimage was an invitation not only to fifteenth-century scribal editors of the manuscripts,[11] but also to Lydgate, who in his *Siege of Thebes* imagines the pilgrims' tale-telling on the journey home. In a passage praising the *Canterbury Tales* in his own Canterbury Tale, this most diffuse of writers is among the earliest to praise Chaucer's pregnant pithiness:

> Be rehersaile / of his Sugrid mouth
> Of eche thyng / keping in substaunce
> The sentence hool / with-oute variaunce
> Voyding the Chaf / sothly for so seyn,
> Enlumynyng / þe trewe piked greyn
> Be crafty writinge / of his sawes swete . . .   (52–7)

So much praise of Chaucer's inimitable qualities by his professed imitator leaves an uncertain space for Lydgate himself to move in, and when in the *Siege of Thebes* Lydgate imagines himself joining Chaucer's pilgrims on their return journey to London, the only pilgrim who seems to be absent is Chaucer himself.[12] But then – as Lydgate's poetry at its most self-conscious moments had so often lamented – the poet Chaucer was dead. Whatever anxiety of influence there was in Lydgate's relation as a poet to Chaucer, his view of Chaucer as the laureate poet in English, comparable to Petrarch and drawing on the spring guarded by the Muses (*Troy Book*, III, 553–5, 4546ff.), sows the

seed which is later to grow in the sixteenth-century view of Chaucer as a writer whose qualities and place in English letters may be defined in relation to classical models.

In his own way Hoccleve comparably praises and understands Chaucer's achievement. In his *Regement of Princes* (*c.* 1412) Hoccleve presents himself as personally acquainted with his 'maister' Chaucer – whose portrait Hoccleve has had included in the manuscript in order to perpetuate Chaucer's memory[13] – and casts himself as the dilatory and unprofitable pupil of a kindly would-be teacher (see p. 54). At the beginning of a long tradition of such praise Hoccleve commends both Chaucer's eloquence and his learning:

> O maister deere and fadir reverent
> Mi maister Chaucer, flour of eloquence,
> Mirour of fructuous entendement,
> O vniuersal fadir in science . . .   (1961–4; *CH*, pp. 62–3)

Hoccleve is also an early example of praise – taken further in the sixteenth century – which sets Chaucer alongside classical authors: in rhetoric no English writer was ever so like Cicero, and

> Also who was hier in philosophie
> To Aristotle in our tonge but thow.
> The steppes of Virgile in poesie
> Thow filwedist eeke, men wot wel ynow   (*CH*, p. 63)

while Hoccleve's hailing of Chaucer as 'The firste fyndere of oure faire langage' shares with Lydgate a conception of Chaucer as the originator of a language for poetry in English.

Fifteenth-century praise of Chaucer continues to laud his achievements in style and diction. John Walton, a canon of Oseney Abbey, in his verse translation of Boethius' *Consolation* (1410) calls Chaucer 'floure of rethoryk / In englisshe tong & excellent poete' (33–4), acknowledging that Chaucer's achievements are not to be matched ('This wot I wel no þing may I do lyk', 35; *CH*, p. 61), as he introduces his translation of a work Chaucer had already translated.[14] At the close of *The Kingis Quair* (*c.* 1425) the dream poem is commended to Gower and Chaucer:

> Vnto [th']inpnis of my maisteris dere,
> Gowere and Chaucere, that on the steppis satt
> Of rethorike quhill thai were lyvand here,
> Superlatiue as poetis laureate
> In moralitee and eloquence ornate,
> I recommend my buk in lynis sevin.   (1373–8)[15]

In John Metham's poem *Amoryus and Cleopes* (1448–9), influenced by *Troilus*, he commends that mastery of a natural versification by Chaucer ('. . . that longe dyd endure / In practyk off rymyng: qwerffore proffoundely / With many prouerbys hys bokys he rymyd naturally', 2189–91),[16] while John

Shirley commends (*c.* 1450) 'þe laureal and moste famous poete þat euer was to-fore him as in þemvelisshing of oure rude moders englisshe tonge' (*CH*, p. 66).

With Chaucer established as an *auctor*, English poets could for the first time look back in that tradition-conscious way that was necessary for a sense of the seriousness, the dignity, the worthiness of their own literary culture. Reference to Chaucer as *auctor* could be a claim for poetic identity in the sense in which Englishness competed not only with the classical past but also with the continental vernaculars. No poet needed to have read Chaucer in order to use him in this way.

But that poets read Chaucer, read him with extraordinary attention, and loved him, is clear in many different ways, which the essays in this book touch on at numerous points. That Chaucer – however much he himself may have worried over them, even, at the end of his life, repudiated them – nevertheless established *in English* secular story-types, secular literary genres, and numerous 'characters', was a legitimating action for his successors. The very incompleteness of his poems encouraged his imitators to do what he had done. That they sometimes seem to have misunderstood what he did was one of the forces which we might think of as creative misinterpretation, resulting in new works which stem from old ones and add to the stock of literary types in their turn. Though most of Chaucer's imitators wrote poetry inferior to his, their efforts nevertheless forged a literary culture in which, for example, a narrating persona within varieties of fictions could be taken for granted. As many of the essays in this collection point out, that persona was particularly useful for handling questions about women and the risks of love. That Chaucer was thought to have been their advocate was a way in to a succession of difficult arguments and attitudes.

It was above all, however, for the richness of Chaucer's English styles that his followers treasured him, treasured as a rich thesaurus of registers, of techniques of rhyme and rhythm, of syntactic adventurousness that had enriched the possibilities of English expression. For poet after poet, the education of long and deep study of Chaucer's poetry created a verbal reservoir which became a kind of lexicon. The accomplished English lyrics associated with Charles d'Orléans will in places draw closely on the language and contexts of Chaucer's poems, so as to present the lover's sorrows in the accents of the *Book of the Duchess*:

For whoso seeth me first on morwe
May seyn he hath met with sorwe,
For y am sorwe, and sorwe ys y.
Allas! and I wol tel the why:
My song ys turned to pleynynge,
And al my laughtre to wepynge,
My glade thoghtes to hevynesse;
In travayle ys myn ydelnesse
And eke my reste; my wele is woo,
My good ys harm, and evermoo
In wrathe ys turned my pleynge
And my delyt into sorwynge.
Myn hele ys turned into seknesse,
In drede ys al my sykernesse . . .
(*BD*, 595–608)

For alle my ioy is turnyd to hevynes
Myn ese in harme my wele in woo
Mi hope in drede in dowt my sikirnes
And my delite in sorow loo
My hele seeknes / and ovirmoo
As euery thing that shulde me plese
I-turned is god helpe me soo
In his amverse to my disese

For who with sorowe list aqueyntid be
As come to me and spille no ferthir wey
For sorow is y and y am he
For euery ioy in me is goon away
(5848-59)[17]

or the pains of absence in reminiscences of Book v of *Troilus*:

Fro thennesforth he rideth up and down,
And every thyng com hym to remembraunce
As he rood forby places of the town
In which he whilom hadde al his plesaunce.
'Lo, yonder saugh ich last my lady daunce;
And in that temple, with hire eyen cleere,
Me kaughte first my righte lady dere.

'And yonder have I herd ful lustyly
My dere herte laugh; and yonder pleye
Sauch ich hire ones ek ful blisfully.
And yonder ones to me gan she seye,
'Now goode swete, love me wel, I preye';
And yond so goodly gan she me biholde,
That to the deth myn herte is to hire holde.

'And at that corner, in the yonder hous,
Herde I myn alderlevest lady deere
So wommanly, with vois melodious,
Syngen so wel, so goodly, and so cleere,
That in my soule yet me thynketh ich here
The blisful sown; and in that yonder place
My lady first me took unto hire grace . . .'
(v, 561–81)

. . . For when me happith here or there to go
And thenke that yondir lo my lady dere
Gaf me this word/or made me suche a chere
And aundir herde y hir so swetely syng
And in this chambre led y hir daunsyng

In yondir bayne so se y hir alle nakid
And this and that y sawe hir yondir worche
Here y fond hir slepe/and yondir wakid
And in this wyndow pleide we at the lorche
And from this stayre y lad hir to þe chirche
And bi the way this tale y to hir tolde
And here she gaf me lo þis ryng of gold

And there at post and piler did she play
And so y first my loue vnto hir tolde
And there aferd she start fro me away
And with this word she made myn hert to
    bold
And with this word allas she made me cold
And yondir sigh y hir this resoun write
And here y baste hir fayre round pappis
    white

In suche a towre also y sigh hir last
And yet wel more a thousand thoughtis mo
(4822-42)

Through the language of Chaucer's love poems the feelings of succeeding generations of courtly and would-be courtly lovers might be lent a voice, and in its advice on improving reading a *Book of Curtesye* printed by Caxton recommends reading Chaucer as an example of eloquence, clarity, and concision ('O fader and founder of ornate eloquence'), while also expressing perhaps the earliest appreciation of Chaucer's lifelike vividness of represen-tation:

Redith his werkis / ful of plesaunce
Clere in sentence / in langage excellent
Briefly to wryte/ suche was his suffysaunce
What euer to saye / he toke in his entente

> His langage was so fayr and pertynente
> It semeth vnto mannys heerynge
> Not only the worde / but verely the thynge ...   (*CH*, p. 72)

In his various prologues and epilogues to his editions of Chaucer Caxton echoes Lydgate in order to draw together some of the strands in this body of praise.[18] In his epilogue to his edition of Chaucer's *Boece* (1478) he repeats with emphasis the view of Chaucer as 'the worshipful fader & first foundeur & enbelissher of ornate eloquence in our englissh ... enbelissher in making the sayd langage ornate & fayr' (*CH*, p. 75) and includes a Latin epitaph of Chaucer by the Italian Humanist scholar Surigo. In the epilogue to the *House of Fame* (1483) it is Chaucer's pregnant concision which Caxton praises by echoing Chaucer's own praise of the Clerk of Oxford ('For he wrytteth no voyde wordes / but alle hys mater is ful of hye and quycke sentence / ... For of hym alle other haue borowed syth and taken / in alle theyr wel sayeng and wrytyng', *CH*, p. 75). It is in the prologue to his second printing of the *Canterbury Tales* (1484) that Caxton draws together the accumulated Lydgatean estimates of Chaucer, echoed by others, praising the learning of Chaucer, whose transformation of English diction from its prior rude state makes him deserve the title of laureate, and repeating Lydgate's praise in *The Siege of Thebes* of the 'pyked grayn' of Chaucer's 'sentence':

> ... That noble & grete philosopher Gefferey chaucer the whiche for his ornate wrytyng in our tongue may wel haue the name of a laureate poete / For to fore that he by hys labour enbelysshyd / ornated / and made faire our englisshe / in thys Royame was had rude speche & Incongrue ... He comprehended hys maters in short / quyck and hye sentences / eschewyng prolyxyte / castyng away the chaf of superfluyte / and shewyng the pyked grayn of sentence / vtteryd by crafty and sugred eloquence.   (*CH*, p. 76)

It was not until twenty and thirty years after these comments by Caxton that William Dunbar (*c*. 1460 – *c*. 1530) and Gavin Douglas (*c*. 1475–1522) wrote their famous praise of Chaucer's rhetorical eloquence, which represents the flamboyant culmination of fifteenth-century eulogies of Chaucer's diction by two of those post-Chaucerian poets who most established an independence for themselves in their drawing on the Chaucerian inheritance.[19] In his dream poem *The Goldyn Targe* (*c*. 1503) Dunbar addresses Chaucer before proceeding to praise Gower and Lydgate:

> O reverend Chaucere, rose of rethoris all,
> As in oure tong ane flour imperiall
>   That raise in Britane, evir quho redis rycht,
> Thou beris of makaris the tryumph riall;
> Thy fresch anamalit termes celicall
>   This mater coud illumynit have full brycht:
>   Was thou noucht of oure Inglisch all the lycht,
> Surmounting eviry tong terrestriall
>   Alls fer as Mayes morow dois mydnycht?   (253–61)[20]

Although two of Dunbar's other poems – his *Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo* and *Sir Thomas Norny* – are written with telling recollections of the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *Sir Thopas* respectively, the use by Dunbar, Henryson, and other Scottish writers, of the thematic and stylistic legacy of Chaucer is independent and innovative, as Douglas Gray illustrates ('Some Chaucerian themes in Scottish writers'). Presented as what the poet found when turning from Chaucer's *Troilus* to another book about Criseyde, Robert Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* differentiates itself in part through an interpretation of the classical gods distinct from that of Chaucer, as Jill Mann shows ('The planetary gods in Chaucer and Henryson'). Like Dunbar, Gavin Douglas in the first prologue in his *Eneados* (1513) also praises Chaucer's eloquence with his own eloquence ('Hevynly trumpat, orlege and reguler, / In eloquens balmy, cundyt and dyall . . .'; see p. 114). Yet it is also Douglas who in praising Chaucer distances himself from Chaucer's approach to classical literature by pointing out that Chaucer's account of the story of Dido and Aeneas is a misreading of Virgil, although understandable in a poet so sympathetic to women ('My mastir Chauser gretly Virgill offendit . . . / For he was evir – God wait – all womanis frend', 1, 410, 449). How Douglas represents his own standing towards Chaucer is discussed by Ruth Morse ('Gavin Douglas: "Off Eloquence the flowand balmy strand" '), and like Douglas in his *Palice of Honour* the English poet John Skelton (1460–1529) is responding to the example of Chaucer's *House of Fame* in his *Garlande of Laurell*, about which John Scattergood writes ('Skelton's *Garlande of Laurell* and the Chaucerian Tradition'). In *Phyllyp Sparowe* Skelton – who always shows a keen sense of Chaucer's humour – praises Chaucer's diction and singles out its distinctive concision and clarity, yet evidently sees the need to protest against a contemporary tendency to feel that Chaucer's language is growing obscure:

> There is no Englysh voyd,
> At those dayes moch commended;
> And now men wold have amended
> His Englyssh whereat they barke
> And mar all they warke;
> Chaucer, that famus clerke,
> His termes were not darke,
> But plesaunt, easy and playne;
> Ne worde he wrote in vayne . . .   (795–803)[21]

Not so obscure, however, as to prevent the dramatist John Heywood setting on stage in his play *The Pardoner and the Frere* (1533) the figure of a pardoner whose speech includes a transposition of the monologue of Chaucer's Pardoner in the Prologue to his Tale.

Satire on clerical abuses is also the theme of the *Plowman's Tale*, which is printed along with Chaucer's works and other 'apocryphal' Chaucerian texts in Thynne's edition of Chaucer (1532), and Thomas J. Heffernan has