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978-0-521-03527-9 - Courtly Letters in the Age of Henry VIII: Literary Culture and the Arts of Deceit

Seth Lerer

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This revisionary study of the origins of courtly poetry reveals the culture of spectatorship and voyeurism that shaped early Tudor English literary life. Through new research into the reception of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, it demonstrates how Pandarus became the model of the early modern courtier. His blend of counsel, secrecy, and eroticism informed the behavior of poets, lovers, diplomats, and even Henry VIII himself. In close readings of the poetry of Hawes and Skelton, the drama of the court, the letters of Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn, the writings of Thomas Wyatt, and manuscript anthologies and early printed books, Seth Lerer illuminates a "Pandaric" world of displayed bodies, surreptitious letters, and transgressive performances. In the process, he redraws the boundaries between the medieval and the Renaissance and illustrates the centrality of the verse epistle to the construction of subjectivity.

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Hans Holbein, Portrait of Sir Thomas Cromwell.

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# Courtly letters in the age of Henry VIII

*Literary culture and the arts of deceit*

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Seth Lerer

*Stanford University*



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For my father

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What a goddes name, haue ye a boke in your hande? let me se. Nouum testamentum: What, thou deceiuest me / I had wend thou couldest haue skillid of nothing but onli of flateri. But what is this in your bosom? an other boke . . . Abyde, what is here? Troylus & Chreseid? Lord what discord is bitwene these two bokes?

Sir Thomas Elyot, *Pasquil the Playne* (1533)



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## Illustrations

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This book began as a sequel to my *Chaucer and His Readers*, and it therefore owes a debt to many of the individuals and institutions that facilitated the writing of that study. The British Library, the Huntington Library, the Bodleian Library, and the libraries of Princeton, Berkeley, and Stanford provided resources and materials. A fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation enabled me to begin work on the present volume, while further financial support and teaching leave from Stanford helped me to complete it.

Portions of the book were presented to audiences at Berkeley, Duke, Notre Dame, the University of Pennsylvania, and Rutgers; to a meeting of the Bay Area Pre- and Early Modern Study Group; and as lectures and colloquia at Washington University, where I had the privilege of serving as the Hurst Visiting Professor in the Winter of 1996. Among those who heard or read material, I single out for special thanks: John Bender, Harry Berger, Mary Bly, Joseph Loewenstein, Patricia Parker, David Riggs, Jennifer Summit, and Steven Zwicker. For support of this project in its earliest stages, I thank R. Howard Bloch, Anthony Grafton, Stephen G. Nichols, and Brian Stock. Joseph Dane had the ability to determine precisely the moments when I was saying just the opposite of what I meant. Timothy Hampton responded fully to an early version of chapter 3 and, in the process, helped me see the larger European scope of my study. Mary F. Godfrey offered valuable commentary throughout the writing of the book. Conversations with Sean Keilen and Bradin Cormack pushed me to refine the exposition and enhance its supporting evidence. Christina Carlson and Deanne Williams secured microfilms of manuscripts. After the book was complete in draft, I had the opportunity to present some of its materials in a graduate seminar at Stanford on early Tudor literature. I am grateful to those students for showing me the implications of my interests and for forcing me to clarify my claims.

Stephen Orgel welcomed this book into the Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture series. But more than that, his presence as a colleague and a friend has enhanced the environment in

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which this publication, as well as many of my others, could productively take shape. Josie Dixon has been a model editor and Jonathan Crewe an ideal reader (whose report not only offered incisive suggestions for revision, but also managed to articulate the scope and argument of the book better than I could myself).

A small portion of chapter 2 appears as an article in *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 59 (1996). An early version of some readings now incorporated into chapters 2 and 4 appears as an essay in *The Book and the Body*, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe and Dolores Warwick Frese (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1996). Finally, I thank the Huntington Library, the Frick Collection, the British Library, and the Pierpont Morgan Library for permission to reproduce photographs of materials in their collections.

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## Note on editions and abbreviations

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Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Chaucer's poetry will be from Larry D. Benson, general editor, *The Riverside Chaucer*, third edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). I have, however, compared the *Riverside* edition of *Troilus and Criseyde* with Barry Windeatt, ed., *Chaucer: Troilus and Criseyde* (London: Longman, 1984), whose readings I occasionally adopt. Quotations from Wyatt's poetry will be from R. A. Rebholz, ed., *Sir Thomas Wyatt, The Complete Poems* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1978). For Skelton: John Scattergood, ed., *John Skelton, The Complete English Poems* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983). For Stephen Hawes: W. E. Mead, *The Pastime of Pleasure*, EETS original series 173 (London: Oxford University Press, 1928); Florence W. Gluck and Alice B. Morgan, eds., *The Minor Poems*, EETS original series 271 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974). For Tottel's *Miscellany*: Hyder E. Rollins, ed., *Tottel's Miscellany (1557–1587)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2 vols. 1928–29, rev. 1965). The manuscript of Humphrey Wellys, Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson C.813, has been edited by Sharon L. Jansen and Kathleen H. Jordan, *The Welles Anthology* (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1991), and for the most part I rely on their edition (though I spell the name of its compiler as he did, Wellys). All other editions will be cited in full in the notes.

My use of these editions, however, does not necessarily imply that I accept all their readings and redactions. The literature I survey survives in manuscripts and printed books of remarkable textual variability. To some, variation is the mark of unreliability; to others, it is testimony to the creatively fluid nature of the medieval and the early modern text and to the intrusiveness (witting or unwitting) of scribes and readers. This is a book about the history of reading and rewriting, and I have often sought the manuscripts and early printed editions of many of the works I analyze. When I refer to these documents to make a point of textual criticism, or to expose the responses of a historical readership, I cite them

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using standard library abbreviations, shelf marks, catalogue references, *Short Title Catalogue* numbers, and foliation or pagination.

Finally, because there is a fair amount of Middle English in this book, I occasionally offer marginal translations of particularly difficult or obscure words in my quotations.

The following abbreviations are used:

EETS OS	Early English Text Society, Original Series
EETS ES	Early English Text Society, Extra Series
<i>MED</i>	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i> , ed. Hans Kurath <i>et al.</i> (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1954 –)
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> , ed., James H. A. Murray <i>et al.</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933)
<i>RES</i>	<i>Review of English Studies</i>
<i>SAC</i>	<i>Studies in the Age of Chaucer</i>
<i>STC</i>	A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, <i>A Short Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, and Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475–1640</i> (London: Bibliographical Society, 1926)
<i>RSTC</i>	The <i>STC</i> revised by W. A. Jacobs, F. S. Ferguson, and Katherine F. Panzer, 3 vols. (London: Bibliographical Society, 1976, 1986, 1991)