Introduction

'Politics *is* very largely the use of language.'[1] This is as true for England in the later Middle Ages as it is in the twenty-first-century world of spin doctors and sound bites. Language does not simply provide the means by which political actions are carried out, but also shapes the form of politics itself. Following decisive and unforgettable turmoil, the language of political debate changes in ways which then influence subsequent action. Political upheaval creates memorable discourses which are kept in mind and frequently returned to in the months and years following the initial moment of crisis. One such indelible event was the deposition of Richard II by Henry Bolingbroke in the summer and autumn of 1399.[2] Henry, whom Richard had exiled in September 1398, returned to England in July 1399 to reclaim the inheritance withheld from him following the death of his father, John of Gaunt. Very soon after his landing, however, Henry's ambitions grew from the recovery of his inheritance to the English throne itself. By the middle of August, Richard had fallen into Henry's hands and the process of securing the usurpation had begun. Once Richard was in custody and those remaining loyal to him had been overcome, Henry and his supporters set about formulating words and ideas to explain and justify recent events, to convert their illegal usurpation into a legitimate deposition.

As well as constructing a title by which he could claim the throne, Henry and his advisers needed to explain how the throne had come to be vacant. The explanation chosen was that Richard had resigned the throne voluntarily because of his failings as king. A deputation of lords visited Richard in the Tower on 29 September where they heard him read aloud a bill in which he resigned sovereignty of his own accord. The bill (as reported in the official *Record and Process* narrative of the deposition) records that Richard recognized that he should resign the throne because of his notorious faults ('propter mea demerita notoria').[3] He acknowledged that he was incapable of governing the kingdom ('insufficientem . . . et inutilem'). At a public ceremony held the following day at which Richard was not present, this bill was read aloud in Latin and in English. During the ceremony, the previously unspecified *demerita notoria*, Richard's notorious flaws, were given definite form in a list of articles.[4] Those present were asked to give their assent to these articles which constituted an exemplification of Richard's shortcomings and to agree that the *demerita notoria* comprised sufficient cause for deposition.[5] This was followed by the reading of the formal sentence of deposition which again accounted for Richard's resignation on the basis of his many misdemeanours and crimes.[6]

Richard's *demerita notoria* were therefore the key fiction of the deposition. His supposed awareness and admittance of his inadequacy and errors caused him to resign the throne, creating a vacancy which Henry could fill without illegal usurpation. The *demerita notoria* in effect rewrote the history of Richard's reign. They categorized Richard as a failure, an unsuccessful, dishonest and selfish king who had acted against the interests of his subjects. In doing so, they also rewrote the terms of political debate for the early Lancastrian period. They reset the agenda for parliamentary exchanges, literary production and the writing of history. A chronicle compiled at the Cistercian abbey at Dieulacres in Staffordshire illustrates the sudden and total derangement of prevailing political conditions. The earlier part of the chronicle, covering the period from 1337 to 1400 and written by an author loyal to Richard, calls Henry and his supporters enemies of the kingdom ('inimici') who usurped the innocent king ('regem innocentem') by deceiving Richard with gentle words ('verbis blandis').[7] The later part of the chronicle, covering the period from 1400 to 1403, was written by another monk supportive of the Lancastrian cause. Faced with a preceding text which contained a very different representation of Richard (particularly as regards his treatment of the Appellants in 1397/8) from the one put forward in the deposition articles, the later chronicler begins his continuation by telling his readers that there are numerous places in which the earlier author 'vituperat commendanda et commendat vituperanda' [condemns that which ought to be commended, and commended that which ought to be condemned].[8] In a single summer, the polarities of political debate had been reversed, and the effects of this reversal were to be long-lasting.

This book therefore follows Paul Strohm's *England's Empty Throne* in using the events of 1399 as a starting point for an exploration of early Lancastrian literature and political discourse.[9] It uses a different method of enquiry, however, and thus produces different results. Its methodology is that laid out by the historian of political thought, J. G. A. Pocock, in a classic essay on political language.[10] Pocock outlines a type of reconstitutive analysis which reads political texts in the light of the linguistic context – that is, a network of associated or surrounding texts – in which they were written. Whilst this mimetic reconstitution can never be complete or total, Pocock argues that we can work towards 'providing co-ordinates' for the production and reception of texts at specific historical moments.[11] This reconstruction is achieved linguistically: 'The primary component of this context has to be language.'[12] By language, Pocock means particular linguistic and textual matrices, which he variously calls 'specialized idioms', 'vocabularies' and 'rhetorics', used and sometimes shared by different institutions, factions and individual agents to participate in key political debates or to comprehend historical events at certain moments.[13] As I see them, these matrices incorporate many different linguistic elements including literary topoi, narrative structures and allusions to particular literary or historical archetypes. Once these languages are identified and coordinates established, a text can be seen as a historical event in its own right, something which happens at a particular moment using a particular set of linguistic and conceptual circumstances.[14]

In his two collections of essays on political thought and history and in articles elsewhere which put forward a method for research into the history of political discourses, Pocock offers an illuminating explanation of how political language functions.[15] His analysis provides much of the inspiration for this book. By means of these politicized languages or textual matrices, speakers and writers create what Pocock calls *paradigms*, ways of talking or writing which 'structure thought and speech' in favour of certain explanations or certain versions of events (though they cannot successfully preclude other versions or explanations).[16] For Pocock, the creators of these paradigms are both borrowers of previously extant languages and innovators who transform language usage.[17] Yet these new or newly important paradigms can themselves be appropriated and reused in different and unexpected ways by other political voices.[18] Whilst Pocock's own researches concentrate on the early modern period, this book aims to show that his theorization of political language works equally well for late medieval political discourse and political literature. Pocock's writings provide a structure which can explain the relationship between official documents disseminated by the Crown and other texts which respond to the language of these documents, particularly contemporary chronicles and literature addressing political topics.

Following Pocock's lead, this book examines the creation and afterlife of two languages or specialized idioms arising from the *demerita notoria* which legitimized the deposition. Firstly, the *demerita notoria* prioritized a particular stereotype or paradigm of Richard and his household as simultaneously youthful and tyrannous, prone to luxury and self-indulgence, and dismissive of the advice of truthtellers and wise counsellors. Rather than remaining solely confined to Richard and his household, however, these stereotypes shaped both the Lancastrian Crown's self-presentation and the challenges, comments and criticisms made to it by its subjects. They evolved into the substance of Lancastrian literature itself in works such as *Richard the Redeless*, *Mum and the Sothsegger*, and poems by John Gower, Henry Scogan and Thomas Hoccleve. Secondly, the textualization of the deposition gave rise to a distinctive picture of Richard's financial practices which moulded subsequent discussion of Lancastrian finance. It focused attention both on ideal reciprocal exchanges of love and credit and on fraudulent or contradictory exchanges. Existing discourses which linked together credit, loyalty, advice and love were revitalized. Again, vernacular literature, particularly *Crowned King* and Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes*, internalizes this newly politicized language.

Both of these languages were used by a wide range of speakers and writers when participating in and recording historical events and the cultural and political struggles which they engendered. Rather than a study of direct sources and influences, or of one-to-one interaction between an author and his patron, this book reconstitutes a larger linguistic environment. The existence of these two related languages is traced in the widest possible range of literary and non-literary texts and genres, including poetry written by named authors close to the centre of national government and by anonymous poets elsewhere, various chronicle accounts of current events written in religious institutions and by private individuals, and bureaucratic sources such as the Parliamentary Rolls, the Patent Rolls, letters and other documents of record. Yet literature is at the centre of this exploration. Literary works written in the aftermath of the deposition cannot be fully appreciated without reference to the changing languages of national politics. The post-1399 works of Hoccleve, Scogan and Gower, the political poems in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Digby 102, and the anonymous poems *Richard the Redeless*, *Mum and the Sothsegger* and *Crowned King* reflect and seek to reconfigure the linguistic and political environment in which they were written. These texts can properly be described as Lancastrian literature, both chronologically and culturally, because all of them respond in some way to Henry's accession and its impact on political debate. Frank Grady has memorably called such texts 'the generation of 1399', texts generated more or less directly by the deposition.[19] Political and literary cultures are inseparable, demanding simultaneous study and analysis.

What becomes most evident and exciting when such study is undertaken is the rapidity and complexity with which political protagonists, poets and chroniclers responded to the changes in political discourse inaugurated by the deposition. They did not accept these linguistic and conceptual changes uncritically or indiscriminately, but instead identified them, discussed them, recycled them and challenged them. Rather than making any simple distinction between subordinated and uncritical reproducers of Crown propaganda and those who opposed and challenged it, we must therefore map out a new position occupied by these writers. Early Lancastrian authors employed languages and idioms which were in the process of escaping from the control of their originators. They adopted the linguistic suggestions and propositions of royal authority, but made more ambiguous or unexpected use of them, transforming these discourses themselves into the subject of Lancastrian literature. They are not for or against the Lancastrian Crown but rather in conversation with it.

Furthermore, elements of Lancastrian literature which might be thought of as idiosyncratic or private are seen to be strategic political interventions when considered against the background of the changes in political culture brought about by the deposition. Thomas Hoccleve, for example, is well known for talking about himself in his poetry.[20] He tells us about his youthful riot in *La Male Regle*, when he drank at the Paul's Head Tavern and was famous amongst the innkeepers and cooks at Westminster Gate and the taxi-boatmen at Paul's Wharf for his generous tips. In the Prologue to the *Regiment of Princes*, he describes his anxieties regarding his current difficulties in gaining payment of his wages from the Exchequer. He records the often unseen hardships of long days spent in scribal labour and his fears for the future when he retires from his job as a Privy Seal clerk. Yet these autobiographical confessions also participate in public dialogues, sharing paradigms and imagery with the discussions which proliferated following the identification of the *demerita notoria*. Hoccleve's simultaneous and contrary presentation of himself as an extravagant wastrel and as an employee defrauded by the shaky machinery of government finance can be explained, as Chapter 6 will show, by comparison with attempts at financial reform fashioned in part by the deposition.

Reconstructing the linguistic environment of which early Lancastrian literature forms a part allows us to see these texts in their full intricacy and energy. One difficulty in reading fifteenth-century literature is its seeming preference for conventional topoi and commonplaces of political and ethical advice. Many of the linguistic elements employed by fifteenth-century authors have a long diachronic history and are present in texts throughout the Middle Ages. A diachronic history, however, does not prevent certain very familiar elements of language from acquiring a

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temporary synchronic significance of one kind or another, a connection to a particular event or argument or person. This book shows how such temporary political significance can become attached, for example, to *de casibus* narratives, the figure of the *pauper superbus* or the priceless Aristotelian advice-giver. The works of Hoccleve and his fellow authors are only formulaic or conventional when political discourse is itself seen as static, unchanging and undisputed. David Lawton warns that it is a 'failure of response' to describe such poetry as offering nothing more than 'convention or commonplace'.[21] This book seeks to provide a context for early Lancastrian literature which makes such a failure unimaginable.

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PART I

Household narratives

1

Stereotyping Richard and the Ricardian familia

RICHARD'S NOTORIOUS FLAWS

The creation and acceptance of Richard's supposed *demerita notoria* were pivotal to the success of the Lancastrian usurpation. Richard's statement of insufficiency and his awareness of particular acts of incompetence were put forward as the primary explanation of his resignation of the throne, thus establishing the vacancy which Henry claimed he had a right to fill. The *demerita notoria* laid the foundations both for dynastic and linguistic change, creating both the Lancastrian monarchy and the terms of reference for Lancastrian politics.[1] Their strategic importance explains the emphasis placed by the official *Record and Process* account of the deposition on the self-evident quality of Richard's notorious flaws. The bill of resignation declared that Richard himself was now fully aware of his deficiency ('veraciter ex certa sciencia').[2] His insufficiency, and the events which demonstrate it, are *notorie*, their authenticity is guaranteed by their status as commonly accepted knowledge. The *demerita notoria* were written down in a fixed form and publicized more widely supposedly to remove any doubt or suspicion surrounding the deposition.[3] This removal of doubt reveals an awareness that any uncertainty about the authenticity of these notorious flaws also threatened the efficacy of the *post hoc* justification of the deposition. This is also demonstrated by the rewriting and revision of the list of articles. The *Record* acknowledges that whilst the majority of the articles were read aloud at the ceremony, it was only during the composition of the *Record* itself that all of the articles were included.[4] This delay allowed time for additions and alterations aimed at improving their persuasive powers.[5]

Richard himself was aware of the use to which his supposed insufficiencies had been put and he tried to resist and refute these charges. The deposition narrative included in the *Annales Ricardi Secundi* describes in more detail than the *Record* a meeting between Richard and Sir William

Thirning, Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas, during which the procedures of the deposition were explained to Richard and the fealty of his subjects formally withdrawn from him.[6] When Richard asked to retain certain aspects of his sovereignty after the deposition, Thirning reminded him that he had admitted in his bill of resignation that he was not capable of governance. Richard replied: 'Non sic, sed quia non placuit populo gubernatio sua' [It was not thus, but rather because his governance did not please the people]. Thirning restates the official position that the deposed king himself was self-confessedly incompetent, but Richard counters that it was his unpopularity rather than his insufficiency which has led to the usurpation. He makes clear the artifice of the Lancastrian account of autonomously professed failure. The exchange between Richard and Thirning was excluded from the official record because the compilers of the *Record* were conscious of the need for unchallenged acceptance of Richard's supposed inadequacies and the acts which bore witness to them. Self-confessed inadequacy and self-evident transgressions were indispensable for the elision of Lancastrian agency in the narrative of the deposition.

RETROSPECTIVE STEREOTYPING

Whilst the Lancastrian claim to the throne combined a number of potentially conflicting strategies, the representation of Richard and his reign as contained in the official account of the deposition was internally coherent and consistent.[7] Subsequent to Richard's acknowledgement of his notorious but unspecified flaws in the bill of resignation, these defects were exemplified first in the thirty-three deposition articles preserved in the *Record and Process* and second in a sermon given by the reinstated Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Arundel, immediately following Henry's accession to the throne. When compared in detail, both of these documents present a coordinated picture of Richard, his *familia* and his particular style of government. In doing so, the two texts employ many of the classic manoeuvres of the stereotyping process.[8] They associate Richard, Ricardian government and Richard's *familia* with fixed and homogeneous assumptions. Their *post hoc* representation of Richard's reign is predominantly evaluative though they claim to be simply descriptive. They attempt to limit flexible thinking about what kind of sovereign Richard had been, giving the illusion of precision in their descriptions of Ricardian government whilst at the same time narrowing and simplifying their representation of Richard's twenty-two-year reign. They imply a general consensus that his reign had been a failure and that it had ended because Richard himself was an incompetent ruler who displayed traits which easily identified him both as a tyrant and as a youthful sovereign. Likewise, they stereotype representations of his *familia regis*.

RICHARD AS TYRANT

First and foremost, the deposition articles present Richard as governing England on his own impulse and in his own interests.[9] Through limited lexical variation on the same adverbial theme, Richard is said in a variety of instances to have acted solely according to his own will and desire.[10] This stress on Richard's wilfulness strongly associates him with a pre-existing image of bad kingship.[11] While Richard was not explicitly called a tyrant in the official Lancastrian depositional narrative, the repeated emphasis on the role of his will, lust or desire in the formulation of his public activities implied that Richard's rule could be categorized as tyrannous and therefore inadequate.[12] Works of political theory such as the *De regimine principum* of Giles of Rome offer analyses of the differences between a true king and a tyrant. The articles draw on such descriptions of bad, false or tyrannical kingship in order to construct a picture of Richard's rule as tyrannous.[13] Rather than acting for common profit, that is, in the best interests of their subjects, tyrants let their own self-interest and desires take precedence. The *De regimine principum* states that one of ten key differences between tyrants and true kings is that 'a kyng takeþ heede to þe comyne profit and a tyrand to his owne profit'.[14] This same distinction between singular and common profit is used to structure many of the accusations made in the deposition articles. Article 13, for example, records that rather than choosing sheriffs for each county for the common profit of the kingdom ('pro bono et utilitate regni'), Richard appointed these officials solely for his and their individual benefit, which harmed the interests of his commonwealth ('pro suo et aliorum commodo singulari; ad magnum gravamen populi sui').[15]

Tyrants are also avaricious. They treat their kingdoms and subjects merely as an economic resource to be exploited for their own ends.[16] Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum* positions this attitude to money as one of the absolute differences between tyranny and true kingship: 'He þat setteth his felicite in money principallych wol gadre money and tresour to hymself, and is therfore a tyraunt and nouȝt a kyng.'[17] Such covetousness is motivated by the need to consolidate his position as ruler. A tyrant uses illicitly appropriated wealth to buy power, status and security.[18] Richard likewise