THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
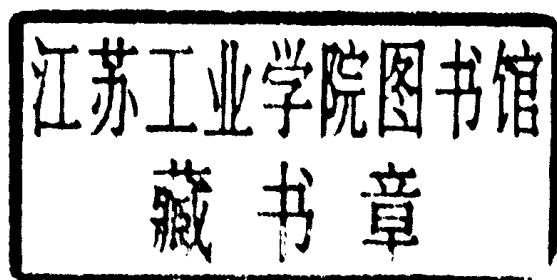
MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERATURE 1100–1500

Edited by Larry Scanlon

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The medieval period was one of extraordinary literary achievement sus-
tained over centuries of great change, anchored by the Norman invasion and
its aftermath, the re-emergence of English as the nation's leading literary
language in the fourteenth century and the advent of print in the fifteenth.
This *Companion* spans four full centuries to survey this most formative and
turbulent era in the history of literature in English. Exploring the period's
key authors – Chaucer, Langland, the Gawain-poet, Mergery Kempe, among
many – and genres – plays, romances, poems and epics – the book offers an
overview of the riches of medieval writing. The essays map out the flourish-
ing field of medieval literary studies and point toward new directions and
approaches. Designed to be accessible to students, the book also features a
chronology and guide to further reading.

LARRY SCANLON is Associate Professor of English at Rutgers University.

A complete list of books in the series is at the back of this book.

ABBREVIATIONS

CHMEL	David Wallace, ed., *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1999)
EETS; EETS os; EETS es; EETS ss	Early English Text Society; Early English Text Society, original series; Early English Text Society extra series; Early English Text Society, supplementary series
Idea of the Vernacular	Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans, eds. *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280–1520* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999)
JEGP	*Journal of English and Germanic Philology*
JMEMS	*Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*
NML	*New Medieval Literatures*
Piers Plowman	William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. A.V.C. Schmidt, second edn (London: Everyman, 1995)
Riverside	Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson *et al.* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1987)
SAC	*Studies in the Age of Chaucer*
SP	*Studies in Philology*
YES	*Yearbook of English Studies*
YLS	*Yearbook of Langland Studies*

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CHRONOLOGY

1066	Normans invade England after the death of Edward the Confessor. William the Conqueror becomes monarch. He installs his retainers as tenants-in-chief throughout the realm, essentially creating a new nobility in one fell swoop.
1086	Appearance of the *Domesday Book*, a comprehensive survey of the people, and property holdings of the entire realm commissioned by William in the last year of his realm. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* comments bitterly, "not one yard of land, not ... one ox, not one cow, not one pig was left out."[1] The Domesday survey demonstrates an interest in centralization and bureaucratic organization that will become the hallmark of English monarchy for most of the later Middle Ages, a structural feature that stays relatively constant in spite of the many dynastic disruptions.
1100	Generally accepted by historical linguists as the dividing line between Old and Middle English.
1100	Henry I, youngest legitimate son of William, accedes to the throne, after the death of his brother William Rufus in a hunting accident. A capable administrator, he is succeeded by Stephen in 1135, the son of his older sister Adela, who soon becomes embroiled in a civil struggle with Henry's daughter Matilda.
1121–55	*Peterborough Chronicle*; begun as a version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, it includes entries for the years 1122–31. Entries for later years are added in 1155, in prose showing many features of early Middle English grammar already well established.

1137	Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia regum Britanniae* (*History of British Kings*).
1154	Henry II, grandson of Henry I, accedes to the throne with the death of Stephen. During the course of his forty-five-year reign he greatly strengthens the power of the monarchy, often at the expense of the barons. He institutes, or regularizes, a system of writs that becomes the basis of a distinctive English common law. He conquers Ireland. His court attracts a number of important writers, including Geoffrey of Monmouth, Walter Map, and Marie de France.
1170	Archbishop Thomas à Becket murdered in Canterbury Cathedral during dispute with Henry over relations between bishops and royal authority.
1170	Death of Saint Godric, reputed to be author of earliest surviving lyrics in Middle English.
c. 1170	Marie de France, *Lais*.
c. 1180	Marie de France, *Fables*.
1189–1250	Laȝamon, *Brut*.
1190–1200	*The Owl and the Nightingale*.
1200–1225	*Ancrene Riwle*; the "Wooing Group"; the "Katherine Group".
1214	Fourth Lateran Council (so-called because it is held in the Lateran palace) makes confession an annual obligation of all believers.
1215	Magna Carta ("The Great Charter") signed by King John and his barons. Often looked to as the founding text of English liberty, its more immediate intent is to put some restraint on the growth of royal power at the expense of the aristocracy.
1216	Henry III succeeds his father at the age of nine. He reigns even longer than his grandfather, fifty-six years. In spite of several crises the power of the monarchy continues to grow.
c. 1225	*King Horn*.
c. 1250	"Sumer is icumen in."
1250–1300	*Arthour and Merlin*.

1272	Edward I becomes king in possibly the smoothest succession in all of the English Middle Ages. Accomplishments include the conquest of Wales, and the subjection of Scotland. Through the *quo warranto* hearings – designed to make lesser lords demonstrate "by what warrant" they exercised justice – he consolidates all legal jurisdictions under the ultimate authority of the Crown.
1275–1300	*South England Legendary. Debate between the Body and the Soul.*
1280–1300	*Havelok the Dane.*
1281	John Pecham, Archbishop of Canterbury, *Ignorancia sacerdotum* (also known as the "syllabus").
1300	Richard Rolle born.
c. 1300	*Cursor Mundi. Amis and Amiloun. Bevis of Hampton. Guy of Warwick. Kyng Alisaunder. Lay le Freine. Richard Coer de Lion. Sir Orfeo.*
1300–25	*Sir Degaré.*
1300–50	*Sir Launfal. Sir Cleges.*
1303	Robert Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne.*
1307	Edward II succeeds his father. The victim of long pent-up grievances among the barony, military difficulties on the Scots border, and his own incompetence, he is deposed and executed two decades later when his queen Isabella and son turn against him.
1320–30	*The Simonie.*
1325–50	*Lybeaus Desconus.*
1330	Edward III becomes king. In 1340 he claims the French throne, initiating the Hundred Years War. During his forty-seven-year reign, Parliament, originally an extension of the King's Council, emerges as an independent institution, in part because of the recurring need to raise taxes to fund the war.
c. 1330	John Gower and William Langland born.
1330–40	Auchinleck manuscript (Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates' 19.2.1).
1340	Dan Michel of Northgate, *Ayenbite of Inwyt.*

c. 1340	Geoffrey Chaucer born. Harley manuscript (London, British Library, MS Harley 2253).
c. 1342	Julian of Norwich born.
1349	Richard Rolle, *Form of Living*. Rolle dies this same year.
c. 1350	*Joseph of Arimathie. Octavian. Sir Eglamour of Artois.*
1350–61	*William of Palerne.*
1350–70	*Gamelyn.*
1350–75	*Speculum Vitae.*
1350–1400	*Ipomadon. Robert of Cisyle.*
c. 1352	*Winner and Waster.*
1357	*Lay Folks' Catechism.*
1359	Chaucer captured while serving in Hundred Years War; ransomed the next year.
1360	John Mandeville, *Mandeville's Travels.*
c. 1360	Alliterative *Morte Arthure.*
1360–70	Chaucer, *Romaunt of the Rose.*
1360–78	Chaucer travels to Italy and France on diplomatic missions.
1365–70	A version of *Piers Plowman.*
c. 1365–75	Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS Pepys 2498.
c. 1368	Thomas Hoccleve born.
c. 1370	Chaucer, *Book of the Duchess.*
1370–80	Gower moves to the Priory of St. Mary Overeys, Southwark.
c. 1371	John Lydgate born; enters the Benedictine abbey at Bury St. Edmund's as a boy.
1373	Julian, *Showings*, short text.
c. 1373	Margery Kempe born.
1374	Edward III appoints Chaucer Controller of Custom, a post he holds until 1386.
1374–78	Gower, *Mirour de l'Omme; Cinkante Balades.*
1375–1400	*The Awntyrs off Arthure. Cloud of Unknowing. Poems of the Gawain*-manuscript (British Library MS Cotton.Nero.x): *Pearl, Patience, Cleanness, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*

1376	York plays performed.
1376–79	B version of *Piers Plowman*.
1377	Richard II succeeds to the throne at the age of twelve. His reign is marked by recurrent constitution struggles with baronial factions, and ends with his deposition.
1378	Chaucer grants Gower power of attorney.
c. 1380	Chaucer, *House of Fame. Sir Firumbras.* Early version of the Wycliffite Bible begun. Later version will be completed in late 1390s.
after 1380	*Death and Life.*
1380–90	*The Pore Caitif.*
1380–1400	Richard Lavynham, *A Litil Tretys on the Seven Deadly Sins.*
1381	English Rising. also called the Peasant's Revolt, although the rebels are not exclusively peasants. The rebellion begins in Essex and Kent, touched off by attempts to collect a poll tax. The rebels march on London, invade the Tower, burn John of Gaunt's Savoy Palace, behead the Archbishop of Canterbury, and extract from Richard II a promise to end lordship and abolish serfdom. Once they disband, Richard disavows his promise, captures the leaders, executes them and has their heads displayed on stakes on the city wall. In spite of its failure most social historians now view the Rising as a longer term catalyst for the decline of serfdom, which becomes largely obsolete by 1430.
1381–85	Gower, *Vox clamantis*, revised version. Original version predates the 1381 Rising. Gower revises the poem again in the 1390s. Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde; Boece.*
1381–90	C version of *Piers Plowman*.
1382	The Blackfriars' Council finds heretical and erroneous propositions in the writings of John Wyclif.
c. 1382	Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls.*
1384	Wyclif dies.
1385	Chaucer appointed Justice of the Peace in Kent.
c. 1385	Chaucer, *Legend of Good Women.* John Clanvowe, *Cuckoo and the Nightingale.* Thomas Usk, *Testament of Love.*

1386	Chaucer elected to Parliament.
c. 1386–1400	Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales.*
1387–91	Hoccleve enters the office of the Privy Seal.
1389	Richard II appoints Chaucer Clerk of the King's Works.
c. 1390	Langland dies. John Mirk, *Festial. Parlement of the Thre Ages.*
1390–93	Gower, *Confessio Amantis.*
1390–1400	Vernon manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Poet. Eng. 1). *The Siege of Jerusalem.*
1391	Chaucer, *Treatise on the Astrolabe.* Chaucer becomes deputy forester of the royal forest of North Petherton.
1393–1415	*The Crowned King. Mum and the Sothsegger. Pierce the Ploughman's Crede. Richard the Redeless.*
c. 1393	Julian, *Showings*, long text.
1394	Processional route for York plays established. *Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards* nailed to Westminster Hall.
1396	Death of Walter Hilton, author of *Scale of Perfection.*
1398	Gower marries.
c. 1398	Gower, *Traitié pour Essampler les Amantz Marietz.*
1399	Henry Bolingbroke leads a successful rebellion against Richard II. He takes the throne as Henry IV. Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury is the intellectual architect of the complex succession and relations between Church and Crown grow much closer than in previous reigns.
1400	Chaucer dies.
c. 1400	Gower, *Cronica Tripertita. Book for a Simple and Devout Woman. Emaré. The Erle of Toulous. Laud Troy Book.* stanzaic *Le Morte Arthur. Sir Gowther. The Sowdane of Babylon, The Siege of Melayne.*
after 1400	Prose *Alexander.*
1400–25	*Castle of Perseverance.*
1401	The statute *De heretico comburendo* declares heresy a capital offense.
1402	Hoccleve, *Letter of Cupid.*
1403	Richard Wyche's letter.

c. 1406	Hoccleve, *La Male Regle.*
c. 1406–08	Lydgate at Gloucester College at Oxford.
1407–09	Archbishop Arundel's *Constitutions.*
c. 1407	*Testimony of William Thorpe.*
1408	Gower dies.
1409–14	*The Lanterne of Liȝt.*
c. 1409	Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ.*
1410–12	Hoccleve, *Regiment of Princes.*
1412	Henry V takes the throne upon his father's death. In 1415 he gains a great victory over the French at Agincourt. He dies seven years later of dysentery during another campaign in France.
1412–20	Lydgate, *Troy Book.*
1413–22	Lydgate, *Life of Our Lady; A Defence of Holy Church.*
1415	Hoccleve, *Letter to Oldcastle.*
1419–21	Hoccleve, the *Series.*
1421–22	Lydgate, *Siege of Thebes.*
c. 1422	Earliest record of Chester plays.
1423	Lydgate appointed prior at Hadfield Regis, an office he holds until 1429–30; returns to Bury St. Edmund's in 1434.
1425–50	Compilation of the N-Town plays.
after 1425	*Destruction of Troy.*
1426	d. Hoccleve. Lydgate, *Title and Pedigree of Henry VI; Pilgrimage of the Life of Man.*
c. 1426	Lydgate, *Danse Machabré.*
1427	Lydgate, *Mumming at London; Mumming at Hertford.*
1428	Lydgate, *Mumming at Eltham.*
1429	Nine months old when his father died, Henry VI now crowned as king at the age of eight. Though he enjoys some success in his twenties, social unrest, the ruinous cost of the war and England's defeat, and finally his own physical and mental infirmities all take their toll, leading to the Wars of the Roses and eventually his deposition.

	Lydgate, *Mumming for Mercers of London*; *Mumming for the Goldsmiths of London*.
c. 1429	Julian of Norwich dies.
1430–60	*The Court of Sapience*.
1431–38	Lydgate, *The Fall of Princes*.
1432	Lygate, *King Henry VI's Triumphal Entry into London*.
1434–36	Lydgate, *Life of Saints Edmund and Fremund*.
1436–38	*The Book of Margery Kempe*.
c. 1440	Robert Henryson born. Margery Kempe dies.
1443–47	Osbert Bokenham, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*.
1446–49	Lydgate, translation of *Secretum secretorum*.
1449	Lydgate dies.
1450	Jack Cade's Rebellion.
c. 1450	*The Floure and the Leafe. Wars of Alexander*.
1450–61	Wars of the Roses.
1450–1500	Towneley Cycle.
1461	Edward, Earl of March, eldest son of Richard Duke of York, crowned Edward IV. He descends from Edward III through Lionel, Duke of Clarence, Edward's second son. In 1469 he is forced into exile as Henry VI is restored to the throne. Edward regains the throne two years later.
c. 1461	*Croxton Play of the Sacrament*.
1465–70	*Mankind. Wisdom*.
1465–1500	*Assembly of Ladies. Lancelot of the Laik. Rauf Coilyear*.
c. 1470	Sir Thomas Malory, *Morte Darthur*; Caxton's edition appears in 1485.
1470–95	Henryson, *Orpheus and Eurydice*; *Fables*; and the *Testament of Cresseid*.
1471	Malory dies.
1476	William Caxton establishes his press in Westminster; his first edition appears in the next year.
1478	Caxton's edition of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

1483	In April Edward V, aged twelve, becomes king on his father's death. His uncle, Richard, Duke of York, persuades Parliament to declare Edward IV's marriage invalid and Edward V illegitimate. In June, Edward and his younger brother are murdered. In July Richard is crowned Richard III.
	Caxton, *The Golden Legend*.
1485	Caxton's edition of Malory's *Morte Darthur*. Richard's forces defeated by Henry Tudor at Bosworth field. Henry becomes Henry VII. This event is traditionally taken to mark the end of the Middle Ages in England.
1490	Caxton, *Eneydos*.
c. 1506	Henryson dies.
1510–25	Earliest print fragment of *Everyman*.

1 *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, ed. and tr. Michael Swanton (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 216.

CONTENTS