Studies in Arthurian and Courtly Cultures

Writings on Love in the English Middle Ages

Edited by Helen Cooney

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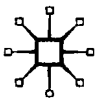

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Helen Cooney holds a B.A. (Mod.) from Trinity College, Dublin, and an M.A. (with Commendation) from Bristol University and a Ph.D. from T.C.D., where she currently teaches medieval and Renaissance literature.

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She has previously worked at Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, and Nottingham University. She has published numerous articles on both Chaucer and Spenser and is currently completing on a monograph on Chaucer's courtly poetry, *Chaucer's Theodicies of Love*. She edited and contributed *Nation, Court and Culture: New Essays on Fifteenth Century English Poetry* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001). Her current research interests include medieval and Renaissance writings on love and medieval and Renaissance literary theory.

Helen Cooper moved in 2004 to the Chair of Medieval and Renaissance English at the University of Cambridge from a Tutorial Fellowship in English at University College, which she held in conjunction with a lectureship in the Faculty of English, University of Oxford. She received her B.A. from New Hall, Cambridge, in 1968, and her Ph.D. in 1972. She was awarded an honorary Litt.D. by Washington and Lee University in 2001. She was Editor for Old and Middle English Language and Literature for *Medium Ævum* from 1989–2001, and was elected President of the New Chaucer Society for 2000–2. She has held visiting academic posts in the United States, and has given lectures and papers at numerous universities and conference in Britain, continental Europe, North America, and India. Her books include *Pastoral: Mediaeval into Renaissance* (Ipswich: Brewer, 1978); *The Structure of The Canterbury Tales* (London: Duckworth, 1983); *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989; revised edition, 1996); *Sir Thomas Malory: Le Morte D'Arthur* ([ed.] Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1998); *The Long Fifteenth Century: Essays for Douglas Gray* (co-edited with Sally Mapstone, Oxford: Calrandon,1997); and *Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). She is the author of numerous articles on Chaucer, Langland, Gower, and the Gawain-poet, medieval romance and its afterlife, Wyatt, Spenser, Shakespeare, and other medieval and Renaissance topics; and many reviews, including review articles in the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *London Review of Books*.

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Carol Meale was Reader in Medieval Studies at the University of Bristol and where she is currently Senior Research Fellow. She is the editor of *Women and Literature in Britain 1150–1500*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and *Readings in Medieval English Romance* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991); and coeditor of *Romance in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991) and *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain—Essays for Felicity Riddy* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000). Amongst her many publications are articles on Chaucer, medieval romance, book production and reception (codices and early printed books), and medieval women's patronage and reading.

Alastair Minnis is Distinguished Humanities Professor in the English Department at Ohio State Universities. His publications include: *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1984, revised ed. 1988), *The Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems* (1995, rpt. 2000), and *Magister Amoris: The "Roman de la Rose" and Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), in addition to articles on Chaucer, Gower, *Piers Plowman*, Boethius, *Biblical Exegesis, and Medieval Theology*. He has co-edited with A.B. Scott) *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c.1100–c.1375: The Commentary Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988; rev. edn. 1991, rpt. 2001) and edited several anthologies of scholarly essays, the latest of which is *Middle English Poetry: Texts and Transmissions*, in honour of Derek Pearsall (York: York Medieval Press, 2001). Currently he is working on the medieval theory and practice of indulgences, the Lollard Walter Brut, and a monograph entitled, *Fallible Authors: Chaucer's "Pardoner" and "Wife of Bath"*. Professor Minnis's research methodology characteristically brings together reading strategies from literary criticism and the history of ideas.

Bernard O'Donoghue teaches Medieval English at Wadham College, Oxford. He writes on medieval and twentieth-century poetry, and his publications include *The Courtly Love Tradition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1982), an anthology of medieval European love-writings in parallel text. He has also written *Seamus Heaney and the Language of Poetry* (New York, London: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1994), as well as five volumes of original poems. He is currently translating *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* for Penguin Classics.

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John Scattergood was educated at the University of Birmingham at King's College, London. From 1964 to 1980, he was a member of the Department of English at the University of Bristol: he was made Reader in Medieval English in 1978. Since 1980, he has been Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English at Trinity College, Dublin, and was made a Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin in 1981. He has written extensively on English literature from the Anglo-Saxon period to the early seventeenth century. His books include *Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century* (London: Blandford, 1971), *Reading the Past: Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), and *The Lost Tradition: Essays on Middle English Alliterative Poetry* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000). He has edited *The Works of Sir John Clanvowe* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1975), and *The English Poems of John Skelton* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1983). He has edited four collection of essays: *English Court Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Duckworth, 1983), with James Sherborne, *Literature and Learning in Medieval and Renaissance England* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1984), *Texts and Their Contexts: Papers from the Early Book Society* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), with Julia Boffey, and, *Text and Gloss: Studies in Insular Language and Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), with Helen Conrad O'Brien and Anne-Marie

D'Arcy. He was awarded the degree of Litt.D in 2002. He is a member of the Royal Irish Academy.

Barry Windeatt is Professor of English in the University of Cambridge, and a Fellow of Emmanuel College. His research interests are chiefly: Chaucer (especially in relation to his European background); the literature of mysticism; and all things Arthurian. His books include: *Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1982); *Geoffrey Chaucer: "Troilus and Criseyde": A New Edition of "The Book of Troilus"* (London: Longman, 1984); (trans.) *The Book of Margery Kempe* (London: Penguin Classics, 1985); (ed. with Ruth Morse) *Chaucer Traditions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); *The Oxford Guides to Chaucer: "Troilus and Criseyde"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); (ed.) *English Mystics of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1994); *Troilus and Criseyde: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); (ed.) *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Harlow: Longman, 2000); and *Troilus and Criseyde* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003).

CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Helen Cooney

> *And for ther is so gret diversite*
> *In English and in writinge of oure tonge . . .*
>
> Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, V.1793–4

This volume seeks to reflect the "gret diversite" of writings on love in the English Middle Ages. It focuses mainly on those writings which were produced in the English language, but also makes significant reference to Anglo-Norman writing, in particular to its influence on English writers on love and their readers, and to the work of those Scottish poets such as Dunbar and Gavin Douglas who themselves professed to write in "Englisshe," as distinct from the Scots-Gallic tradition. Due recognition and considerable reference is however made to the international background, chiefly to the influence of the courtly ethos of *fin amor* as expressed either through continental lyric and romance or as encapsulated in Andreas Capellanus's scholastic treatise, the *De Amore*, as well as in the *Roman de la Rose*. This book seeks not to impose a single "grand récit" on the body of texts under discussion, and to have not a unitary but rather a multifaceted perspective. It is hoped that the wide range of genres addressed and the vastly differing perspectives on love which seem to have been held by the medieval writers of lyric, romance, allegory, and so on, and by a whole range of writers, from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, are given expression in all their diversity. As a reflection of this diversity, the kind of scholarly approach adopted by the contributors is likewise various: there are essays which deal with issues of culture, gender, "the politics of desire" and textual and social practice in England, as well as more traditional literary methodologies, such as intertextuality, source-study, and comparative treatments of male- and female-centered texts. Three of the essays deal with the works of Chaucer, but several more make significant reference to

him—something which reflects the sheer importance of his work for audiences of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The essays which deal with Chaucer's love-poetry itself are also significantly diverse, but it is hoped that all lead to new—and radical—readings of very familiar texts.

* * *

In the course of describing the dance of love in the Jardin de Deduiz in the *Roman de la Rose*, Guillaume de Lorris made the following remark about the garment of Cupid: it was "faites / par fines amorietes." (877–8).[1] The text here, as so often, is utterly polysemous, yet given that *textus* means primarily "woven [thing]," and given also the currency of the textile/textual analogy in medieval culture, it seems to me that one possible interpretation of Guillaume's remark is that the *Roman*'s literary account of the nature of Cupid and, by extension, the emotions and activities of his servants (i.e., the entire *textus*), have actually been created by ("par") courtly ("fines") lovers themselves.[2] This remark is hugely significant in what it tells us about the extent to which the phenomenon known as *fin amor* was a purely textual and/or social construct. At the very least, it suggests a very strong element of contingency and subjectivity—or even, in its strictest sense, of "self-fashioning"—in the literature of courtly love.

This volume of essays, while it is (intentionally) without a central thesis, does however explore, in a significant subtext, the extent to which the writings about love addressed here are self-fashioned and essentially subjective, or are determined by objective, external factors such as the social class or the broad cultural milieu and historical circumstances of the writer. The work of Chaucer seems to give the lie utterly to the view that the medieval writer on love is bound by his or her subjectivity or circumstances, gendered, social or otherwise. Ironically, it was most likely the *Roman de la Rose* itself (most notably, Jean de Meun's continuation of it) which suggested to Chaucer the possibility that a single author might give voice to a whole range of perspectives on love and life in general. Indeed, Barry Windeatt's essay here makes the case that even the apparently monolithic *Troilus and Criseyde* is host to a wide variety of perspectives on love. On the other hand, John Scattergood's analysis of the socially nuanced dialogues of the second book of Andreas Capellanus's *De Amore*, as well as a range of texts including the *Roman de la Rose* itself, makes a powerful case for the fact that the literary lover's nature and identity was in large part governed by the social realities and hierarchies of the medieval world. Looking at a different text again, however, Carol Meale demonstrates how a male-authored English translation of Alain Chartier's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* actually

works toward "the assertion of *female* subjectivity." In this instance, it would seem that writing on love need not be determined even by the gender of the author. But to shift the ground once more, my own essay here seeks to show that *The Floure and the Leafe*, like much fifteenth-century courtly literature, represents a response to a specific set of social and historical circumstances and a crisis which was occurring that time, in the aristocratic milieu in England.

Even this brief sampling would suggest that while, on the one hand, writings on love were indeed (as Guillaume had suggested) created by lovers in their own image and hence were highly subjective in nature, it would appear that, on the other hand, texts were often influenced, if not actually determined, by external social and historical realities and duly reflect these objective forces. The single instance which best captures the range of possibilities on this subjective/objective, or performative/descriptive continuum is the imaginative ventriloquism of Andreas in the *De Amore*, the celibate male cleric who could accurately give voice to the social and amatory imperatives faced for example by the courtly heroine and the male peasant lover alike.

* * *

It is appropriate that a volume which seeks to privilege diversity of approach should contain, form the beginning, an internal dialectic. Hence, in the opening essay, Bernard O'Donoghue proposes to reassert mid–twentieth century views according to which ideas of *fin amor*, initiated by the southern French lyric poets in the twelfth century and duly "translated" into romance form at around that time, are the best context for a reading of medieval English love-poetry. He thus implicitly challenges the insistence of John Burrow in his magisterial *Ricardian Poetry* on the lack of an established literary tradition in the middle of the fourteenth century, seeking to show instead that continental works embodying the ethos of *amour par amour* were of profound significance to medieval authors working in the courtly tradition. In making this case, he sees medieval English writers on love as sharing the Lacanian definition of love as "an individual inclination that worked against the interests of society." The focus in the essay is on Middle English lyrics in the context of the European background. However, in her essay, Helen Cooper proposes a radically different view—namely, that the ideal of *fin amor*, and with it, Petrarchan conventions, had no relevance in writing on love in England at least until the writing of *Troilus and Criseyde*. In her study of Anglo-Norman romances, she demonstrates that, in texts of this kind, women had an enhanced role, and she shows clearly how features which were anathema to the *fin amor* and

Petrarchan ethos—most especially reciprocal passion and resulting marriage, as well as the fact that the romance heroines often become pregnant on their wedding-night—were in fact commonplace in the Anglo-Norman romances. She argues that this ethos of love has been lost sight of primarily because of the dominance in the modern readers' mind of works such as *Troilus* and the *Knight's Tale*. Corinne Saunders shares Cooper's rebuttal of the importance of the *fin amor* tradition on English writing, this time focussing on the native tradition of Middle English romances. Comparing these texts with Latin and French antecedents and analogues, she does see evidence of "engagement" with these texts but at the same time finds a sharp contrast and deliberate "rewriting" of the (continental) treatment of love as a courtly game into the English concept of love as a virtue, characterised particularly by qualities of "trouthe." The three opening essays thus constitute a mini-"débat" concerning the significance—or otherwise—of the (male-authored and originally continental) ethos of courtly love in medieval English writings on love. Moreover, while for Bernard O'Donoghue, in the volume's first essay, Andreas Capellanus' *De Amore* was taken to encapsulate the continental ideal of *fin amor* and was discussed insofar as this ideal/ethos may have had an influence on medieval English writings on love, John Scattergood's essay treats Andreas's treatise of love in a far more sociohistorical and empirical way. It takes up the *De Amore*'s rhetorical concern with social class and, beginning with a detailed discussion of the often-neglected series of dialogues between lovers of varying "degree" in the lengthy second book of the treatise, extrapolates from these dialogues the very real constraints of social hierarchy on the medieval lover, firstly as expressed in the thirteenth century *Roman de la Rose*, but ultimately in the English pastourelles of Dunbar and some "native" English romances, including the *Squire of Lowe Degree*.

There follows a group of essays on the love-poetry of Chaucer, and in these one finds a focus not alone on diversity, but also on divergences of points of view on love, even within a single text. This is emphatically the case with the essay of Barry Windeatt, which challenges the preoccupation, not only of critics, but most importantly, of the poem itself, with establishing a monolithic/single "definition" of love—founded most often on intertextual ironies—in order to unify the poem. Windeatt argues that in *Troilus and Criseyde*, Boccaccio's *Filosatrato* has been "rescripted" in order to allow for repeated discussion and definition of love, and that it is in fact an implicitly humanist narrative, by virtue of its experimental and open-ended nature.

Throughout the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *Tale*—and consequently and inevitably, in literary-critical studies of the texts—it is the corporeality of Alisoun and her desires that have been emphasised, and her genesis in literature has most often been found in Jean de Meun's embittered, old

La Vieille, a former promiscuous woman, who used her body to fulfil her material desires. Alastair Minnis attempts a radical reappraisal of Alisoun of Bath as an *auctrice* or female authority-figure, skilled in academic disputation. He argues that this remarkable transformation from her literary models and precedents is achieved by Chaucer's manipulation of narrative point-of-view and voice—thereby placing traditional misogynistic materials in a problematizing perspective in such a way that one may find in the discourse of an old woman "wisdom and usage." The *Franklin's Tale* has been tried and tested in relation to myriad contexts: Neil Cartlidge is perhaps the first critic to bring it into conjunction with late-medieval legal materials. He finds the tale "remarkably legalistic," dealing with issues such as the wife's liability within a marriage or the definition of a contract, and argues that legal and scholastic genres such as the *quaestio disputanda*, are the correct context in which to view the tale, as distinct from traditional contextualizations of it in relation to, for example, the literary *demande d'amour.*

The focus then shifts almost entirely to fifteenth-century writings on love. Taking up once again the idea of differentiation between male- and female-authored texts, Martha Driver compares the treatments by Geoffrey Chaucer and Christine de Pizan of a common stock of materials on various types of love from the sacred to the profane, as found in the seminal *Roman de la Rose*. She concludes—using the example of La Vieille as she is reconstituted in Chaucer's Wife of Bath, on the one hand, and in Christine's advice to women in her *Book of the Three Virtues* on the other—that Chaucer is "an advocate" of the *Rose*, Christine, "a critic," while noting the important qualification of this in Chaucer's *Melibee*. The overarching purpose of the essay is however to show how the *Roman* was rewritten ("romanced") for a late-medieval audience. Carol Meale's essay is more overtly gender-based and poses a trenchant challenge to the dominance of male-centered texts which focus on male-centered desire, this time, as such an ethos had attained dominance in the works of Chaucer and others in the fourteenth century. Meale shows how the mid–fifteenth century Middle English translation of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* dislocates that text's portrayal of the expression of female desire as somehow transgressive and allows us to feel the female speaker's frustration with the entire courtly discourse, so that a "difficult" woman is created (ironically enough, by a male translator). She echoes the view of Cooper and Saunders to the effect that many of the writers of Anglo-Norman and "native" English romance had indeed created "strong women" as heroines of romance. However, Meale goes further and argues that if these women are indeed active "it is only because their activity is congruent with male desire." She goes on to continue her search for "intimations of female interiority" and "other examples of female subjectivity" in fifteenth-century courtly poems such as *The Floure and*

the Leafe and *The Assembly of Ladies*, concluding with a brief study of Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*. Helen Cooney's essay on *The Floure and the Leafe* seeks to show that this "little booke" has not only moral, but also philosophical, esthetic and sociohistorical significance, and that the poem comprises a highly self-conscious and finely wrought negotiation of the influence of Chaucer. Finally, Priscilla Bawcutt returns to the question of the "courtly love tradition" and explores the existence (or, as has hitherto been thought, *non*existence) of such literature in Scotland, in the fifteenth century. Bawcutt examines a range of genres (principally romance, dream-allegory, and complaint) in which love is treated and the variety of tone and definition in those treatments, which she believes to have been heavily influenced by Chaucer and other English poets. She focuses specifically on the treatment of love in Blind Harry's *Wallace*, Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice*, and Gavin Douglas's *Eneados* (Prologue to Book IV).

Notes

1. Reference is to *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Félix Lecoy, 3 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1965–1970).
2. The phrase "par fines amorietes" is translated by Charles Dahlberg as "by delicate loves," (*The Romance of the Rose* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971]) and by Frances Horgan as "of courtly loves." (*The Romance of the Rose* [Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1992]). Both seem to miss the profoundly self-reflexive nature of this remark about the making of a garment or *textus*. It is essential to note that the text/textile analogy, now favored by modern theorists, is to be found in the work of Patristic authors, notably St Ambrose and St Augustine. For an account of its origins and significance in medieval thought, see Eric Jager, *The Tempter's Voice* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), especially pp. 99–142. A translator of the *Roman* into modern French, André Lanly, comes closest to my own interpretation: his translation reads, ". . . une robe de fleurettes/faite par de tenders "amourettes." (*Le Roman de la Rose* [Paris: Champion, 1971]). This endorses the inference that the robe (i.e., the text) was actually created by personifications of those in Cupid's retinue. As Lanly puts it in his note: "ces 'amourettes' semblent, ici . . . les suivantes d'Amour personnifiées comme lui."

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