



A COMPANION TO
MEDIEVAL ENGLISH
LITERATURE AND
CULTURE
c.1350 – c.1500

EDITED BY **PETER BROWN**



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A COMPANION TO
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CULTURE

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EDITED BY PETER BROWN

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Canterbury
May 2006

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Quotations from the Bible are from the English translation of the Latin Vulgate, otherwise known as the Douay–Rheims version.

Abbreviations

CYT	Canon's Yeoman's Tale
DNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> , ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, new edn, 60 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)
EETS	Early English Text Society
es	extra series
FrankT	Franklin's Tale
FrT	Friar's Tale
GP	General Prologue
IMEV	Carleton Brown and Rossell Hope Robbins, <i>Index of Middle English Verse</i> (New York: Columbia University Press for the Index Society, 1943)
KnT	Knight's Tale
LGW	<i>Legend of Good Women</i>
ManT	Manciple's Tale
ME	Middle English
MED	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i> , ed. Hans Kurath, Sherman M. Kuhn and Robert E. Lewis, 12 vols (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1954–2001)
MilP	Miller's Prologue
MilT	Miller's Tale
MkT	Monk's Tale
MLT	Man of Law's Tale
OED	<i>The Oxford English Dictionary</i> , 2nd edn, prepared by J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, 20 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989)
os	original series
PardP	Pardoner's Prologue
PardT	Pardoner's Tale
ParsP	Parson's Prologue
PhyT	Physician's Tale

PL	<i>Patrologia Latina: Patrologiae cursus completus . . . series Latina (prima)</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 vols (Paris: 1844–64)
REED	<i>Records of Early English Drama</i> (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979–)
RvT	Reeve's Tale
SIMEV	Rossell Hope Robbins and John L. Cutler, <i>Supplement to the Index of Middle English Verse</i> (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965)
SNT	Second Nun's Tale
SqT	Squire's Tale
ss	supplementary series
STC	Pollard, A. W. and Redgrave, G. R. (eds), <i>A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland and Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad 1475–1640</i> , rev. W. A. Jackson, F. S. Ferguson, and K. F. Pantzer, 3 vols (London: Bibliographical Society, 1976–91).
SumT	Summoner's Tale
TEAMS	The Consortium for the Teaching of the Middle Ages
TC	<i>Troilus and Criseyde</i>
WBP	Wife of Bath's Prologue
WBT	Wife of Bath's Tale

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Introduction

A volume such as this would have been impossible ten years ago. Then, the accent in late medieval English literature was on the 'literary'. Geoffrey Chaucer was in the foreground, shadowed by William Langland and the *Gawain* poet. The fifteenth century was dominated by Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* and the mystery plays, which often seemed like the last gasp of the old order before Humanism and the Reformation destroyed it for good. Medievalists occasionally made forays into critical theory – if only to demonstrate that St Augustine had anticipated Jacques Lacan – and into neighbouring disciplines, especially history, but by and large they gave the impression that the traditional approaches to the traditional canon gave them plenty to do.

That insularity has now gone. The category of 'literature' has broadened and deepened to include other kinds of writing, especially of the religious variety. Of course, religious writing has always been an unavoidable component of medieval literature more generally, insofar as it occurs in the works of canonical authors. But the centrality of religious writing – of which there is an enormous amount as yet under-studied – is now more generally acknowledged as a means of coming to terms with distinctive and influential structures of thought, feeling and representation. Manuals of religious instruction, devotional treatises and mystical writing have been subject to the same kind of scrutiny once reserved for, say, the *Canterbury Tales*. A major impetus for this redirection of focus has been the recognition that the ideas of John Wyclif and his Lollard followers, who placed a high value on literacy, texts, translation and interpretation (especially of the Bible), are crucial to an understanding of the more general status, circulation and meaning of late medieval writing. Furthermore, the polemical works produced by Wycliffites, and the measures taken to counteract them, take us to the heart of religious and political ideology and controversy, offering fascinating and complex objects of study, and providing insights into questions of authority, translation and censorship.

At the same time, more general processes of literary production have become a key interest: the ways in which manuscripts and early printed books were made, how texts