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*Chaucerian Conflict: Languages of Antagonism in Late
Fourteenth-Century London* (review)

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Studies in the Age of Chaucer, Volume 30, 2008, pp. 408-411 (Review)

Published by The New Chaucer Society

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sac.0.0010>

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Such details do not significantly mar the book's achievement. Perhaps most innovative is Thomas's focus on the Bohemia of English imagination and, to a lesser extent, the England of Bohemian imagination. This motif provides one of the book's stronger links between the otherwise relatively diverse chapters. In one sense, the chapter on the Czech anti-Hussite poem—"The Wycliffite Woman"—seems most out of place. Yet it too belongs here, as its detailed engagement with recent arguments about gender, literacy, and heresy in medieval England best exemplifies the book's consistent efforts to address scholars of medieval and Renaissance English literature. More than a few of them, I hope, will be inspired to explore further the Czech and German literature of medieval and early modern Bohemia. For this, they should begin by consulting Alfred Thomas's other publications.

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MARION TURNER. *Chaucerian Conflict: Languages of Antagonism in Late Fourteenth-Century London*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007. Pp. viii, 213. £53.00; \$95.00.

We have come a long way from the "quiet hierarchies" that D. W. Robertson proposed for the intellectual and social formation of the medieval world. Now conflict, treason, heresy, and social rivalries are detected in every byway of fourteenth-century London. Book titles provide a synopsis of prevailing outlooks: Steven Justice's *Writing and Rebellion* (1994), Peggy Knapp's *Chaucer and the Social Contest* (2000), and my own *Chaucer and Langland: The Antagonistic Tradition* (2007). Marion Turner's book exposes a particularly deadly, depressing version of Greenblatt's arena of social contests. Chaucer was "concerned with depicting the inevitably destructive nature of human fellowship and society" (p. 2) and held out "no hope for social amelioration" (p. 5). So we have also come a long way from E. Talbot Donaldson's jolly, amicable author.

Chapter 1, "Discursive Turbulence," launches the now-normal historicist operation of reading between literary and nonliterary texts. Precise dating of the poet's output therefore becomes crucial, and *The House of*

Fame is repositioned to the mid-1380s on the basis of a long-standing view persuasively resurrected by Helen Cooper. Chaucer's dream-poem assumes new meaning in the context of Richard II's 1387 proclamation against slander as well as the parallel crackdown by Mayor Brembre that figured in the complaint of the *Mercers' Petition*. Chaucer personifies Slander as having the swiftness and destructive power of a cannonball (lines 1625–44), and his appeal for personal anonymity (lines 1876–82) fantasizes an evasion from this newly aggressive surveillance. As an enactor of caution, *The House of Fame* refuses to name the “man of gret auctorite” and breaks off without reporting what he said or he did.

Chapter 2, “Urban Treason,” discusses how *Troilus* with its domestic betrayals, first by Calchas, then by his daughter Criseyde, and finally by Antenor—with the foreigner Sinon significantly omitted—gains meaning in context of the letters accusing London aldermen of aiding the 1381 rebels by opening the capital's gates. The manipulation of Deiphoebus dramatizes how appeals to “common profit” cloaked self-serving schemes that actually undercut prospects for peace. Perhaps the most lethal traitor is Pandarus, whose opportunistic, can-do optimism distracts from the tragic outcomes awaiting the principal players.

Chapter 3, “Troynovant in the Late Fourteenth Century,” builds on the work of Sylvia Federico's *New Troy* to explore the civic fantasy “always already inhabited by potential division” (p. 56). Not gesturing to some past ideal, Chaucer becomes the realist whose Troy materializes as a palimpsest for London. His Troy/Troilus wordplay invokes the Freudian parallel between individual and national mythmaking. This nationalist mythology collapses in Chaucer's Trojan epic, just as it did in Gower's *Vox clamantis*, Maidstone's *Concordia*, and *St. Erkenwald*, because each text exposes divisive bids for dominance by royal power, juridical authority, and competing professional estates.

Chapter 4, “Ricardian Communities,” focuses on the factionalist and early member of Chaucer's audience, Thomas Usk, who became a victim of these urban conflicts. His textual output neatly divides into the documentary *Appeal* and the literary *Testament of Love*. In his attempts to straddle the political divisions between royal court and civic communities—and extract from a misprision of *Troilus* a redemptive ideal of social coherence—Usk ended up abandoned by King Richard and scapegoated on behalf of urban interests by the Lords Appellant. As a royal servant, he clearly lacked the wiles of Pandarus (and Chaucer) to maneuver safely under the radar. Triangulating these two literary works with historical

records of the 1380s, Turner offers perhaps the best intertextual reading to date of Usk's *Testament*.

Chapter 5, "The Canterbury Fellowship and Urban Associational Form," explores the reach of these urban antagonisms into the social harmony of the *Tales*, carefully policed by the Host and expressed in language reminiscent of the guild returns of 1388–89: "In compaigney we schal han no debaat" (*CT* III.1288). Pledges of fellowship prove illusory as mutual suspicion breeds the conflicts dramatized by the narrative *quitings*. Though cruelty marks the exchange between the London-based Cook and Manciple, the quarreling almost comes to blows between the Host of Southwark and the Pardoner of Charing Cross. Once insulted, Harry Bailey as "governour" cannot constrain his own violent outbursts.

Chapter 6, "Conflict Resolved?" investigates Sir John Clanvowe's *Two Ways* and Philippe de Mézières's *Letter to Richard II* to show how texts that purport to eulogize reconciliation actually advocate alternative violence. Writers advancing peace between England and France transferred the chivalric impulse for aggression into a call for armed crusade. Richard II's efforts at suspending war with France were interpreted as a betrayal of the realm, and his counselors deserved execution for their treasons. With documented links to so many courtiers allied with the peace movement, Chaucer's own pacifist sentiments run throughout his writings and seem most explicit in the *Melibee*—or maybe not. Turner's persuasive reading of this allegory reveals that Prudence, rather than preaching blanket forgiveness, advocates "profitable" pragmatics best understood in terms of the conflicting economic interests of land-owning knights and city-dwelling merchants and tradesmen.

Most readers will find the claim that "Chaucer's texts frequently reflect the chaos of the London that he knew" (p. 5) contrary to their own encounters with his poems. What has bare-knuckle urban politics to do with Palamon and Arcite, Arveragus and Dorigen, or Custance and Saint Cecilia? David Wallace's "Absent City" reminds us of the extent to which the turbulent London of the fourteenth century is strangely *missing* from Chaucer's works when compared with Gower's *Vox* and Langland's *Piers Plowman*.

That said, Turner's contemporary critical methods become a welcome departure from the same-old. Who else has summoned Slavoj Žižek to discuss Thomas Usk and Philippe de Mézières? As thesis supervisor, Paul Strohm has bequeathed a "social Chaucer" embedded in the "textual environment" of London infighting and projecting those anxieties,

in repressed form, upon narratives like *Troilus* explicitly remote in time and place. An astute reader of these poems as social documents, Marion Turner carries forward this historicist project with surprising insight and admirable, sustained scholarly rigor.

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ALISON WIGGINS and ROSALIND FIELD, eds. *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007. Pp. xxii, 226. £50.00; \$85.00.

Guy of Warwick is one of the most popular figures of medieval literature and culture, particularly in England, where he gained the status of national hero. The romance *Guy of Warwick* has enjoyed a recent resurgence in critical attention as scholars begin to question the unflattering assessments of its literary quality by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century antiquarians. Recognition by scholars such as Velma Bourgeois Richmond and Thorlac Turville-Petre of the extent to which Guy functioned as a touchstone for early English national identity has brought the romances of Guy of Warwick into a much-deserved critical spotlight that has broadened to include new work on Guy in other literary genres and in other artistic media.

As the first book-length scholarly volume (other than editions) on Guy to appear in over a decade, *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor* is a most welcome addition to current scholarship on the legendary hero and his place in the English imagination. The collection offers new interdisciplinary research on topics as diverse as the manuscript histories of the Anglo-Norman and English-language Guy romances; nontextual and illustrative representations of Guy in the Middle Ages and the early modern period; political uses of Guy and his legend; and representations of women in Guy texts. Moreover, the volume engages the most current and influential trends in literary studies: gender theory, East-West relations, literary political activism, and translation theory, to name just a few. For the reader who is less familiar with the Guy romances, the volume's appendix includes both a short and a more detailed summary based on the famous Auchinleck manuscript of ca. 1330: one will want