

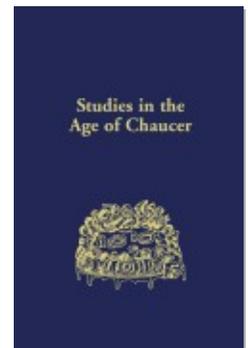


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Chaucer's Lyrics and "Anelida and Arcite": An Annotated Bibliography, 1900 to 1980 ed. by Russell A. Peck
(review)

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doubt that this narrative, which moves us "from plague to pleasure," has a therapeutic aim among its more exclusively literary concerns, such doubt should be weakened in light of early commentary on the work, and particularly in light of the "plague tracts," treatises concerned specifically with means of surviving the plague, one of which was to encourage cheerfulness with "songs, stories, and melodies." There is relatively little on Chaucer in Olson's book, though there is some fresh insight into the relation between the narrator's melancholy in *The Book of the Duchess* and his subsequent turning to a book for solace.

Literature as Recreation is a dense and intricately argued book, but it is demanding without being tiresome. Those who choose to use it for "reference," or to enter its argument by way of the index, will do so at their own peril, for it is the relatedness of the materials Olson presents, the recurrent qualification of one position by another, that lend the book its authority. If Olson's connections between theory and practice are sometimes tenuous, they may help us appreciate the dilemma of thoughtful persons during a crucial phase of intellectual history: "The expanded secular culture of the later Middle Ages still relies heavily on the recreational idea to understand and justify its interest in worldly pleasures. It does not yet give those pleasures independent status as goods in themselves" (p. 232).

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RUSSELL A. PECK, ed., *Chaucer's Lyrics and "Anelida and Arcite": An Annotated Bibliography, 1900 to 1980*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983. Pp. xx, 226. \$36.00.

Peck's bibliography is the first in a new series, The Chaucer Bibliographies, under the general editorship of A. J. Colaianne and R. M. Piersol, of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. As set out in the General Editors' Preface, the series is designed to

provide comprehensive annotated bibliographies from 1900 onward, in separate volumes, on Chaucerian works, groups of works, and special topics—coverage that is discriminating in that more significant items are usually accorded longer annotations.

Following a concise but graceful Introduction, dealing with the problems of textual tradition, canon, reputation, and autobiographical content of the lyrics, the bibliography of 575 numbered, annotated entries is divided as follows: (1) editions, arranged chronologically, beginning with the Skeat edition of 1894 and ending with the Parkes and Beadle facsimile edition of 1979; (2) bibliographies, indexes, manuscript, and textual studies, listing catalogues of manuscripts in British libraries, followed by studies in an alphabetical arrangement by author which is used thereafter in the bibliography; (3) metrics, versification, and vocabulary; (4) general studies; and (5) individual studies arranged under twenty-two titles. The apparatus includes Preface, Abbreviations, and a very full Subject-Author Index.

Although Peck's is the best guide available for Chaucer's lyrics and *Anelida and Arcite*, he has not rendered other bibliographies totally obsolete. He makes no claim for definitiveness, that sometimes dubious virtue. Although he has, of course, made extensive use of preceding bibliographies listed in his Preface, nowhere is the work a slavish compilation. He has omitted relatively useless items and has included several valuable items, especially parts of books, listed in no other bibliographies of the lyrics, and thus, but for him, not easily found. He includes only a few unpublished dissertations and only substantive or significant reviews, which he places conveniently following items to which they pertain. Occasionally, as in no. 273, he also gives opposing opinions from articles, books, etc.; a few items, in fact, seem to be entered merely to justify noting opposing criticism, as for example, no. 109, the insubstantial and inadequate entry on Chaucer in the *DNB*. The bibliography is flexible. A major problem, the identity of Adam, receives separate billing under *Chaucers Wordes Unto Adam, His Own Scriveyn*, for example. Although cross-referencing is usually very full, occasionally an important item is overlooked, as for example, item no. 48 on *Proverbs*, which is buried in Bibliographies, Indexes, etc., and not

referred to under *Proverbs*, though it is found in the Index under *Proverbs*.

Annotations ranging from one line to three pages (no. 359) include extensive quotations to let the author speak for himself, sometimes verbosely (and so expensively for the publisher that one wonders whether this method will work in the general editors' proposed ongoing computerized data base), yet often so entertainingly as to make this bibliography enjoyable as well as useful. A few are irresistible—under *Purse*, Norman Eliason (no. 311): "As a writer, he [Chaucer] got some things astoundingly wrong. . . . If he carried the habit over into his work as a civil servant, God knows what the budget bureau made of his accounts!"; under *Pity*, John Gardner's comparison (no. 406) of the naive narrator to the "man who shoots back at the movie screen"; under *ABC*, Vincent J. McNabb (no. 186): "I will at once confess to you that I have never had the heart to read those verses and tales which the poet meekly confessed he should never have written," or G. K. Chesterton (no. 161) on Ten Brink's notion (no. 78) of Chaucer's Mariolatry: "I do not quite understand why Chaucer must have 'passed through' this fit of devotion; as if he had Mariolatry like the measles," or the illustration noted in Joseph O'Brien's essay (no. 187) juxtaposing a "picture of Jesus under an olive tree on a hill overlooking a town in Palestine" and a picture of a car running on an 'empty' gas tank, advertising Payroll Savings Bonds," or John Gardner's response (no. 373) to George Williams's equation of Mars with Gaunt, etc.: "What poet in his right mind would compliment his friend by reminding him of the time 'you'd've had it old boy, if it wasn't for you-know-who!'" or Thomas Carter's opinion (nos. 89, 333) that *Mars* is an "exercise which 'reeks with cleverness'"; under Prosody, Alan T. Gaylord's comparison (no. 61) of Baum's view of *Anelida* (no. 58) as a "bizarre piece of engineering" with Agee's formulation, "The goddamnedest thing I ever did see," or Ian Robinson's dismissal of *Anelida* (no. 71): "Gower is always trying to be a Great Poet (an affliction from which Chaucer made an almost complete recovery)"; under *Anelida and Arcite*, R. H. Robbins (no. 263): "The major reason for the success of *Anelida's* complaint is that Chaucer created a character reacting spontaneously and colloquially

to her grief; she is not a talking doll with three inches of prerecorded tape in her sawdust." Peck's "exhilaration" and "glee" in his work (Preface) show through at every opportunity.

A minor quibble is an occasional nod in proofreading, which is, however, generally excellent throughout. In addition to various errors in the preliminary pages found in earlier copies and announced as corrected in later copies, I have turned up the following: "Hunamities" for "Humanities" and "apperaing" for "appearing" (p. xi); the archaic "nones" for "nonce" (no. 66); "oathes" for "oaths" (no. 95); and really to strain after gnats, a few wrong divisions of words, for example, *vi-vidness* (no. 60) and *unk-noun* (no. 393).

The bibliography is a necessity for all scholarly libraries.

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V. J. SCATTERGOOD and J. W. SHERBORNE, eds., *English Court Culture in the Later Middle Ages*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983. Pp. x, 220. \$27.50.

This book collects papers given at a seminar sponsored by the Coleton Research Society at Bristol University in the spring of 1981. While the papers show the disparities that such joint efforts always produce, cross-references throughout call attention to concurrences—as well as differences—in interpretation. Of the ten well-known medievalists who took part in the symposium, four write about English literature, including manuscripts; five about history, including art, education, and architecture; and one about music and poetry. We might have expected much more disagreement over the terms of their brief than these scholars in fact display. However various the subjects, there is a remarkable consensus about the implications of our knowledge of court culture in late-medieval England.

As all the authors stress, that "knowledge" is seen through a glass