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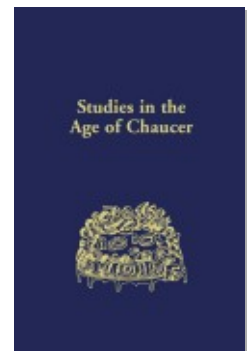
English Court Culture in the Later Middle Ages ed. by V. J.
Scattergood, J. W. Sherborne (review)

Ruth Morse

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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

darkly because of the patchiness of the surviving evidence. In fact, the first three words of their title indicate three of their four focal difficulties. First, since England was a client culture of French and Burgundian art, music, pageantry, fashion, and literature, the Englishness of their subject is not always straightforward. Second, they explicitly use "court" as an elastic term to mean the king and *familia regis*, the aristocracy, and courtiers in the broadest sense. This last is of crucial importance where literary patronage is concerned. It seems clear that, whether or not the English monarchs read or collected books, at the fringe of their circle literate "civil servants" were reading and writing for each other. Whether such persons should count as "court" is not clear. Third, the authors display a tacit acceptance of "culture" as restricted to what we might characterize as "high culture"; there is no definition of what they understand "culture" to consist of. It is instructive to see how similar the problems are in the recent *Profession, Vocation, and Culture in Later Medieval England* (Liverpool, 1982), intended as a festschrift for the late A. R. Myers, which deliberately excludes the court. One chapter of *English Court Culture*, quite clearly aimed at dispelling once for all Terry Jones's myth of Chaucer's Knight, elegantly demonstrates cultural values and shared beliefs in its consideration of the status of crusading among aristocrats. How far the aristocratic models extended is—rightly—left unresolved. This raises the fourth difficulty that all these essays confront. Was "English" "court" "culture" (however defined) a model, for itself, for other courts, for people who aspired to courtliness? That is, the difficult business of assessing influence is an inescapable part of the enterprise of this book.

There are nine substantive essays (J. A. Burrow contributes only a brief preface; J. S. Sherborne, a miscellaneous introductory essay). Maurice Keen's exemplary essay on crusading as an ideal combines remarkable knowledge of the sources with great interpretative assurance. Nicholas Orme, writing about medieval education with his usual breadth of reference, develops scanty evidence into a speculative essay on what *must* have existed. Like his companion essay on schoolmasters in the Myers festschrift, this one builds a wide-ranging description upon the most fragmentary survivals. It is,

however, surprising that Orme's wide net seems to have missed J. H. Hexter's classic essay on the education of the aristocracy in the Renaissance.

The necessity of speculating from minimal evidence is a leitmotif of these essays. In what is intended as a revisionist view of "Literary Culture at the Court of Richard II," Scattergood allows his speculations to outrun his evidence. While there can be no quarrel with his starting point that evidence for book ownership is meager, surely his attempt to correct earlier theories built on that fact suffers exactly their faults of arguing from what does not exist. To show how tenuous the evidence is for Chaucer and Gower as court poets is not, by the same token, a proof that they had nothing to do with the court. The Memoranda Roll List (1384/85) and a few scattered donations make incomplete evidence, not a proof that "Richard II seems to have been anything but an assiduous book collector" (p. 34). If the inventory of Thomas of Woodstock's collection is a large one, we may be grateful that this inventory survives without arguing that it was usual or unusual. The bequests of Eleanor Bohun may indicate which of her books were valuable enough to be bequeathed (largely, perhaps, because of their binding and illuminations), not an exhaustive guide to what she owned. Wills and inventories have their conventions, too. Scattergood's doubts about the famous frontispiece to the *Corpus Troilus* are as speculative as his predecessors' confidence: assigning a source to a picture is no more an explanation of an artist's choice and use of that source than it would be in a literary context. Let us make the limits of our knowledge clear, by all means, but let us be careful what we infer from those limits.

It is a pity that Scattergood does not consider *Poets and Princepleasers*, by another of the contributors, Richard Firth Green, which deals, as does his essay here on the courts of love, with many of the same questions. Green expands a subject mentioned in passing in his book (chapter 4) to consider the implications of the evidence for aristocratic "courts of love," taking in, by the way, the importance of legal modes of reference for late-medieval courtiers and writers. His control of both the historical and the literary evidence from both sides of the channel is sure, and his conclusions are elegantly

demonstrated. A. I. Doyle's modest and masterful examination of what English books can tell us about court patronage makes a fine complement to these two essays and is one of the best in the collection. He is as clear about its central problems as one could wish and at one point quietly inverts its supposed central assumption: that inspiration moved outward from a "central" court.

Denton Fox surveys the evidence of Scottish court patronage of poets (whose literary language was English), including poets whose work is no longer extant. He begs the question of courtliness by restricting himself to poems of "some degree of rhetorical sophistication," which leads him to omit "factual" (by which he seems to mean "historical") poems, though he excepts, briefly, John Barbour's *Bruce*. One may wonder, however, where one would find a better source for any court's self-conception than in its historical idealization of its acts of greatness. Like Green, Fox stresses the importance of literary self-consciousness in his authors. His verdict on the existence of a special court culture seems to be the uniquely Scottish "not proven."

Looking at English royal patronage of painting and manuscript illumination, J. J. G. Alexander analyzes the implications of the surviving evidence and offers a brief comparison between England and the Continent. He makes some new identifications and some interesting suggestions relating wall and manuscript painting, all of which confirm an impression of the international movement of artists and the geographical slipperiness of the English court. One of his firmest conclusions is that what survives suggests that royal patronage was less extensive in England than it was on the Continent (not surprising in the poorer country) and that the quality of painting was lower. This last is, of course, an art historian's judgment. Is it ungenerous to hope that future research will consider—in addition to purely painterly qualities—the narrative contributions of manuscript illustrations: How far do the scenes comment on the text? What happens to the illuminations when Latin or French texts are translated into English? We need a study of the work of those amateurs whose drawings, often dismissed as doodles, may tell us so much about contemporary attitudes to texts.

The acute problems of survival for the architectural historian are

obvious. H. M. Colvin considers the implications for future research on the limitations of our knowledge and gives an excellent survey of the state of contemporary scholarship. Like the two art historians, Nigel Wilkins deals with the Continental influences on his subject, music and poetry at court. Wilkins's knowledge of late-medieval French poetry is well known; here he gives a general picture of the surviving sources, which other scholars will find useful though they may not wish to follow all his speculations.

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JEAN-CLAUDE SCHMITT, *The Holy Greyhound: Guinefort, Healer of Children Since the Thirteenth Century*. Translated by Martin Thom. Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture 6. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983. Pp. x, 215. \$34.50.

Sometime before 1261 the Dominican inquisitor Stephen of Bourbon encountered (about thirty miles north of Lyons) an unusual heresy, which he at once determined to suppress. A number of peasants in the region were worshipping a dog, a greyhound they had named Guinefort, because it had been hastily and unjustifiably slain by a local knight. Stephen's exemplum, condemning such heretical superstitions, was included in his collection of exempla as *de adoratione guinefortis canis*. Having saved the infant of the house from the coils and jaws of a large serpent, Guinefort was slain by the returning father-knight, who, finding blood spattered around the nursery and the dog's mouth, struck the faithful animal a mortal blow. Stephen also reported that in a fortified place about a league distant a heretical ritual was enacted, in commemoration of Guinefort, though inspired by enticements of the devil: mothers with sick or weak children sought out a certain old woman, who enacted rituals involving offerings to demons to bring about the infants' health.