



PROJECT MUSE®

Chaucer: A Bibliographical Introduction by John Leyerle,
Anne Quick (review)

James I. Wimsatt

Studies in the Age of Chaucer, Volume 9, 1987, pp. 231-235 (Review)

Published by The New Chaucer Society

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sac.1987.0027>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/658822/summary>

other manuscripts of the work. The volume concludes with two indices: one of authors and titles and another of manuscripts.

Paging through the *Index* is like paging through a photograph album of medieval life, for the Middle English prose writers addressed themselves to a multitude of philosophical, recreational, and cultural topics. One finds, besides the anticipated prayers and proverbs, works on divination, fishing, hawking, toothaches, sundials, horses, grammar, medicine, hunting, bloodletting, navigation, obstetrics, and journeys to the Holy Land. The number of manuscripts in which some of these works exist can also be striking and instructive. *The Wyse Boke of Philosophie and Astronome*, for instance, survives in twenty-eight manuscripts, and so it is indeed indicative of medieval tastes that Chaucer's *Treatise on the Astrolabe* is found in twenty-six manuscripts, while his *Troilus and Criseyde* occurs in only twenty authorities.

The limitation of the *Index* to printed materials is understandable given the volume of Middle English prose, and, indeed, the unprinted material will be fully indexed in the handlists of *The Index of Middle English Prose* (see *SAC* 8 [1986]:196–200). An objection can be raised, however, against the exclusion of unprinted dissertations, which are sometimes important editions; and lexicographers will be puzzled by the alphabetization of “obsolete words . . . under their nearest modern English equivalent” (p. xxix). A strictly topical index would also facilitate use of the *Index*.

But even these objections, when the quality and value of the *Index* are considered, are quibbles. The editors hope to have provided “an index that will be of maximum utility to editors and bibliographers of Middle English prose” (p. xxvi), but they have in fact provided much more. The *Index* offers access to some of the most popular literature of medieval England and in so doing facilitates modern understanding of the period and its people. Middle English prose needs no defense; it needs study, and the present volume is an essential step in this direction.

TIM WILLIAM MACHAN
Marquette University

JOHN LEYERLE and ANNE QUICK. *Chaucer: A Bibliographical Introduction*. Toronto Medieval Bibliographies, vol. 10. Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1986. Pp. xx, 322. \$35.00.

This selective, annotated bibliography, consisting of 1,242 items plus generous cross-referencing, satisfies a major desideratum in Chaucer stud-

ies. Like the other volumes of the Toronto Medieval Bibliographies, it aims to assist scholars new to the areas of interest in question, both students and more advanced readers, along with new libraries building their collections. As for more practiced Chaucerians, the compilers modestly hope that their work may act as "a convenient finding list." I feel confident that it will serve these functions well, and more, and I recommend it to both neophyte and veteran. Despite inevitable drawbacks, the selection is judicious, the annotations are helpful, and the taxonomies which it sets up work well. Besides, there is little competition. Whereas the inclusive bibliographies of Hammond, Griffith, Crawford, Fisher, Baird, *SAC*, *PMLA*, and the Modern Humanities Research Association—not to mention the new Toronto series of annotated Chaucer bibliographies—provide a treasury of complete lists for the scholar, the selected compilations available are inadequate: Baugh's Goldentree Bibliography is now twenty years old, Fisher's very helpful bibliography in his edition is partly inclusive and partly selective, and the lists provided by the essayists in Beryl Rowland's *Companion to Chaucer* and by L. D. Benson in Derek Brewer's *Geoffrey Chaucer* are aging and very limited. Moreover, none of these selections has systematic annotation.

Among the drawbacks of the Leyerle-Quick book, the most poignant is that it is already out of date, since it covers items only through 1979. Fortunately, a second edition is in planning. Another problem, at least for me, is with the identifying code used for the items. Letters are used to identify a category, with numbers for the items within the category: the *Chaucer Life-Records* is M106 (M for Materials), listed on p. 26; Lewis's *Discarded Image* is B145 (B for Background), found on p. 284; while Spurgeon's collection of *Chaucer Criticism and Allusion* is CrS16 (CrS for Critical Studies), found on p. 103. One can decipher the code only by searching the index, which is itself presented in a confusing format. I find it much easier to use the through-numbering system employed in other bibliographies in the series, such as Fred C. Robinson's *Old English Literature* and Robert A. Taylor's *Littérature occitane du moyen âge*.

The annotations are an important feature; they are generally good though uneven. The mandatory complete sentence, with the pattern "Kittredge uses," "Kökeritz lists," and "Magoun gives," often lends grace but sometimes accentuates wordiness; the note to Robert Pratt's "'Joye after wo' in the *Knight's Tale*" is "Pratt argues that the plot of the poem illustrates the theme of 'joye after wo.'" The collections of essays are described mainly with some variation of "This collection includes *x* number of essays written for, etc.," with little attempt to show the collection's individuality. A more

flexible system of description that accommodates phrases and lists, like that used by Taylor in the Provençal bibliography, seems finally more efficient. The extent of the annotations is irregular and at times seems inappropriate. Charles Muscatine's basic study, *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, gets three lines, while the preceding entry, Alice Miskimin's specialized *Renaissance Chaucer*, gets six. D. W. Robertson, Jr.'s *Preface to Chaucer* gets a good sixteen lines, which include a list of reviews, but then Chauncey Wood's *Chaucer and the Country of the Stars* gets the non-description "Wood takes a Robertsonian approach to Chaucer's astrological imagery," with a reference to the annotation of *Preface*. One does not know whether this is purposely dismissive or simply hasty. As a matter of fact, Leyerle and Quick do employ evaluative adjectives, but without consistency. Muscatine's book is "important and influential," Robertson's "important and controversial," Clemen's "excellent," Elbow's "stimulating," but no adjective evaluates Paul Ruggiers's *Art of the Canterbury Tales* or Donald Howard's *Idea of the Canterbury Tales*—though the length of the annotations might suggest that the latter (nine lines) is of much more consequence than the former (one line). The guidance to the beginner to whom the bibliography is directed, then, is not firm. Nevertheless, the annotations—much easier to criticize than to compose—are in the main quite serviceable.

The choice of items from the mass of Chaucer scholarship is particularly good, I think. The compilers' major premise seems to have been that students—and scholars of medieval literature in general—need most to know about literary and cultural contexts; accordingly, they emphasize background and primary materials more than previous selections do. The first large category is "Materials for Chaucer Study" and includes 313 items with full descriptions, and the third and last is "Backgrounds," which has 238. "Backgrounds" should be valuable to all Chaucerians; it includes items particularly relevant to Chaucer studies on history, economics, fine arts, philosophy and religion, and so on. "Materials" provides especially full treatment of the text, language, life records, and "Source and Influences." Furthermore, the large middle division, "Chaucer's Works," has an ample section on the literary background of each work under the rubric "Sources and Analogues." This label may strike some as archaic, appropriate for Brusendorff and Tupper but not for modern use. But an inspection of the items in Leyerle and Quick suggests that source study is as strong and important today as it ever was, or perhaps more so, and the compilers have judged such work particularly important.

Of course, the intended audience led them to accentuate basic materials. Nevertheless, there are implications for Chaucer study that some may find surprising, or may question, when of the sixteen items listed for *The Nun's Priest's Tale* eleven are "Sources and Analogues" and only five "Critical Studies," and of the eleven listed for *The Monk's Tale* eight are source studies and but three critical treatments. These are not the most typical cases in the bibliography, but nevertheless throughout the section on "Chaucer's Works" one must be impressed by the number of source studies selected, especially as compared with the critical studies, quite out of proportion to the totals that have been published. If we accept the compilers' judgment—and I am inclined to, not entirely because of my own scholarly preoccupations—the lessons to be drawn from their emphasis on source materials are significant. First, it supports the truism that literature, and especially medieval literature, grows out of other literature, and that one of the best ways to determine the nature of a work is to know the previous works that helped to inspire it. Of course, "anxiety of influence" and simple artistic choice will lead to differences between a later work and its progenitors, but authors' angst is hardly pervasive in the Middle Ages, whatever the situation later, and in any event one needs to know where an author began. Second, it testifies to Chaucer's exceptionally wide learning and ability to assimilate; through manifest and manifold echoes and reflections of previous writings, his works lay themselves before us for anatomy, providing a unique opportunity for studying the writing process of a great genius. Finally, exploration of Chaucer's use of other literature supplies a valuable index both to the culture of the time and to the development of his own mind. It is for such reasons that "Sources and Analogues" criticism of Chaucer will continue to flourish and claim a major place in selective bibliographies and that the separate rubrics for such criticism adopted by Leyerle and Quick, and by Baird before them, will prove valid and useful (one might adduce as supporting testimony the new comprehensive *Chaucer Source and Analogue Criticism*, edited by Lynn Kay Morris).

In a selection one can always find items included that might be omitted, and vice versa. Nevertheless, in a survey of my bookshelves I was impressed to find that my old standbys, both the obvious and the less obvious, were almost always among those listed. There is no Sarum Breviary and Missal, but the Pfaff bibliography of the liturgy, which leads to them, is shown. Arnold Rzepecki's collected bibliography for 1910–19 may be of marginal use to the new student, but it perhaps has a legitimate place in Leyerle and Quick as the predecessor to *PMLA*. Technical faults are equally hard to

find. The type is clear and readable, the text remarkably free of error. Chaucerians, then, can be grateful to the compilers and the press for this bibliography. They may well require it in their graduate classes and will no doubt find it useful for their own work. I am sure that my own copy will soon be well worn, and I look forward to a new edition.

JAMES I. WIMSATT
University of Texas at Austin

UBERTO LIMENTANI. *Dante's Comedy: Introductory Readings of Selected Cantos*. Cambridge, London, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985. Pp. viii, 164. \$29.95, £19.50.

Cambridge is the one place in Britain—indeed in the English-speaking world—where Dante studies have been flourishing with particular intensity in the past twenty years, as the work of Kenelm Foster, Patrick Boyde, Robin Kirkpatrick, and Peter Dronke testifies. Although not a Dantist strictly speaking, Uberto Limentani has in many ways been the active source of inspiration behind the scholarly enterprises of his colleagues. He it was who organized a series of lectures to celebrate the seventh centenary of the poet's birth in 1965 (which he subsequently edited for the Cambridge University Press as *The Mind of Dante*), and it is to him that Cambridge owes the *lecturae Dantis* which, following the model inaugurated by Boccaccio in 1373–74, are held there regularly. It is therefore fitting that Limentani's own contributions to the *lecturae* should now be collected in a volume published by the same press that has brought out no less than seven books on Dante in the past fifteen years.

In offering us *Dante's Comedy*, Limentani has, as he himself states, a twofold aim: to provide students with a first commentary on single cantos of the poem and to show the wider public that Dante can be read even by those who have little or no Italian. I have no doubt that the volume fully achieves its double purpose and that it will become a very useful tool for all who read it.

The book in many ways resembles those early commentaries on the *Comedy* which sought to explain the poem's difficulties and elucidate its meaning by reading it line by line, and which can (rather, must) be read with profit even six centuries later. Here ten cantos are chosen (*Inferno* 1, 6,